



He Taught Us To Be
Brave

Congressman John Lewis

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Jerry,

Fifty years ago today, I was with Robert Kennedy in Indianapolis when we heard that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had been shot and killed.

The leader of our movement for civil rights was gone, assassinated on April 4, 1968, in Memphis.

And I believe something died in all of us that day. Something died in America.

But I've also always held the belief that what he left us — the way of hope, the way of peace, the way of love, a philosophy and discipline rooted in nonviolence — cannot be taken away. These things are eternal.

On Monday, I had the privilege of meeting with President Obama and a group of young men in Washington, D.C. for a My Brother's Keeper Alliance roundtable. Together, we commemorated the legacy of Dr. King, celebrated his life, and looked to the future.

I believe we can always do more to embody the teachings of Dr. King, not just on the anniversary of his death, but every day.

And young people are demonstrating that spirit to us. They are organizing and speaking up. They're marching. They're demanding more for themselves and their generation.

And so I had a message for the young folks I met with this week.

When I was growing up as a child in Alabama, I saw crosses that the Klan had put up. I saw signs that said "white" and "colored." There were places we couldn't go. The majority of African Americans could not participate in a democratic process in the South. We could not register to vote. And when I first came to Washington to go on the Freedom Rides in 1961, black people and white people couldn't be seated together on a Greyhound bus leaving this city.

When I got involved in the Civil Rights Movement as a young man, we'd sit in at restaurants. People would spit on us, put their cigarettes out on us, pour hot coffee down our backs. I was arrested 45 times in the 1960s. I was beaten, left bloody and unconscious.

But I never gave up. And today, you cannot give up.

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That's what Dr. Martin Luther King can teach us today. His message is as important now as it was 50 years ago: "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

Because of King and the actions of so many others, we brought those signs down. We earned the right to sit in those restaurants. We earned the right to vote.

Now, all across the South and all across America, there are elected officials who are people of color. In the recent elections in Virginia and around the country, more people of color and more women were elected to positions of power. They are African American, Latino, Asian American, Native American. Our country is a much better place – a much different place – in spite of all the setbacks and interruptions of progress.

Dr. King taught us to be brave, to be courageous, to be bold. I don't know where America would be, where many of us of color would be, were it not for him.

His legacy was to speak up, stand up. When you see that something isn't right or fair, you have to do something – you have to get in the way. Get into good trouble.

The young men I met with this week give me so much hope for our future.

Watch this video of our conversation to see why: [—Congressman John Lewis](#)

