



Congressman Donald M. Payne, Jr.
Representing New Jersey's 10th District



“Dr. King’s Dream 50 Years Later”

Congressman Donald M. Payne, Jr. (NJ-10)
Congressional Black Caucus Special Order Hour
Monday, January 8, 2018

Thank you, Congressman Evans, for hosting tonight’s Special Order Hour on Dr. King’s Life and Legacy.

Fifty years after his death, Dr. King’s legacy has been shrouded in myth by people who prefer being comfortable to being real.

His personal truths have been twisted into lies by people who want to appear woke but whose eyes are blind to the harsh reality of injustice.

This year – in 2018 – we must reclaim Dr. King’s legacy from those who are apt to quote “I Have a Dream” as they seek to silence people of color who are fighting to preserve that Dream.

Mr. Speaker, Dr. King understood that non-violence does NOT mean non-confrontational. He knew that social change requires sacrifice. He knew that doing what is right does not mean doing what is easy.

When Black Lives Matter protesters peacefully rally in the streets to protest police brutality against young men of color, conservatives and white moderates shout that Black Lives Matter incites violence and should be peaceful, *like Dr. King*.

What they are really saying is “Sit down, boy, and know your place.”

That’s the same thing they said fifty-five years ago, when Dr. King led peaceful protests against racial injustice in Birmingham, Alabama. Conservatives shouted that Dr. King was causing “hatred and violence.” They told him to sit down and know his place. But he persisted.

Dr. King was not in Birmingham to make everyone comfortable. He was there to upset the status quo and change our democracy.

Then, four years later, Dr. King proclaimed that the Vietnam War was morally unjust. He pointed out that profit had become more important to the government than people, who were sacrificing their lives overseas.

Conservatives once again attacked Dr. King. They said he was being slanderous, that he was “tragically misleading” people. They told him to *be quiet and know his place*. But, like Dr. King told one of his friends at the time, he might have been politically *unwise*, but he was being morally wise – and that’s what mattered!

This year – in 2018 – we must be morally wise!

Dr. King’s life and legacy shows us that doing what is right is rarely the same as doing what is easy. We, too, must persist.

As we head into a consequential year, when Americans will go to the polls, let us not lose sight of the fact that to protect and preserve Dr. King’s legacy demands that we protect and preserve our democracy from voter suppression, cybersecurity weaknesses, and foreign meddling.

We must expand voting rights for all Americans.

We must modernize our voting systems.

We must appoint an independent commission to investigate foreign meddling in the electoral system before the 2018 federal election.

We must break down barriers to voting, not build them.

We must make registering to vote easier, not harder.

We must ensure elections are competitive, not guaranteed.

We must restore the right to vote for felons who have served their prison sentences.

We must end partisan gerrymandering.

We must protect the sanctity of our elections.

And we must restore the Voting Rights Act.

Thank you, and I yield back.