

# Honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

## 'If I Had Sneezed': 5 Surprising Lines from MLK's 'Mountaintop' Speech

By Sheryl Huggins Salomon  
Special to the NNPA  
from the New Pittsburgh Courier

**N**early 48 years after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968, we still recall the fateful words of his last public speech the day before.

Delivered in Memphis, Tenn. in support of striking sanitation workers there, his address is popularly known as "The Mountaintop Speech" for these famous closing lines: "We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop....I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."

They're unforgettable: the final, soaring, prophetic words of a leader who seemed to know his hours were numbered. Yet if you listen to the entire speech, what comes through is a call to action in support of organized labor, buttressed by rhetoric that ranges from scripture to statistics to personal anecdotes to complaints that ring true over half a century later.

Even the more prosaic elements of his last public speech are enlightening. For instance, did you know that in "The Mountaintop Speech," Dr. King:

### 1. Recounted the time a woman stabbed him during a book tour stop in New York City.

*"...while sitting there autographing books, a demented black woman came up. The only question I heard from her was, 'Are you Martin Luther King?'... the X-rays revealed that the tip of the blade was on the edge of my aorta, the main artery... It came out in the New York Times the next morning, that if I had sneezed, I would have died."*

### 2. Cited Rev. Jesse Jackson, Sr. – and paused to ask him a question mid-speech.

*"We are asking you tonight, to go out and tell your neighbors not to buy Coca-Cola in Memphis...Tell them not to buy—what is the other bread?—Wonder Bread. And what is the other bread company, Jesse? Tell them not to buy Hart's bread. As Jesse Jackson has said, up to now, only the garbage men have been feeling pain; now we must kind of redistribute the pain."*

### 3. Complained about the press.

*"You know what happened the other day, and the press dealt only with the window-breaking. I read the articles. They very seldom got around to mentioning the fact that one thousand, three hundred sanitation workers were on strike, and that Memphis is not being fair to them...They didn't get around to that."*

### 4. Rattled off stats on the size of Black buying power.

*"The Negro collectively is richer than most nations of the world. We have an annual income of more than thirty billion dollars a year, which is more than all of the exports of the United States, and more than the national budget of Canada. Did you know that? That's power right there, if we know how to pool it."*

### 5. Stressed the need to support Black-owned businesses.

*"We've got to strengthen black institutions. I call upon you to take your money out of the banks downtown and deposit your money in Tri-State Bank—we want a 'bank-in' movement in Memphis... We begin the process of building a greater economic base. And at the same time, we are putting pressure where it really hurts. I ask you to follow through here."*

To read "The Mountaintop Speech" in its entirety, visit <http://www.afscme.org/union/history/mlk/ive-been-to-the-mountaintop-by-dr-martin-luther-king-jr>

## States Plan Renewed Debate on LGBT Rights, Religious Freedom

Civil rights tussles could push red, blue states in opposite directions

DAVID A. LIEB  
Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — With same-sex marriage now legal nationwide, lawmakers in numerous states are preparing for a new round of battles in 2016 over whether to grant discrimination protections to LGBT people or religious exemptions to nonprofits and businesses that object to gay marriage.

The tussle over civil rights and religious freedoms is one of several hot-button issues that could drive states in opposite policy directions, as lawmakers seek to appeal to voters during a year in which more than 5,800 state legislative seats will be up for election.

Republicans hold majorities in two-thirds of the states' legislative chambers, meaning they get to set the agenda. Those priorities could include attempts to exempt businesses from providing wedding-related services to gay couples, expand gun rights and further restrictions on abortions.

Democrats, meanwhile, will likely be pushing in the opposite direction.

**“You’ve got the Democratic states reacting very differently, a lot of the time, than the Republican states to these issues**

“What we’ve got is division,” said William Pound, executive director of the National Conference of State Legislatures.

He predicts there will be a “significant number of bills” seeking to advance either religious rights or the civil rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.



In this March 28, 2015, file photo, Jackson Blanchard, of Indianapolis, leads the crowd in a chant during a rally against a new Indiana religious objections law outside the State House in Indianapolis. An intense debate over gay rights already is shaping up in Indiana, where a religious-rights law passed last spring thrust the state into the national spotlight over concerns it could sanction discrimination against gays and lesbians.

“You’ve got the Democratic states reacting very differently, a lot of the time, than the Republican states to these issues,” Pound said.

of the states, according to an analysis by Associated Press statehouse reporters around the country.

At least 10 states might consider

Those potentially divisive debates will be playing out as legislators also struggle with some traditionally difficult financial issues, such as budget shortfalls and calls to boost funding for public schools and infrastructure. Education issues are expected to be at the forefront in more than a third

new revenue for transportation in 2016, building on a trend in which at least half the states already have acted in the past several years.

States that rely heavily on the energy industry for tax income, such as Alaska, Oklahoma, West Virgin-

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