

Remarks on the Occasion of Harvard Club of DC MLK, Jr. Day of Service
©2021 Jeffrey James Madison

Another Harvard alum, and another Harvard alum whose first name also starts with Jeff asked me to give a short speech or “series of remarks” in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to start this day of service nature walk here, at the foot of his statue, in honor of the national MLK, Jr. holiday.

My first thought was, why? I know myself, and myself said to me, “Self, I know you, and you’re no Martin Luther King, Jr.”

Jeff sort of said it was because he’s read my eloquent (his words, not mine) interview reports. If they are eloquent, it’s because I’m passionate about the subject. You see shedding the best light on these young applicants matters a lot to me. So, I give it my all.

I think if one were to say there’s any inkling of a notion of an idea where the late, great Dr. King, Jr. and I exist in common, it’s in that—giving it our all.

That doesn’t mean I’ll be giving you all a lengthy oratory. I am nowhere near like him in that way. Dr. King had a way with words, and if you don’t mind, I’d like to share with you a few of them as it relates to this beautiful place and this trying time. This quote is from his 1964 Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech:

“We have flown the air like birds and swum the sea like fishes but have yet to learn the simple act of walking the Earth like brothers.”

Sixty years later, here we are, in this trying time—not the Civil Rights era but the Climate Change era. Where once we were ignorant, now it is well-known: It is we who are killing the climate by poisoning our brethren, slaughtering the birds and decimating the fishes.

If Dr. King were alive today, I know he would be a staunch climate champion. He was witness to what we call today, climate injustice. Today, we know that racial justice is climate justice, and climate justice is racial justice. And at a global scale, there is no worse form of climate injustice than the climate injustice perpetrated on the poorest and most marginalized people, largely people of color around the world.

Today, you are giving it your all to move the needle in some small way to prevent the climate from becoming inhospitable and preventing the injustice that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his life to redress. With that knowledge, in his honor, let us enjoy this walk and imbibe deeply the beauty of this place. Let us walk this small patch of Earth and absorb the limitless power and beauty of Nature in it, a powerful beauty that reminds us we are at once brethren to it, and each other.

Thank you.