

Measuring King's Nobel Peace Prize, Today

Have times really changed? Is his vision for peace relevant in the 21st Century?

By Jesse Washington, AP National Writer

The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. dedicated his life to much more than achieving racial equality. That goal, he said again and again, was inseparable from alleviating poverty and stopping war. And he reiterated this theme after being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize 50 years ago in October, 2014.

"I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war, that the bright day-break of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality," he said in his Nobel acceptance speech.

"Sooner or later, all the people of the world will have to discover a way to live together in peace."

Half a century later, it's obvious that enormous progress has been made toward overcoming racial discrimination -- that King was right in his vision about race. Yet widespread poverty remains, in America and beyond, and bombs still fall as brutal wars rage on.

Was King naive? Was his full vision simply unobtainable — do free markets require poor people to function, and will war always assert itself as a defining human habit?

Is King's Nobel vision relevant five decades later?

Absolutely, insist some who study King's life and philosophy. They say his racial proclamations and strategies, so controversial back then but now part of the American cultural canon, can and should apply to today's stubborn issues of poverty and war.

"I don't think his vision has ever been more relevant," says Paul Chappell, a West Point graduate who served in Iraq and now teaches and writes books about peace. "The problem is, people don't realize how prophetic King was."

Chappell, the Peace Leadership Director for the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, which seeks a world without nuclear weapons, says a close examination of King's life and work shows he predicted today's protests over income inequality and trillions of war dollars drained from America's budgets.

"He realized that American military intervention is not only harmful to people around the world, it's also harmful to the American people," Chappell says.

The peace prize for King, then just 35 years old, honored a Southern preacher

whose philosophy, courage and oratory galvanized the civil rights movement, on whose behalf he said he accepted it. It gave a unique international recognition to

approached all-out war in Vietnam. King accepted the award in Oslo, Norway, on December 10, and the following day delivered the traditional Nobel lecture.

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The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

the movement's accomplishments at a pivotal time.

The prize was announced on October 14, 1964, against a backdrop of the Civil Rights Act, whose passage earlier that year finally granted black Americans full citizenship. But it also came as the nation

In his remarks, King returned to a lifelong theme of describing a world where love and compassion could conquer poverty and conflict. His strategies were based on nonviolence — "the need for man to overcome oppression and violence without resorting



President Lyndon B. Johnson, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Rosa Parks at the signing of the Voting Rights Act on August 6, 1965.

to violence and oppression," as he said in his speech.

"The foundation of such a method is love," he said.

"The Nobel speeches really are neglected gems of how long-term progress against these evils requires a

great commitment of mind and spirit and cooperation

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"We refuse to believe there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation."

-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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