the Negroes from falling into a state of apathy I believe that the south will be a different place in which to live ten years from now.

All of your friends here are doing fine. Maude [Ballou] and Lillie [Hunter] are on the job everyday and working hard as usual. They send their best regards. Coretta and the children are fine. They too send their regards.

I have autographed the books for your friends. They should be arriving in a few days. As soon as I definitely know whether or not I will be coming to Hawaii in September, I will let you know. Be sure to keep in touch with me.

Very sincerely yours,
Martin L. King, Jr.

TLC. MLKP-MBU: Box 33A.

7. In Proctor’s 22 May letter, she asked that King autograph books for three of her associates in Hawaii.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

“Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution,”
Address at Morehouse College Commencement

[2 June 1959]
[Atlanta, Ga.]

In a 22 December 1958 letter, Morehouse president Benjamin Mays invited King to address the graduating class of 1959; King accepted six days later. In these prepared remarks—his earliest known usage of this title—King invokes his common themes of anticolonialism and black self-respect.1 He places the domestic “social revolution” in a global context and urges the graduates of his alma mater to rise above the limits of “individualistic concerns,” submitting that all people are “caught up in an inescapable network of mutuality.”

News coverage of the speech indicates that King modified this handwritten text at several points. He advised his audience to adhere to nonviolence, for the “oppressors would be happy” if black Americans “would resort to physical violence” and reminded them of progress already made: “We’ve broken loose from the Egypt of slavery . . . and

1. The text of this address resembles one that King gave at a 1957 NAACP rally (see “Facing the Challenge of a New Age,” Address Delivered at NAACP Emancipation Day Rally, 1 January 1957, in Papers 4:73–89). A month prior to the Morehouse speech, King had delivered a sermon at Dexter titled “Sleeping Through a Revolution” that contained similar allusions (Napoleon N. Vaughn to King, 9 May 1959). King would continue to deliver variations on this theme throughout the 1960s (see for example, “Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution,” 12 October 1964 and 31 March 1968).
Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution

There can be no gainsaying of the fact that we are experiencing today one of the greatest revolutions that the world has ever known. Indeed there have been other revolutions, but they have been local and isolated. The distinctive feature of the present revolution is that it is worldwide. It is shaking the foundations of the past and the present. It has engaged every continent of the world. You can hear its deep rumblings from the distant valleys to the highest intellectual centers. Every segment of society is being...
we stand on the border of the promised land in integration."2 King reportedly closed with a warning against inaction: "If you go home, sit down and do nothing about the revolution which we are witnessing you will be the victims of a dangerous optimism."3

There can be no gainsaying of the fact that we are experiencing today one of the greatest revolutions that the world has ever known. Indeed there have been other revolutions, but they have been local and isolated. The distinctive feature of the present revolution is that it is worldwide. It is shaking the foundations of the east and the west. It has engulfed every continent of the world. You can hear its deep rumblings from the lowest village street to the highest intellectual ivory tower. Every segment of society is being swept into its mainstream. The great challenge facing every member of this graduating class is to remain awake, alert and creative through this great revolution.

In thinking of the challenge which this revolution brings to each of us, I am reminded of a familiar story that comes down to us from the pen of Washington Irving. It is the story of Rip Van Winkle.4 The one thing that we all remember about this story is the fact that Rip Van Winkle slept twenty years. But there is another significant fact in this story that is often over looked. It is the change that took place in the pictures on the wall of the little inn in the Hudson town on the Hudson from which Rip went up into the mountains for his long sleep. When he went up the wall had a picture of King George III of England. When he came down it had the picture of another George, George Washington. Rip looking up at the picture of George Washington was completely lost. When he started his quiet sleep America was still under the domination of the British Empire. When he came down she was a free and independent nation. This incident suggest that the most striking thing about the story of Rip Van Winkle was not that he slept twenty years, but that he slept through a great revolution. While he was peacefully snoring up in the mountain a revolution was taking place which completely changed the face of the world. Rip knew nothing about it. He was asleep. There is nothing more tragic than to sleep through a revolution.5

5. Luccock, Marching Off the Map, pp. 129-130: "I was startled by something...that I had never thought of before. That was the sign on the inn in the little town on the Hudson from which Rip went up into the mountains for his long sleep. When he went up the sign had a picture of George III of England. When he came down it had a picture of George 'the first'...Rip, looking up at that picture of George Washington, was completely lost. The incident suggests that the most striking thing about the story of Rip Van Winkle was not that he slept twenty years (almost anyone could do that)! But that he slept through a revolution. While he was peacefully snoring up in the mountains, there had been a great turnover which completely changed the face of his world. But Rip did not know anything about it. He had been asleep."
We do not have to look very far to see signs of the present revolution—revolution that is taking place in our world today. There is a revolution in the social and political structure of our world on the question of the equality of man. The great masses of people are determined to end the exploitation of their lives, and share in their own future and destiny. They are moving toward their goal like a tidal wave. They are saying in no uncertain terms that colonialism and racism must go.

There are approximately two billion five hundred million (2,500,000,000) people in this world, and the vast majority of these

The practical consequences of this revolution are clearly seen. For instance; twenty five years ago most of the one billion six hundred million (1,600,000,000) colored peoples of Asia and Africa were dominated politically, exploited economically, segregated and humiliated by some foreign power. Just fourteen years ago the British had under her control more than five hundred million people in Asia and Africa. Twenty Thirty years ago there were only two independent countries in the whole of Africa—Liberia and Ethiopia. But today the picture has greatly changed. More the one billion three hundred million (1,300,000,000) of the former colonial subject have their independence, and the British Empire now has less than eighty sixty million people under her control in Asia and Africa. In less than three decades eight independent countries have arisen in Africa, and in 1960 four more will be added—Nigeria, The Camaroons, Togoland and Somalia. I predict that in ten years the vast majority of the countries of continental Africa will be independent, and that the funeral procession will be forming for the eternal burial of colonialism and imperialism in that section of the world.

This world shaking revolution which is engulfing our world is seen in the United States in the transition from a segregated to an integrated society. The social revolution which is taking place in this country is not an isolated, detached phenomenon. It is a part of the world wide revolution that is taking place.

It is impossible to understand the revolution in America without understanding the great change that has taken place in the Negro’s evaluation of himself. Living through the long night of slavery and segregation many Negroes lost faith in themselves. Many came to feel that perhaps they were inferior, for they were forced to live with a system that continually stared them in the face saying; “you are less than, you are not equal to.” Then something happened to the Negro. Circumstances made it possible and necessary for him to travel more—to spread of the automobile, the upheavels of two world wars, and the great depression. His rural plantation background was gradually supplanted by migration to urban and industrial communities. His cultural life gradually rose through the steady decline of crippling illiteracy. His economic life security gradually rose through the growth of industry and the influence of organized labor. All of these forces conjoined to cause the Negro to take a new look at himself. Negro masses all over began to reevaluate themselves. He came to feel that he was somebody. His religion revealed to him that God loves all of his children and that the important thing about a man is not “his specificity but his fundamentum” not the texture of his hair or the color of his skin, but the texture and quality of his soul.

With this new sense of self-respect and new sense of dignity, a new Negro emerged. The tension which we are witnessing in race relation today can be ex-
plained in part by the revolutionary change in the Negroes evaluation of himself, his nature and destiny, and his determination to struggle and sacrifice until the walls of segregation have finally been crushed by the battering rams of surging justice.

Along with the Negro's changing image of himself came the supreme court's momentous decision of May 17, 1954 outlawing segregation in the public schools. In this decision the Supreme Court of this nation unanimously affirmed that the old Plessy Doctrine must go. It affirmed in unequivocal terms that separate facilities are inherently unequal and that to segregate a child on the basis of his race is to deny that child equal protection of the law. As a result of this decision a revolution change is taking place in the structure of American society. Let nobody fool you, all of the loud noises that we hear today in terms of "nullification" and "interposition" and "massive resistance" are merely the death groans from a dying system.

There is not only a revolution taking place in the social and political structure of man's being, but there is a revolution taking place in the external physical structure of his being. In other words, a revolution is taking place in man's scientific and technological development. Man through his scientific genius has been able to dwarf distance and place time in chains. He has been able to carve highways through the stratosphere, and is now making preparations for a trip to the moon. These revolutionary changes have brought us into a space age. The world is now geographically one. Jet planes have compressed into minutes distances that a few years ago took weeks. Bob Hope has described this new jet age in which we live. He says it is an age in which we will be able to take a non stop flight from Los Angeles to New York city, and if by chance we develop hiccups on taking off, we will “hic” in Los Angeles and “cup” in New York city. It is an age in which one will be able to leave Tokyo on Sunday morning and, because of the time difference, arrive in Seattle Washington on the preceding Saturday night. When your friends meet you at the airport in Seattle inquiring when you left Tokyo, you will have to say, “I left tomorrow”. This is a bit humorous, but it reminds us that a great revolution is taking place in the physical structure of our universe.

Now the great question facing us today is whether we will remain awake through this worldshaking revolution, and achieve the new mental attitudes which the situations and conditions demand. There would be nothing more tragic

7. An Atlanta Daily World reporter quoted King: “We have carved highways through the stratosphere for a trip to the moon. This has brought about a geographical oneness and an end to the narrow confines of individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of humanity. This geographical oneness means that our very existence will be determined by our coexistence. It has forcibly demonstrated that our bases in space must be built on the general concerns and understanding that all life is interrelated and we must keep our moral and spiritual advances within our scientific and technological growth” (Jackson, “Remain Awake,” Dr. King Tells Morehouse Graduates).
8. Hope, a British-born American comedic actor, made numerous film and television appearances during this period.
9. Luccock, Marching Off the Map, p. 130: “That is one of the great liabilities of life, is it not, of sleeping through a time of great change, and failing to achieve the new mental attitudes which the new situations and conditions demand?”
during this period of social change than to allow our mental and moral attitudes to sleep while this tremendous social change takes place. May I suggest a few of the changed responses that we must make in order to remain awake during this great revolution.

First, we are challenged to rise above the narrow confines of our individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity. The individual or nation that feels that it can live in isolation has allowed itself to sleep through a revolution. The geographical togetherness of the modern world makes our very existence dependent on co-existence. We must all learn to live together as brothers or we will all perish together as fools. Because of our involvement in humanity we must be concerned about every human being.

I have just returned to the country from a memorable [strikeout illegible] visit to India. Although I had a most rewarding experience in that great country, there were those depressing moments. For how can one avoid being depressed when he sees with his own eyes millions of people sleeping on the sidewalks, and discovers that millions go to bed hungry at night? How can one avoid being depressed when he discovers that out of India's population of 400 million people, more than 300 million make an annual income of less than $70 per year, and most of them have never seen a doctor or dentist? All of this has resulted from the centuries of exploitation and oppression inflicted upon the India people by foreign powers.

As I observed these conditions I found myself asking: "Can we in America stand idly by and not be concerned? The answer is an emphatic no, because the destiny of America is tied up with the destiny of India. As long as India, or any other nation, is insecure we can never be totally secure. We must use our vast resources of wealth to aid the undeveloped nations of the world. To often have we used our wealth to establish military bases, while neglecting the need of establishing bases of genuine concern and understanding.

All of this amounts to saying that in the final analysis all life is interrelated. No nation or individual is independent; we are interdependent. We are caught up in an inescapable network of mutuality.

As long as there is poverty in the world I can never be rich, even if I possess a billion dollars. As long as millions of people are inflicted with debilitating diseases and cannot expect to live more than thirty-five years, I can never be totally healthy even if I receive a perfect bill of health from Mayo Clinic. Strangely enough, I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. John Donne placed this truth in graphic terms when he affirmed, "No man is an island entire of itself. Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the maine." Then he goes on 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."10

A second challenge facing us in this day of revolution is to keep our moral and spiritual development in line with our scientific and technological growth. Certainly, one of our failures in the past has been of the tragedies of the present era is modern man's blatant failure to bridge the gulf between scientific means and moral ends. Unless the gap is filled we are in danger now of destroying ourselves

10. King recites a section from John Donne's "Meditation XVII" (1624).
by the misuse of our own instruments. Moral stagnantcy is not only intolerable, but suicidal in a day when the rivers of science and technology are constantly to larger oceans of fulfillment.

An understanding of man's present predicament [strikeout illegible] may be found in the distinction between civilization and culture. Professor Maciver of Columbia University, following the German sociologist, Alfred Weber, has clearly set forth the distinction.11 Civilization refers to the things we use; culture, to what we are. Civilization is the complex of devices, mechanisms, techniques, and instrumentalism by means of which we live. Culture is the realm of spiritual ends, expressed in art, literature, morals, and religion, for which at best we live. The great problem confronting man today is that he has allowed his civilization to outdistance his culture. He has allowed his mentality to outrun his morality. He has allowed his technology to outdistance his theology. He has allowed the means by which he lives to tower above the ends for which he lives. How much of our modern life can be summarized in the shewd diction of the poet thoreau, "Improved means to an unimproved end."12 So we have ended up producing a generation of guided missels and misguided men. Unless [strikeout illegible] we awake and solve this problem soon our civilization will not only be indicted for sleeping through a revolution; it may well be destroyed before it has the opportunity to arise from its complacent slumber.

A third response that this revolutionary period demands is that of achieving [strikeout illegible] excellence in our various fields of endeavor. This is particularly true for those of us who are emerging from the yoke of oppression as a result of the present revolution. If we allow ourselves to be content with shear mediocrity, we will be sleeping through the at a time when we should be fully awake.

Today many doors will be opening to us that were not opened in the past, and the great challenge which we confront is to be prepared to enter these door as they open. Ralph Waldo Emerson said in a lecture in 1871:

If a man can write a better book, or preach a better sermon, or make a better mouse trap than his neighbor, even if he builds his house in the woods the world will make a beaten path to his door13

This has not always been true us, but the social revolution that is taking place will make it increasingly true.


12. Henry David Thoreau, Walden; or, Life in the Woods (1854), p. 57: "Our inventions are wont to be pretty toys, which distract our attention from serious things. They are but improved means to an unimproved end, an end which it was already but too easy to arrive at; as railroads lead to Boston or New York."

13. The source of this quotation, generally attributed to Emerson, is uncertain (see note 6 to "Mother's Day in Montgomery," 18 May 1956, in Papers 3:266).
In this new age that is emerging we will be forced to compete with people of all races and nationalities. Therefore, we cannot aim merely to be good Negro teachers, good Negro doctors, good Negro ministers, good Negro skilled labours. Maybe that was alright in the past. But today if you are merely seeking to do a good Negro job, you have already failed your matriculation examination for entrance into the university of integration. You have failed to remain awake through a great revolution.

We must broaden our interest to include fields that we have not pursued in the past. While we must to make strides in the relatively secure professions, we must produce more scientist & engineers. These are demands of the space age.

Above all, whatever your life's work happens to be, do it well. Do it with such dedication and thoroughness that even God almighty will have smile with approval. If it falls in the category of an ordinary job, do it in an extraordinary way. In the words of Douglas Malloch:\(^\text{14}\)

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14. King probably intended to quote lines from Douglas Malloch's "Be the Best of Whatever You Are" (1926), as he did in "The Three Dimensions of a Complete Life," Sermon Delivered at the Unitarian Church of Germantown, 11 December 1960, p. 573 in this volume.