

REVEREND DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. SYMPOSIUM 2017 THEME STATEMENT:

## **SOUNDS OF CHANGE**

**Sound is a core of change, as is its absence, silence. What sounds of change are you drumming up?**

“Sounds of Change” brings to mind images of the auditory experiences that mark moments of change. The term implicitly addresses the plurality of change: positive, negative and ambivalent. This plurality represents a broad spectrum of sounds from music that comforts in times of grief to roaring voices of contention. It can represent dialogue that motivates, noise that drowns out discussion, and indeed, silence itself as a means of creating change. Ultimately people are the producers of sound and so are the agents of change.

### **Each Sound is Part of the Song in the Key of Life**

Each life vibrates and produces sound that is part of a collective global symphony. The vibrations of each life add new notes to the melody and color the harmony of the whole human ensemble. Some sounds of change are undetectable. Just as sound waves with very low or very high frequencies are inaudible to the human ear, cries made from the margins of the social spectrum may not be easily discerned by society. What voices are we not hearing? What struggles go unattended? We do not all sing the same note, but we must work to ensure we hear one another clearly in order to sing together, in tune, and in harmony.

Change, in being constant, is inevitable and moves on a continuum scale between cacophony to harmony. The instruments of fear, self-righteousness, ignorance, silence, wisdom, injustice, confusion, peace and love are always present and being played. Change is heard based on a wave of sound detected by the listener, though each player has an instrument and is compelled to contribute their voice to the conversation. Dr. King realized that the preservation of a nation is based on how willing and often its citizens play their instruments in harmony. Different voices held together by the key signature of community produce chords of love, justice, and peace.

Listen closely to the percussive chants during protests:

“What do we want?”	“Freedom!”
“When do we want it?”	“Now!”
“No Justice”	“No peace”
“Hands up!”	“Don’t shoot!”

### **Listen closely to the sounds that ignite protest.**

Hear the tap-tap-tap-tap-tap-tap-tap of skittles spilling out in a rapid succession one by one to the ground. Hear the peeeeeooooohh peeeeeooooohh whispers from a 12-year-old boy as he plays bang bang shoot ’em up with a toy gun in the park. Hear the frustration and confusion in “Under arrest for what?” Hear the low, melodic humming of prayer during bible study just

before bullets from a Glock 45 burst through the air, hitting their intended targets at close range. Hear the rustle of a shirt and pants twisting in a car seat as the driver reaches for his wallet, and a split second later, multiple gunshots ring out. Hear the shock and fear in his girlfriend's voice and her four-year-old daughter's cries as they scream out in horror. Hear the panic and anguish in the call

----- "I can't breathe!"

An inaudible action to promote awareness and change can echo as loud as thousands of voices. Colin Kaepernick, quarterback of the San Francisco 49ers, in August began kneeling during the national anthem in silent protest of the oppression of people of color and police brutality.

"I'm going to continue to stand with the people that are being oppressed...When there's significant change and I feel that flag represents what it's supposed to represent, and this country is representing people the way that it's supposed to, I'll stand."

"This stand wasn't for me. This is because I'm seeing things happen to people that don't have a voice, people that don't have a platform to talk and have their voices heard, and effect change. So I'm in the position where I can do that and I'm going to do that for people that can't."

"It's something that can unify this team. It's something that can unify this country. If we have these real conversations that are uncomfortable for a lot of people. If we have these conversations, there's a better understanding of where both sides are coming from."

Kaepernick's silent protest galvanized thousands of others to kneel for change allowing the sound of support, of solidarity, to ring loud across the nation. Silence calling for dialogue.

### **Music as a Catalyst for Change**

Sam Cooke's 1964 ballad 'A Change Is Gonna Come' told the story:

There have been times that I thought I couldn't last for long  
But now I think I'm able to carry on  
It's been a long, a long time coming  
But I know a change is gonna come, oh yes it will

Using music as a means of exposing and combatting oppression is not a novel idea. Artists from every musical genre have been raising their voices for decades to enlighten, empower, and uplift people with regard to a multitude of pressing social issues. From war to poverty, racism, sexism, civil rights and equality, music expresses our deepest pains and hopes. The beauty of music is that it has this uncanny ability to unite people from all walks of life. Music can serve as the catalyst necessary to open up our hearts and, subsequently, our minds, so that dialogue about difficult subjects begins. From jazz to hip-hop, country to soul, and rock to spoken word, artists weave concepts, lyrics and melodies together into beautiful, thought provoking, and powerful themes. Many of these artists use their lyrics to give voice to otherwise silenced

issues and use rhythm to build and demonstrate shared humanity of the collective. As Stevie Wonder proclaims, “Music is a world within itself with a language we all understand.”

The trudge through turmoil, the fight toward justice is a hard sung one. Sometimes the song continues with strained voices—through blood, sweat, and tears—but still it continues on. Marvin Gaye asked, “What’s going on?” Maya Angelou proclaimed, “Still, I’ll rise.” and Kendrick Lamar told us, “We gon be alright.” Whether in jubilee, or in relentless courage, the communal sounds of change are sometimes heard louder when we come together.

In the case of the Dakota Access Pipeline, the Standing Rock Sioux tribe have attracted the voices of hundreds of tribes across the country and voices from the Black Lives Matter Movement and Code Pink. The Dakota Access Pipeline is an underground oil project creating a 1,172-mile-long pipeline under the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers from North Dakota to Illinois. The construction of the pipeline sounds like an investment to some, yet to tribal nations and their allies protesting the pipeline, the construction sounds like an alarm warning of a threat to the “way of life, [their] water, people, and land.” The sounds heard from the Sacred Stone Camp are those of spiritual and cultural restoration, persistence, and courage to some, and to others, a nuisance in a financial project; sounds needing to be silenced.

When people protest they are demanding to be heard. Whether these protests occur in song, from Billie Holiday’s “Strange Fruit” to Michael Jackson’s “They Don’t Care About Us,” to N.W.A.’s “F the Police,” or in chant, “Mni wiconi” (Lakota for: “water is life”), these protests represent hope responding to the agony in the key of life. As we approach the 50th anniversary of the Detroit riots, we are reminded that even when protests turn violent, the angry sounds of persons who refuse to be silenced over injustice happening within their communities are voices demanding change. If we are to find harmony, then we must work to hear one another.

All sounds of change penetrated Dr. King’s ear as he persisted on writing and directing his composition in three movements.

***...sounds of love.***

“Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.” —Rev. Dr. Martin L. King, Jr.

***...sounds of justice.***

“Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable.... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.” —Rev. Dr. Martin L. King, Jr.

***...sounds of peace.***

“We will not build a peaceful world by following a negative path. It is not enough to say ‘We must not wage war.’ It is necessary to love peace and sacrifice for it. We must concentrate not merely on the negative expulsion of war, but on the positive affirmation of peace.” — Rev. Dr. Martin L. King, Jr.

**Love is required for justice; justice is required for peace. Sound is a core of change, as is its absence, silence. What sounds of change are you drumming up?**

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Links:

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<http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2016/11/22/502068751/the-standing-rock-resistance-is-unprecedented-it-s-also-centuries-old>

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