

“Keep Moving from This Mountain,”  
Address at Spelman College on 10 April 1960

Atlanta, Ga.

*In this Founder’s Day address at Spelman College, King identifies four symbolic mountains—relativism, materialism, segregation, and violence—that must be overcome “if we are to go forward in our world and if civilization is to survive.” He also criticizes the “profit-making and profit-getting aspects of capitalism” and warns of the danger of being “more concerned about making a living than making a life.” This speech was published in the May issue of the Spelman Messenger.<sup>1</sup>*

Thank you, President Manley, members of the faculty, and students of Spelman College, ladies and gentlemen. I need not pause to say how delighted I am to be here this afternoon and to be a part of this occasion. Founders Day is always a significant day and I join you in paying tribute to those persons who through their dedication and their tireless effort brought this institution into being. In a real sense you are the heirs of a legacy of goodwill and sacrifice on the part of the founders of this institution. Of course there is also one basic reason why I am happy to be here, and that is because I happen to be a Morehouse man and Morehouse

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1. Spelman College president Albert Manley had initially invited King to address the college in 1959 (Manley to King, 16 October 1958; see also Ballou to Manley, 10 November 1958, and Program, “Founders Day, seventy-ninth anniversary,” 10 April 1960).

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men always consider it a privilege to speak to Spelman ladies.<sup>2</sup> I'm deeply grateful to the president of this institution, Dr. Manley, for inviting me to be here today, and it is a great privilege to see each of you.

I would like to use as a subject for my address this afternoon, "Keep Moving From This Mountain." For the moment, I would like to take your minds back many, many centuries to a group of people whose exploits and adventures have long since been meaningfully deposited in the hallowed memories of succeeding generations. At a very early age in their history, these people were reduced to the bondage of physical slavery. They found themselves under the gripping yoke of Egyptian rule. But soon a Moses appeared on the scene who was destined to lead them out of the Egypt of slavery to a bright and glowing promised land. But as soon as they got out of Egypt by crossing the Red Sea, they discovered that before they could get to the promised land they would have to go through a long and difficult wilderness. And after realizing this, three groups, or rather three attitudes, emerged. One group wanted to go back to Egypt: they felt that the fleshpots of Egypt were more to be desired than the ordeals of emancipation. Then you had a second group that abhorred the idea of going back to Egypt and yet could not quite attain the discipline and the sacrifice to go on to Canaan. These people chose the line of least resistance. There was a third group, probably the creative minority, which said in substance, "We will go on in spite of the obstacles, in spite of the difficulty, in spite of the sacrifices that we will have to make."

In every movement toward freedom and fulfillment we find these three groups. But this afternoon, I am concerned mainly with the second group, the individuals who didn't want to go back to Egypt necessarily and yet didn't want to go on to the Promised Land, the individuals who chose the line of least resistance.

As Moses sought to lead his people on, he discovered that there were those among them who would occasionally become emotionally and sentimentally attached to a particular spot so that they wanted to stay there and remain stationary at that point. One day when Moses confronted this problem, he wrote in the book of Deuteronomy, the first chapter and the fifth verse: "You have been in this mountain long enough, turn ye and go on your journey, move on to the mount of the Amorites."<sup>3</sup> This was a message of God through Moses. And whenever God speaks he says go forward, saying in substance that you must never become bogged down in mountains and situations that will impede your progress. You must never become complacently adjusted to unobtained goals; you have been in this mountain long enough, "turn ye and take your journey."<sup>4</sup>

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2. In a typescript of this speech, King elaborated: "I was thinking yesterday that I would say that it was just a few years ago that I used to assemble in Sisters Chapel, in fact I used to sing in the chorus and the glee club at Morehouse, so I had the priviledge of coming here quite frequently. But then I got a little worried when I looked back and noticed how many years ago I came to this chapel and how many years ago I studied at Morehouse, I discovered that I finished about twelve years ago, thirteen years ago almost, and I got a little worried thinking that the years were going a little too fast for me and that age is piling up. But I'm still young so that doesn't particularly matter" (King, "Founders Day address," 10 April 1960).

3. Cf. Deuteronomy 1:6-7.

4. Cf. Deuteronomy 1:7.

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In a real sense, each of us assembled here today is in a wilderness moving toward some promised land of freedom and fulfillment. In every age and every generation men have envisioned some promised land. Plato envisioned it in his republic as a time when justice would reign throughout society and philosophers would become kings and kings philosophers. Karl Marx envisioned it as a classless society in which the proletariat would finally conquer the reign of the bourgeoisie; out of that idea came the slogan, "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need."<sup>5</sup> Bellamy, in *Looking Backward*, thought of it as a day when the inequalities of monopoly capitalism would pass away.<sup>6</sup> Society would exist on the basis of evenness of economic output. Christianity envisioned it as the kingdom of God, a time when the will of God will reign supreme, and brotherhood, love, and right relationships will be the order of society. In every age and every generation men have dreamed of some promised land of fulfillment of freedom. Whether it was the right promised land or not, they dreamed of it. But in moving from some Egypt of slavery, whether in the intellectual, cultural or moral realm, toward some promised land, there is always the same temptation. Individuals will get bogged down in a particular mountain in a particular spot, and thereby become the victims of stagnant complacency. So, this afternoon, I would like to deal with three or four symbolic mountains that we have been in long enough—mountains that we must move out of if we are to go forward in our world and if civilization is to survive.

First, I think we have been in the mountain of moral and ethical relativism long enough. To dwell in this mountain has become something of a fad these days, so we have come to believe that morality is a matter of group consensus. We attempt to discover what is right by taking a sort of Gallup poll of the majority opinion. Everybody is doing it, so it must be all right, and therefore we are caught in the clutches of conformity. We've been in this mountain long enough—the feeling that there is nothing absolutely right and nothing absolutely wrong, that right is a matter of customs and tastes and appetites and what happens in a particular community. Nothing is absolutely right. To put it in sociological lingo, we follow the mores of the right way.

Another consequence of this moral and ethical relativism is that we have developed a sort of pragmatic test for right and wrong. According to this view, anything that works is all right if you can get by with it. We don't talk much any more about the Darwinian survival of the fittest, it is now the survival of the slickest. Whoever can slick his way through makes it through all right, according to this

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5. Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (Moscow, 1947), p. 17.

6. Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000-1887* (New York: Modern Library, 1951). Shortly after they had begun dating, Coretta Scott gave King a copy of Bellamy's book with the inscription: "I should be interested to know your reaction to Bellamy's predictions about our society," and added: "In some ways it is rather encouraging to see how our social order has changed since Bellamy's time. There is still hope for the future . . . Lest we become too impatient" (Coretta Scott, Inscription to Martin Luther King, Jr., 7 April 1952). King replied in an 18 July letter: "I welcomed the book because much of its content is in line with my basic ideas. I imagine you already know that I am much more socialistic in my economic theory than capitalistic. And yet I am not so opposed to capitalism that I have failed to see its relative merits."

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theory. In a sense, we are no longer concerned about the ten commandments—they are not too important. Everybody is busy, as I have said so often, trying to obey the eleventh commandment: “Thou shalt not get caught.” And so, according to this view, it is all right to lie with a bit of finesse. It’s all right to exploit, but be a dignified exploiter. It’s all right to even hate, but dress your hate up into garments of love and make it appear that you are loving when you are actually hating. This type of moral and ethical relativism is sapping the very life’s blood of the moral and spiritual life of our nation and our world. And I am convinced that if we are to be a great nation, and if we are to solve the problems of the world we must come out of this mountain. We have been in it too long. For if man fails to reorientate his life around moral and ethical values he may well destroy himself by the misuse of his own instrument.

Now education has a great role to play at this point. You see, education has a two-fold function. The one is utility and the other culture. Education must give an individual efficiency, but it must also humanize the individual. On the one hand education must give us the power to concentrate, the faculty for intensive thinking; this is a basic function of education. On the other hand, education must help us to think critically. And so education helps to lift an individual from the bondage of legends and half truths to the unfettered realm of objective analysis and creative appraisal. If an individual can’t think critically he really isn’t educated. Of course I’m sure all the Spelmanites and Morehouse men and Morris Brown and Clark and Atlanta University students and all the other people present here are educated, but I’ve found a lot of people who have been to school who are not educated. I’m sure that does not apply to you. So many people can’t think critically. Thinking critically means that the individual must think imaginatively, creatively, originally. Originality is a basic part of education. That does not mean that you think something altogether new; if that were the case Shakespeare wasn’t original, for Shakespeare depended on Plutarch and others for many of his plots.<sup>7</sup> Originality does not mean thinking up something totally new in the universe, but it does mean giving new validity to old form. In a real sense, education must help an individual think intensively, critically, imaginatively.

But this isn’t enough. Any education that stops at this point is a dangerous education. An individual who is properly educated must have more than efficiency. The proper education will not only give the individual the power of concentration but worthy objectives upon which to concentrate. It will give him not only critical faculty for precise judgment, but profound sympathies with which to temper the asperity of his judgment. It will not only quicken his imagination but kindle his enthusiasm for the objects of his imagination. True education helps us on the one hand to know truth, but more than that it helps us to love truth and sacrifice for it. It gives us not only knowledge, which is power, but wisdom, which is control. I am convinced that if we are to move forward, that if we are to face the many problems of our world, education must take on this two-fold role as it has traditionally done, and give the individual a sense of moral and ethical values along with his efficiency, so that he will go out of his college classroom knowing that

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there are certain moral laws in the universe just as there are basic physical laws. For in a real sense there is something in this universe that justifies Carlyle saying, "No lie can live forever."<sup>8</sup> There is something in this universe that justifies William Cullen Bryant in saying, "Truth crushed to earth will rise again."<sup>9</sup> There is something in this universe which justifies James Russell Lowell saying,

Truth forever on the scaffold,  
Wrong forever on the throne,  
Yet that scaffold sways the future,  
And behind the dim unknown  
Standeth God within the shadows,  
Keeping watch above His own.<sup>10</sup>

There is even something in this universe which justifies Greek mythology in talking about a goddess of Nemesis.<sup>11</sup> There is something here in the structure of our universe that justifies the Biblical writer in saying, "You shall reap what you sow."<sup>12</sup> This is a law-abiding universe, and we must move out of the mountain of moral and ethical relativism that we have been in all too long.

We must also move out of the mountain of practical materialism. We have been in it long enough. I am not speaking now of metaphysical materialism—the materialism which says in substance that all reality can be explained in terms of matter in motion and that life is merely a physiological process with a physiological meaning. We need to move out of that mountain also, I guess, but I am talking about another type of materialism—not a theoretical materialism, which is usually confined to a sophisticated few. I am speaking of a practical materialism, which means living as if there were nothing else that had reality but fame and material objects. We operate, or we live, rather, in two realms, so to speak—the *within* of a man's life, which is the realm of culture, and the *without* that is the realm of civilization. There is structure, which is the realm of means, and destiny, which is the realm of ends, preliminary concerns which are the realm of science and technology, ultimate concerns which are the realm of morals and ethical religion. The great danger that faces our civilization is that we will allow the *without* of life to absorb the *within*—that we will allow destiny to get tied up in structure—that we will allow our preliminary concerns to take precedence over ultimate concern. We have been in this mountain long enough.

One of the dangers we must always watch in our nation and in the system un-

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8. King paraphrases Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution* (1837), part 1, book 3, chap. 1: "No lie you can speak or act but it will come, after longer or shorter circulation, like a bill drawn on Nature's Reality, and be presented there for payments—with the answer, No effects."

9. William Cullen Bryant, *The Battlefield* (1839), stanza 9.

10. James Russell Lowell, *The Present Crisis* (1844), stanza 8. King's phrasing closely resembles a sermon by Harry Emerson Fosdick (see note 21 to "Facing the Challenge of a New Age," 1 January 1957, in *Papers* 4:82–83).

11. Nemesis was the goddess of retributive justice or vengeance. King included a fuller discussion of the Goddess of Nemesis in an earlier sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church (King, "Conquering Self-Centeredness," 11 August 1957, in *Papers* 4:256).

12. Cf. Galatians 6:7.

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der which we live is known as capitalism. As you know, capitalism stresses the profit motive. Of course capitalism has done some marvelous things for our nation and the world. Through this economic system we have been able to build up the greatest system of production that the world has ever known, and we have become the richest nation in the world. All of this is marvelous. But the danger point is that we will become so involved in the profit-making and profit-getting aspects of capitalism that we will forget certain ends of life. There is always the danger that we will become more concerned about making a living than making a life—that we will not keep that line of division between life and one's livelihood.

And there is also the danger that our system can lead to tragic exploitation. We must come out of the mountain and be concerned about a more humane and just economic order. And I say, this afternoon, that we cannot solve this problem by turning to Communism. Communism is based on an ethical relativism and a metaphysical materialism that no Christian can accept. I do believe that in America we must use our vast resources of wealth to bridge the gulf between abject, deadening poverty and superfluous, inordinate wealth. God has left enough space in this universe for all of his children to have the basic necessities of life. As I have travelled around the Middle East and in India and Africa, I have always been moved and deeply concerned about the poverty in those countries. Poverty there is so widespread, because these people have been exploited economically and dominated politically by foreign powers. Every time I look and notice these conditions I start thinking about the fact that in the United States of America we spend almost ten billion dollars a year to store the surplus food that we have in the nation. And I say to myself as I look at these conditions, "I know where we can store that food free of charge, in the wrinkled stomachs of hungry men and women and children of God all over the world." If the United States is to survive, along with all the citizens of the world, we must come out of this mountain of practical materialism which can be transformed from a legitimate individualism into a rugged individualism, and we must move out of that into a proper concern for all humanity and into a proper concern for every individual, and a proper concern in our individual lives for what I call the *within* of life—the realm of destiny.

There is another mountain we have been in long enough. We have been in the mountain of racial segregation long enough. We all know how long we have been in this mountain, so I need not go back and give the historical development of it. It is now time for us to turn and take our journey toward the promised land of integration. In a real sense, segregation in any form is wrong. Segregation is wrong because it substitutes an I-it relationship for the I-thou relationship.<sup>13</sup> Segregation is wrong because it relegates individuals to the status of things rather than taking the high moral position of elevating them to the status of persons. Segregation is wrong because it assumes that God made a mistake—and finally, it is wrong because it stands in the face of the great American creed "that all men are created equal and endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights." And so we must go out and say to our nation and say to South Africa and say to the world, that we have been in the mountain of segregation too long and now we must move out.

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Segregation is a cancer in the body politic which must be removed before our democratic health can be realized. The underlying philosophy of segregation is diametrically opposed to the underlying philosophy of democracy and Christianity and all the sophisms of the logicians cannot make them lie down together. We must make it clear that in our struggle to end this thing called segregation, we are not struggling for ourselves alone. We are not struggling only to free seventeen million Negroes. The festering sore of segregation debilitates the white man as well as the Negro. We are struggling to save the soul of America. We are struggling to save America in this very important decisive hour of her history.

This is why the student movement that has taken place at this time all over our country is so significant. Let nobody fool you, this movement is one of the most significant movements in the whole civil rights struggle. For you students, along with other students all over the nation, have become of age, and you are saying in substance that segregation is wrong and that you will no longer accept it and adjust to it. This movement says, more clearly than was ever said before, that segregation cannot be maintained in the South without leading to chaos and social disintegration. The beautiful thing about it is that you are not merely demanding service at the lunch counter, though that is a basic part of it. You're not merely demanding a cup of coffee and a hamburger here and there.<sup>14</sup> You are demanding respect. You are saying in substance, "if you respect my dollar you will also have to respect me as a person." An individual who is not concerned about his selfhood and his freedom is at that moment committing moral and spiritual suicide, and you are standing up to the great determination. You have taken up the deep groans of the century. The students have taken the passionate longings of the ages and filtered them in their own souls and fashioned a creative protest. It is one of the glowing epics of the time and I predict that it will win—that it will have to win, because this demand is a basic American demand.

Victor Hugo said many years ago, "There is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come."<sup>15</sup> The idea whose time has come is in the idea of freedom and human dignity. Wherever men are assembled today, whether they are in Johannesburg, Nairobi, Accra, Berlin, Atlanta, New York, Montgomery, or Little Rock the cry is always the same: "We want to be free." And so, today, let men everywhere join in this quest for freedom by moving out of the mountain of racial segregation. This is the mountain that we must leave—we have dwelt in it long enough. On this Founders Day, if you forget all I have said, I hope you won't forget this mountain.

Finally, we have been in the mountain of corroding hatred and crippling vio-

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14. King's associates James Lawson and Ella Baker had expressed similar thoughts in their own public remarks on the sit-ins. Speaking at a student conference, Lawson questioned whether the protests were "just a lot of nonsense over a hamburger? Or is it far more?" ("We Are Trying to Raise the 'Moral Issue,'" in Francis L. Broderick and August Meier, eds., *Negro Protest Thought in the Twentieth Century* [Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1965], p. 275). Baker published "Bigger than a Hamburger" in the May 1960 issue of the *Southern Patriot*: "The Student Leadership Conference made it crystal clear that current sit-ins and other demonstrations are concerned with something much bigger than a hamburger or even a giant-sized coke."

15. Hugo, *The History of a Crime*, p. 429.

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lence long enough. We have been in this mountain for centuries because men have gone to war and they have fought numerous wars; battle fields of the world have been painted with blood. We know about it—we know about this mountain because violence is the inseparable twin of western materialism, the hallmark of its grandeur. We know about this mountain, we have been in it long enough. I am convinced if we fail to move out of this mountain we will be plunged into the abyss of annihilation. This means not only on the local scale; we must move out of it on the international scale. There was a time when we fought wars and felt they were just wars. I must admit that at one point in my intellectual pilgrimage I justified war, certainly as a sort of negative good in the sense that it blocked an evil force, a totalitarian force. I have come to believe firmly now that war can no longer serve even as a negative good because of the potential destructiveness of modern war. There was a time when we had a choice of violence or nonviolence, but today it is either nonviolence or nonexistence.

And so the nations of the world must get together. In Geneva they must get together; at the Summit Conference they must get together, to bring an end to the armament race, to bring about universal disarmament and set up a sort of world police force.<sup>16</sup> This is a matter of survival now. Talk about love and nonviolence may have been merely a pious injunction a few years ago; today it is an absolute necessity for the survival of our civilization.

Also in the racial struggle, this is vitally important to our nation and to other nations: we must come out of the mountain of hatred and violence. This is why I am convinced that as we stand up for freedom and as we stand up for justice we must always struggle with the highest weapons of dignity and discipline. We must never use weapons of hatred and violence. Men have thought over the years that either they would have to fight their oppressions or they would have to acquiesce and surrender. You have seen the type of people who felt that the only way to deal with oppression was to accept it. Sometimes you will hear somebody singing, “been down so long that down don’t bother me.”<sup>17</sup> That is how some people adjust, they get exhausted in the struggle, and they give up and they are free—they achieve the freedom of exhaustion. Then others have felt that the only way to deal with oppression is to stand up with violence and get ammunition and weapons of violence to deal with an evil system and an evil opponent. I say to you, today, there is another way that combines the best points of both of these and avoids the evil points of both, and that is what we call *nonviolent resistance*. For here you have discovered a way of struggle which combines the militant and the moderate; a way of struggle that combines the realistic and the idealistic; a way of struggle that combines the calm and courageous. You need not now bow to hate, you need not now bow to violence, for you have now discovered another way and another approach. It comes to us from the long Christian tradition, Jesus of Nazareth himself, com-

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16. King refers to the summit meeting of representatives from the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States in Geneva, Switzerland, to discuss a permanent nuclear test ban. For more on King’s involvement with nuclear disarmament campaigns, see Norman Cousins and Clarence Pickett to King, 9 March 1958, in *Papers* 4:379–380.

17. Blues singer Ishman Bracey’s 1928 recording of “Trouble Hearted Blues” included the following lyric: “Down so long, down don’t worry me.”

ing down through Mahatma Gandhi of India, who took the love ethic of Jesus Christ and made it effective as a sociopolitical force and brought about the transformation of a great nation and achieved freedom for his people.

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I know you are asking, "What do you mean about this love thing—you are talking about people who oppose you, loving people who are trying to misuse you, seeking to defeat you—what in the world are you trying to say? That is impossible!" Since these questions are often raised, I have to pause quite often to explain the meaning of love in this context. It is interesting that the Greek language comes to our rescue and our aid at this point. You know in the Greek language there are three words for love. One is *Eros*. *Eros* is a sort of aesthetic love. Plato talked about it a great deal in his dialogue, "the yearning of the soul for the realm of the divine." It has come to us to mean a sort of romantic love; in that sense we all know *Eros* because we have experienced it and we have lived with it, we have read about it in all of the beauties of literature. I would imagine Edgar Allen Poe was talking about *Eros* when he talked about his beautiful Annabelle Lee with a love surrounded by a halo of eternity.<sup>18</sup> In a sense Shakespeare was talking about *Eros* when he said, "Love is not love which alters when it's alteration finds or bends with the remover to remove. Oh no! it is an everfixed mark that looks on tempests and is never shaken. It is a star to every wandering bark."<sup>19</sup> These are beautiful words of Shakespeare's. They express something of the meaning of love. Then there is another word, *philia*, which is a sort of intimate affection between personal friends. In a sense, this is the sort of love that you have for your roommate, the persons that you like and eat dinner with and the persons you like to talk to on the telephone. You have this intimate feeling of love because you like them and because there is something that you have in common on this level; you love because you are loved. It is a reciprocal love. Then the Greek language comes out with another word, *agape*. *Agape* is more than *Eros*. It is more than *philia*. It is understanding, creative, redemptive goodwill for all men. It is a spontaneous love which seeks nothing in return. Theologians would say it is the love of God operating in the human heart. When you rise to love on this level, you love men not because you like them, not because their ways appeal to you, not because they have any particular meaning to you at the moment, but you love them because God loves them. And so you rise to the point of loving the individual who does the evil deed while hating the deed that he does.

I think this is what Jesus meant when he said, "Love your enemies."<sup>20</sup> I am very happy he did not say like your enemies, because it is very hard to like some people. It is hard to like some senator who waters down the civil rights bill in Congress; it is pretty hard to like him. It is hard to like somebody who is bombing your house, who is seeking to kill you and defeat and destroy your children. It is difficult to like them. But Jesus says "Love them," and *love* is greater than *like*. Love is creative, redemptive goodwill for all men. When men rise to live on this level, they come to see all men as children of the almighty God, and they can look in the eyes of the opponent and love him in spite of his evil deed.

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18. Poe's "Annabel Lee" (1849) was written in memory of his wife, who died of tuberculosis in 1847.

19. William Shakespeare, "Sonnet 116" (1609).

20. Cf. Luke 6:27.

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I believe if we will follow this way, we will be able to achieve not only desegregation, which will bring us together, physically but also integration, which is true intergroup, interpersonal living. I believe if we will follow this type of love we will go into the new age with the proper attitude. We will not go, believing in any philosophy of black supremacy, for black supremacy is as dangerous as white supremacy. God is not interested merely in the freedom of the whole human race. It is this type of love which will keep our attitudes right so that we will continue to struggle for first-class citizenship, never using second-class methods to gain it. We will move out of these mountains that have so often impeded our progress, the mountain of moral and ethical relativism, the mountain of practical materialism, the mountain of corroding hatred, bitterness and violence, and the mountain of racial segregation. We will be able to build a new world, and I say to you this afternoon as you look ahead to the days to come, always have faith in the possibility of getting over to the promised land. Don't become a pessimist and feel that we cannot get there; it is difficult sometimes, it is hard sometimes, but always have faith that the promised land can be achieved and that we can possess this land of brotherhood and peace and understanding.

I do not give you this element of faith and superficial optimism. I do not stand here as a detached spectator. As I say to you this afternoon, have faith in the future, I speak as one who lives every day amidst the threat of death. I speak as one who has had to stand often amidst the surging murmur of life's restless sea, I speak as one who has been battered often by the jostling winds of adversity, but I have faith in the future. I have faith in the future because I have faith in God and I believe that there is a power, a creative force in this universe seeking at all times to bring down prodigious hilltops of evil and pull low gigantic mountains of injustice. If we will believe this and struggle along, we will be able to achieve it.

Keep moving, for it may well be that the greatest song has not yet been sung, the greatest book has not been written, the highest mountain has not been climbed. This is your challenge! Reach out and grab it and make it a part of your life. Reach up beyond cloud-filled skies of oppression and bring out blazing stars of inspiration. The basic thing is to keep moving. Move out of these mountains that impede our progress to this new and noble and marvelous land. Langston Hughes said something very beautiful in "Mother to Son."

Well son, I'll tell you  
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.  
It's had tacks in it, splinters,  
Boards torn up, places with no carpets on the floors, bare!  
But all the time, I'se been a-climbing on and reaching landings  
And turning corners and sometimes going in the dark where there ain't  
been no light.  
So boy, don't you stop now.  
Don't you sit down on the steps cause you find it's kinda hard.  
For I'se still goin boy, I'se still climbing,  
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.<sup>21</sup>

## The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

Life for none of us has been a crystal stair, but there is something we can learn from the broken grammar of that mother, that we must keep moving. If you can't fly, run; if you can't run, walk; if you can't walk, crawl; but by all means keep moving. 13 Apr 1960

PD. *Spelman Messenger*, May 1960, pp. 6-17.