

Speaker: Martin Luther King, Jr.
Date of speech: 12 November 1961
Title of speech: Facing the Challenge of a New Age
Location: Mankato High School.

Dr. Rose, platform associates, ladies and gentlemen. I am certainly delighted to have the privilege of being in your community today and to discuss with you one of the vital issues of our day. And I want to express my personal appreciation to the Wesley Foundation for extending the invitation and making it possible for me to be with you at the third annual lecture. I regret so much that an extremely busy schedule prevents my staying longer. This is sort of a bash-in-bash-out visit for me. But, I have certainly spent some rewarding moments here in Mankato. And I hope that circumstances will make it possible for me to return again. Some months ago, Prime Minister Macmillan of England was traveling through Africa and he stopped at one point on this rather quick journey through Africa to make this significant statement: the wind of change is blowing in Africa. In a real sense, the wind of change is blowing all over the world. It is sweeping away an old order, and ushering in a new order. And so we stand today between two ages: the dying old and the emerging new. Now we are all familiar with the old order that is passing away because we have lived with it and we have seen it and all of its dimensions. We have seen the old order in other nations and with far more colonialism and imperialism. As you know that approximately 2,800,000,000 people in the world. The vast majority of these people live in Asia and Africa. For years they were dominated politically, exported economically, segregated and humiliated by some foreign power. But, there comes a time when people get tired of being trampled over by the iron feet of oppression. And so these millions of people decided to protest and as a result of that movement more than 1,700,000,000 of a possible 1,900,000,000 colonial subjects have their independence today. Just 25 years ago, for instance, there were only three independent countries in the whole of Africa. I remembered when Mrs. King and I journeyed to Ghana in 1957 to attend the independence celebration. There were only eight independent countries in Africa. But today there are 28 independent countries in the continent of Africa. So as we look Africa into Asia, we notice that the old order of colonialism is passing away and the new order of equality and human dignity is coming into being. But not only have we seen the old order and its international dimensions, we have seen it in our own nation in the song of slavery, racial segregation and discrimination. We all know the long history of the old order in the United States. It had its beginning in 1619 when the first slaves landed on the shores of this nation. Then, the old order continued to exist in the system known as segregation. Living with the conditions of slavery and then later segregation, many Negroes lost faith in themselves. Many came to feel that perhaps that they were inferior. But, then something happened to the Negroes, circumstances made it possible and necessary for him to travel more: the coming of the automobile, the upheavals of two world wars, the Great Depression. And so the rural plantation gradually gave way to urban industrial life. With economics rising, gradually rising through the growth of industry, the influence of organized labor expanded educational opportunities and other forces. Even as cultural life was rising through the steady decline of crippling illiteracy. All of these forces conjoined caused the Negro to take a new look at himself. Negro masses all over

began to reevaluate themselves and the Negro came to feel that he was somebody. His religion revealed to him that God loves all of his children and that all men are made in his image. That the basic thing about a man is not his specificity but his fundamentals. Not the texture of his hair or the color of his skin, but his eternal dignity and worth. And so the Negro could now consciously cry out (*inaudible words*) and black complexion. Stand up for him claim. Skin may differ but affections dwells in black and white the same. I was so tall as to reach the pole, ought to grasp the ocean as it stands. I must be measured by my soul. The mind is the standard of the man. With this new sense of dignity and this new sense of destiny a new Negro came into being, with a new determination to struggle, to suffer and sacrifice until justice and freedom became realities. And so as a result of this new determination, the old order gradually passed away. Then something else happened, the Supreme Court of the nation rendered a momentous decision on May 17, 1964. The United States Supreme Court rendered what was known as the Dred Scott decision in 1875, which said in substance that the Negro is not a citizen of this nation; he is nearly property subject to the dictates of his owner. In 1896, the Supreme Court rendered what was known as Plessy v. Ferguson decision, which established the doctrine of separate but equal as the law of the land. In 1954, the Supreme Court said in substance that the old Plessy doctrine must go. That separate facilities are inherently unequal, and that the segregated child on the basis of his race is to deny that child equal protection of the law. As a result of this decision, we stand today on the threshold, the most creative and constructive period in the history of our nation in the area of race relations. To put it figuratively and biblical language, we've broken loose from the edict of slavery. We have moved through the wilderness of segregation and now we stand on the border of the promised land of integration. The old order is passing away and the new order of freedom and justice is coming into being. Now whenever anything new comes into history, it brings with it new challenges and new responsibilities and it would be tragic indeed if we stood by our nation and in the world and noticed the emerging new age without meeting the concomitant responsibilities that we face as a result of this emerging new age. And so I would like to mention some of the challenges that we face as a result of this emerging new age. First, we are challenged to develop a world perspective. We must rise above the narrow confines of our individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity. The world in which we live is geographically one. We must come to see that in a sense we must struggle to make it spiritually one. Now it is true the geographical oneness of this age has come into being to a large extent because of man's scientific ingenuity. Modern man has been able to log distance and place time in chains. And our jet planes have compressed into minutes distances that once took days. I think Bob Hope has, has adequately described this new generation in which we live and I know it isn't a usual thing for a preacher to be quoting Bob Hope, but I think he has adequately described this new jet age. He said it is an age when it is possible to take a nonstop flight from Los Angeles, California to New York City. And if I'm takin' off in Los Angeles you develop (*inaudible words*) in New York City. You know it is possible because of the time difference to take a flight from Tokyo, Japan on Sunday morning and arrive in Seattle, Washington on the preceding Saturday night. And when your friends meet you at the airport and ask when you left Tokyo, you'll have to say I left tomorrow. This is the time in the world in which we live. Now this is a bit humorist, but I'm trying to laugh the basic facts into all of us, and it is simply this, that the world in which we live is geographically one. The world in which we live is a neighborhood and now more than ever before we are challenged to make this world a

brotherhood. We must all learn to live together as brothers or we will all perish together as fools, which is the challenge of the hour. No individual can live alone. No nation can live alone. We are interdependent. Some months ago, Mrs. King and I journeyed over to that great country known as India. I never will forget the experience. It was a marvelous experience to meet and talk with the great leaders of India and to meet people in all of the cities and the villages throughout that vast country. The moments we spent in India will remain dear to me as long as the cords of memory shall lend them. But, I say to you that there were those depressing. How can one avoid being moved and concerned and depressed when he sees with his own eyes millions of people going to bed hungry at night? How can one avoid being depressed when he sees with his own eyes millions of people sleeping on the sidewalks at night? They have no beds to sleep in. They have no houses to go in. How can one avoid being concerned when he discovers that out of India's population of 400 million people, more than 360 million make an annual income of less than 80 dollars a year? Most of these people have never seen a doctor or dentist. And as I stood by and noticed these conditions, something in me cried out: can we in America stand idly by and not be concerned? An answer came, oh, no because the destiny of the United States is tied up with the destiny of India and every other nation. And I started thinking of this fact that we spend more than a million dollars a day in the United States to store surplus food. And I said to myself, I know where we can store that food free of charge, in the wrinkled stomachs of the millions of people in Asia, Africa and South America and in our own nation who go to bed hungry at night. Maybe we spend far too much of our national budget establishing military bases around the world, rather than bases of genuine concern and understanding. All I'm saying is simply this, that all life is interrelated. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. And so whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. As long as that is extreme poverty in this world, no individual can be totally rich, even if he possesses a billion dollars. As long as disease is rampant and millions of people cannot expect to live more than 20 to 30 years, no individual can be totally healthy even if he just got a check-up at the Mayo Clinic. Strangely enough, I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. You can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality. John Donne called it years ago and phrased it in graphic terms: "No man is an island, Entire of itself, Every man is a piece of the continent, A part of the main." Then he goes on towards the end to say: "Any man's death diminishes me, Because I am involved in mankind, And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for thee." Men and women all over this world have come to see this if we are to meet the challenge of the new age. The second challenge is this: we must get rid of the notion once and for all that there are superior and inferior races. Now for some reason this idea still lingers around. The idea that there are some races that are superior and other races that are inferior. Now certainly there is no intellectual basis for this. Anthropologists such as Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict and Melville Herskovits have all pointed out that there is nothing to this idea that superior and inferior races that there maybe superior and inferior individuals academically within all races. Medical science tells us that there are four types of blood and that these four types of blood are found within all racial groups. But in the midst of all this, there are still those who feel that there are superior and inferior races. Now there was a time that men used to argue this idea of inferiority for certain races on the basis of the Bible. They argued that the Negro and colored people, generally, were inferior by nature. It's a strange thing how men often believe things that are evil in context and

they go to find some religious and biblical justification for it. And so they lift things out of context and try to argue or to justify a particular belief that they have. So it was argued at one time in pulpits across the nation that the Negro was inferior by nature because of Noah's curse upon the children of Ham. The apostle Paul's dictum became a watchword: servant, be obedient to your master. Then one brother probably had read the logic of the great philosopher Aristotle. Aristotle did a great deal to set up what we now call formal logic and used to talk in terms of syllogism, which has major premise, a minor premise and a conclusion. Until one brother could put his argument into framework Aristotelian syllogism he could say all men are made in the image of God. Then came the minor premise, God as everybody knows is not a Negro. Therefore, the Negro is not a man. This is the kind of reasoning that, uh, prevailed at one time. But today there is little difference, uh, these arguments have passed away by and large. But there are those who argue on more subtle sociological and cultural grounds. They would say that, uh, if you integrate schools and if you integrate other facilities the Negro will pull the white race back a generation. The Negro is not culturally ready for integration. And then they would go to say, you know, the Negro is a criminal and uh because of these things we just can't have integration without bringing about social, uh, corruption and social dislocation and everything else. Now that people who argue on the basis of this fail to say that if there are lagging standards within the Negro community they lag because of segregation and discrimination. They fail to say poverty, ignorance and disease breathe crime, whatever the racial group may be. These things are environmental and not racial. And it is the torturous logic to use the tragic results of segregation as an argument for the continuation of it. The thing to do is get rid of the cause of basis and so we must get rid of the notion once and for all that there are superior and inferior races. And I think we already have numerous and inspiring examples of Negroes who have demonstrated that human nature cannot be catalogued and in spite of that oppression, they've risen up and plunged against cloud-filled nights of affliction. New and blazing stars of inspiration. And so from an old slave cabin in Virginia's Hills, Booker T. Washington rose up to be one of America's great leaders. He lit a porch in Alabama then darkness fled. From the Red Hills of Gordon County, Georgia and on to the mother who could neither read nor write, Roland Hayes rose up to be one of the world's great singers, carried his melodious voice into the palace of King George the fifth and the mansion of Queen Mother of Spain. From poverty stricken conditions of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Marian Anderson rose to be the world's greatest contralto, so that Toscanini could say, "A voice like this comes only once in a century," and Sibelius of Finland could say, "My roof is too low for such a voice." From humble, crippling circumstances, George Washington Carver rose up and carved for himself an imperishable niche in the annals of science. There was a star in the sky of female leadership, then came Mary McLeod Bethune and grabbed it and allowed it to shine in her life with all of its scintillating beauty. There was a star in the diplomatic sky, then came Ralph Bunche, the grandson of the slave preacher, and allowed it to shine in his life. And all of these people have revealed that human nature cannot be catalogued. And that there is not truth in the idea that the Negro and the colored races in general are inferior by nature. And if we ought to meet the challenge of the new age, we must get rid of the notion, once and for all, that there are superior and inferior races. The next challenge is this: we are challenged to continue to engage in creative protest in order to bring an end to the barriers of racial segregation and discrimination. All over this nation we must develop men and women who will not rest until segregation and discrimination have been removed from every area of our nation's life. Now, in

order to engage in this creative protest, we gotta get rid of at least two myths that tend to get around. One is the myth of time. There are those who argue that time will solve this problem. And so they would say to the Negro and to white people of good will who are willing to be allies in the struggle, just be patient and pray and wait and time will solve this problem. I said in there I believe in prayer and I believe in patience and we must do more than pray and be patient. People who move out on the myth of time fail to realize that time is neutral. That it can be used either destructively or constructively. And at times I am convinced that the people of ill will, the segregationists, have used time much more effectively than the people of good will. And it may well be that we that we will have to repent in this generation, not merely for the loud, vitriolic words of the bad people, but for the appalling silence of the good people. Somewhere along the way, we must come to see that human progress never rolls in on the wheel of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and the persistent work of dedicated individuals and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the insurgent and primitive forces of the irrational emotionalism and social stagnation. We must help time. We must see that the time is always right to do right. The other myth that gets around a great deal is what I call, for lack of a better phrase, educational determinism. This is the idea that only education can solve this problem. You've heard this argument that in order to solve the problem, we must change attitudes. And this can only done through education. You can't deal with this problem through legislation. You can't deal with this problem through judicial decrees, they would argue. Only through changing the hearts and only through educational processes can the problem be solved. To those who would argue this, I would simply say that it is not either legislation or education; it is both education and legislation. Certainly we need education. Certainly we need religion to solve this problem. Beyond that, we need legislation. As I said in my message this morning, it may be true that morality cannot be legislated, but behavior can be regulated. It may be true that the law can't make a man love me, but it can keep him from lynching me, and I think that's pretty important also. It may be true that the law cannot change the heart, but it can restrain the heartless, and this is what we seek to do through legislation. We cannot change bad internal attitude through legislation, religion and education will have to do this. But, we seek to control the external effects of bad internal attitude. And so legislation is necessary in this period of transition. Therefore, all people of goodwill must work with renewed vigor to get the proper legislation. There is need, for instance on the national scale, for new civil rights legislation in the next session of Congress. There is need on the local scale for legislation within every state to do away with housing discrimination. To do away with employment discrimination. That these twin evils exist at every state in this union. And so there is need for legislation to do away with it. And also we need executive orders from the president of the United States. I was saying to a group earlier this afternoon that the president of the United States could all but end the housing discrimination with a stroke of the pen. Because most housing falls under the category of the federal government, in some sense, that is in terms of financing, either falls under FHA, PHA, urban renewal or Veterans Loan. And the president could issue an executive order making it palpably clear that no federal funds can be involved in situations where there is housing discrimination. 'Cause as long as we have housing discrimination, we will have segregation in every other area of the community. We will have de facto segregation in the school. We will have de facto segregation in recreational facilities, in churches and every other area. And so there must be a determined effort to break down discrimination in housing all over the United States. I spent an

hour with President Kennedy last week talking about some of these problems, stressing the need for new legislation, the new session of Congress. Stressing the need for an executive order in housing, and I also suggested to him that the time has now come on executive orders declaring all segregated facilities unconstitutional on the basis of the Fourteenth Amendment. We have the first Emancipation Proclamation issued by Abraham Lincoln, and that was an executive order, it was not a judicial decree, it was not a legislated act. It was an executive order. Now, almost a 100 years later, the time has come for a second Emancipation Proclamation. The first Emancipation Proclamation freed the Negro from the bondage of physical slavery. But even today, a form of slavery still exists because segregation is nothing but slavery covered up with certain niceties of complexity. And so there is a need for an executive order, a second Emancipation Proclamation, bringing an end to all forms of segregation. And I believe the hour has come for this, and all people of goodwill must press for such an executive order. Beyond this, there is need for nonviolent direct action. I am still convinced that nonviolence is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom and human dignity. And so we must delve deeper into the meaning of the philosophy and method of nonviolence. Nonviolent direct action must be the major thrust of the Negro and his allies in this struggle to break down segregation and discrimination. Now, there are many advantages to this method. It has certain practical advantages. It has a way of disarming the opponent. It exposes his moral defenses. It weakens his morale and at the same time it works on his conscience. This is the power of nonviolence that the opponent just doesn't know how to deal with it. If he seeks to beat you, you accept that without retaliating. If he doesn't beat you, that's fine. If he seeks to put you in jail, you go in jail and transform the jail from dungeons and chains to havens of freedom and human dignity. Even if he seeks to kill you, you develop acquired courage of dying if necessary without killing. So it leaves the opponent disarmed not knowing exactly what to do. This is the power of this approach. But it has certain moral attributes. It says that the individuals involved can secure moral ends, through moral means. There has been a long struggle through history, this whole question of ends and means. There's been debates and arguments and philosophical theories. Occasionally there has been those who argue that the end justifies the means, no matter what the means are. If the end is noble, it's alright. Time's great systems, large systems of government succumb to the temptation of believing in this theory. The ultimate weakness of Communism is that it believes that the end justifies the means. It talks about the end of the classless society, then it goes on to argue that any means is alright to bring it about, violence, defeat, lying and even the denial of human freedom. This is what Lenin says: that somewhere nonviolent resistance comes along and said we could never follow such a philosophy, because in the long run of history, the immoral means can never bring about moral ends because the end is preexisting in the means. The end that represents, or rather the means represents the end in making and the ideal in process. And so nonviolent resistance provides a method whereby individuals can work to secure moral ends through moral means. It also places the love ethic at the center of its thrust. This is very important in the nonviolent movement. It says that it is possible to resist the unjust system and yet maintain an act of love and an act of sense of goodwill for the perpetrators of the unjust system. Now, many people stop to ask to along the way: what do you mean when you say love those people who are oppressing you, those people who are opposing you, those people who are bombing your home and all of that? How can you love such people? And I always have to stop to try to give the meaning of love in this context.

When I speak of love in this context, I'm not talking about emotional bosh, or merely a sentimental outpouring. I'm thinking of something much deeper. The Greek language comes to our aid when we try to deal with the meaning of love in this area. There are three words in Greek for love. One is the word eros. Eros is a sort of aesthetic love, a yearning of the souls of the realm of the divine. Plato talks about it a great deal in his dialogue. It has come to us to a sort of romantic love. And so in this sense, we have all read about eros in the beauties of literature. We've all experienced it. In a sense, Edgar Allan Poe was talking about eros when he talked about his beautiful Annabelle Lee, with the love surrounded by the halo of eternity. In a sense, Shakespeare was talking about eros when he said love is not love which alters when its alterations finds, or bends with the remover to remove. It is an ever fixed mark that looks on tempest and is never shaken. It is the star to every wandering bark. You know, I can remember that because I used to quote it to my wife when we were courting. That's eros. Eros' meaning. The Greek language talks about philia, which is another level of love that's a sort of intimate affection between personal friends. On this level, you do love people because you like them. It's a reciprocal love. In short, it's friendship. Then the Greek language comes out with another word, it calls it agape. Agape is more than romantic, aesthetic love. Agape is more than friendship. Agape is understanding creative, redemptive goodwill for all men. It is an overflowing love that seeks nothing in return. Theologians would say that it is the love of God operating in the human heart. So, when one rises to love on this level, he loves the person who does the evil deeds while hating the deeds that the person does. And I believe that this is the way this understanding created redemptive goodwill and somehow bring us into the new day of brotherhood and understanding as we move on. This approach to the problem is not without successful precedent. Mohandas K. Gandhi used it in a magnificent manner to free his people from the political domination inflicted upon them for years. He struggled only with the weapons of sole force, non-injury, moral principles and courage. This method has been used in a marvelous way by hundreds and thousands of Negro students over the South. They have taken our deep groans and passionate yearnings for freedom and filtered them in their own tender souls and fashioned them into a created protest, which is an epic known all over our nation. And as a result of their nonviolent discipline, yet courageous action, they have been able to bring about integration at lunch counters in more than 150 cities of the South. And I submit that this nothing less than revolutionary. This has also been expressed in the magnificent Freedom Rides. This movement came into being to reveal that segregation is still the Negro's burden and America's shame. As a result of the Freedom Rides, something has happened, never happened before. Most of the cities in the deep South now have integrated bus terminals and I am convinced that the ICC ruling, which took effect on the first of November declaring all segregation in interstate travel, as far as bus transportation is concerned, illegal. I'm convinced that this ruling came into being directly as a result of the Freedom Rides. And so this way of nonviolent direct action is a powerful approach to social change. And I believe that this way coupled with all of the other (*inaudible words*) we all dream of. May I say in conclusion that this problem will not be solved until enough people in America come to see that it is morally wrong to discriminate against another individual, to segregate an individual, and until enough people come to see that it is sinful. Segregation is evil because it substitutes an I-it relationship for the I-thou relationship. Relegates individuals and persons to the status of things. We must come to see this problem is not nearly a sectional problem, it's not nearly a Southern problem, it is a natural problem. No

section of our country can boast of clean hands in the area of brotherhood. It is one thing for people of goodwill in the North to rise up with righteous indignation when a Negro is lynched in Mississippi or when a bus is burned in Anniston, Alabama with Freedom Riders. Those people of goodwill must rise up with as much righteous indignation when a Negro cannot live in their neighborhood simply because his race. When a Negro cannot get a position in his or her firm simply because of his race. When a Negro cannot join a particular academic society or a particular fraternity or sorority. This problem will not be solved until there is a sort of divine discontent. You know, that is, thought of by, I mean every academic discipline has certain words that soon become stereotypes and clichés. Every academic discipline has its technical nomenclature. Modern psychology has a word that is probably used more than any other word in modern psychology. It is the word maladjusted. This word is a ringing cry of modern child psychology, maladjusted. And certainly we all wanted to live the well-adjusted life in order to avoid neurotic and schizophrenic personalities. But I say to you, in conclusion, that there are some things in our social order that which I'm proud to be maladjusted. I call upon all men of goodwill to be maladjusted to these things until the good society is realized. I never intend to become adjusted to the evils of segregation and discrimination. I never intend to adjust myself to religious bigotry. I never intend to become adjusted to economic conditions that will take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few. I never intend to become adjusted to the madness of militarism and the self-defeating effects of physical violence. For in a day when Sputnik's and explorers are dashing through outer space and guided ballistic missiles are carving highways of death through the stratosphere, not nation can win a war. It is no longer the choice between violence and nonviolence. It is either nonviolence or nonexistence. And the alternative to disarmament, to suspension of nuclear tests, the alternative to setting up a police force through the United Nations and disarming the whole world, may well be a civilization plunged into the abyss of annihilation. And so I never intend to become adjusted to the madness of militarism. And so if you will allow the preacher in me to come out now, let me say, let us be maladjusted, as maladjusted as the prophet Amos, who in the midst of the injustices of his day, could cry out in words that echo across the centuries, let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream. As maladjusted as Abraham Lincoln, who had the vision to see that this nation could not exist as half-slave and half-free. As maladjusted as Thomas Jefferson, who in the midst of an age amazingly adjusted to slavery could cry out in words lifted to cosmic proportions, we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. As maladjusted as Jesus of Nazareth, who could say to the men and women of his generation, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, cradle them that despitefully use you. And I believe that through such maladjustment, we will be able to emerge from the weakened, desolate midnight of man's inhumanity to man and to the bright and glittering daybreak of freedom and justice. This will be the day when the new society will be here. This will be the day when the new age of brotherhood will be here. Yes, this will be the day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and gentiles, Protestants and Catholics will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last, free at last, thank God almighty, we are free at last."