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**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT THE NATIONAL
ACTION NETWORK'S DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY EVENT**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you.

[Applause]

Thank you, everybody. Happy King Day, everyone.

[Applause]

You know, Rev – Rev was influenced at the height of Dr. King's movement to join that movement as a young man and to help it grow. And when Dr. King was assassinated it did not end his ideas or his movements. It became all the rest of our responsibility to carry it forward.

What Rev did – and he mentioned that silent march to end the unconstitutional use of stop-and-frisk in this city, that march was the beginning of the end for that broken policy. Let's thank Rev for all of his leadership.

[Applause]

Thank you to all the elected officials and the leaders who are here. Thank you to everyone who has joined us – so many activists in this room, so many people who are change-agents and make a difference in this city every day.

Please applause your neighbor, everyone.

[Applause]

But let me also offer a thank you on behalf of 8.5 million New Yorkers. If you are a Haitian-American, thank you. Thank you for your contributions to this city and this country.

[Applause]

If you come from African and you have come here to make us better, thank you.

[Applause]

If you left violence in El Salvador and now are helping to create a better community here in New York City, thank you.

[Applause]

That is what we should be saying on a day that celebrates Martin Luther King, Jr.

And I want to remind you on this day – I'll be very brief – but I want to remind you, he showed us over and over again that change happens from the grassroots, from the bottom up not the top down.

The entire history of the Civil Rights Movement was from everyday people in cities and towns all over the South deciding it was time for a change and breaking the status quo with their very actions. That's what we witnessed with our own eyes.

And I remind people that there was an anthem – there were many but one that particularly has been remembered. And when we hear the singing of "We Shall Overcome" my caution to all of us is not to feel nostalgic, not to believe that that's a beautiful song from the past that evokes a noble history. "We Shall Overcome" is not just a pleasant melody, it is an instruction to us all. It's a living, breathing idea.

And it's a reminder that every generation has faced this struggle. By the way what Dr. King and his movement faced makes our situation today look positively easy because he was trying to fundamentally remake a society that rejected him and everyone who looked like him in every way, in laws, in deeds, in language, in culture, in every way there was rejection and it looked impossible to change it.

But a people's movement changed it. No matter what the odds, we saw it with our own eyes. And now we have to remember what that means for our times because Lord knows, my friends, it is easy to be discouraged in these times.

Right, let's have some real talk. It is easy to be discouraged. I don't know how many tweets I can take.

[Laughter]

It is easy to be confused. It is easy to be depressed. But if we were to be depressed, if we were to be paralyzed by all the negativity then we would have forgotten the lesson Dr. King.

We shall overcome – if that's an instruction to us, it means whatever hand you're dealt you've got to change the world as you've found it.

And I'm going to give you three easy examples. If you ever get down I want you just to dwell on these examples. One was the one we just mentioned a moment ago. When the movement against the overuse of stop-and-frisk began, universally you heard voices of the status quo say there would be the chaos and the crime that Rev referred to.

I remember vividly – this is only five or six years ago – we were all told constantly, it was like surround-sound, that that change would lead to horrible things. People knew better. People knew that anything that tore a police and community apart couldn't be the right idea.

Anything that denigrated our young men of color was taking us in the wrong direction, and that we had to do something different. And just because we did not know exactly where it would lead us did not mean we shouldn't have faith that there was a better way. Everyone in this room who participated in that silent march and everything we did after, in our time took the kind of inspiration we saw from Dr. King and put it into action right here in New York City.

You saw a broken and oppressive policy, you stood up against it, you used every tool, and you proved the status quo wrong. And yeah, we're the safest big city in America because of it.

[Applause]

The second example I want to give you is as great as the protest of the 1960s were, as powerful as they were, as much as they changed things and we honor that, the greatest protests in our history in terms of the number of people who participated simultaneously in the most places in the history of the United States was last January 21st.

[Applause]

Millions upon millions of people all over the country simultaneously in common cause to stand up for the rights of women and to reject the policies of the new administration. We had never seen anything like it. Wouldn't Dr. King loved to have live in the Digital Age so he could organize people like that?

Well guess what, we do. We live in this time. But we have tools he could only have dreamed of. Let that encourage you.

And finally, a place we did not expect to see inspiration, a place that bore the brunt during the Civil Rights struggle and kept fighting, and then in so many ways we kept hearing that no change could ever happen again in the State of Alabama.

[Applause]

Don't be taken in by the conventional analysis that says that was just about a reprehensible Republican candidate. That was people organizing on the ground who believed that change could happen. Were they overwhelmed by voter suppression laws? No. No they were afflicted by voter suppression laws but they overcame those laws and voted in record numbers.

[Applause]

You know the phrase we say about our town, “If you can make here, you can make it anywhere?” If you can do something impossible in Alabama, you can do it anywhere.

[Applause]

So, I conclude with a simple thought. As tough as these times can be, we have the gift of Dr. King’s legacy. We have the map he left us and he did not believe it was just about one great eloquent leader like himself, he believed it was about us.

If you don’t like what’s happening in Washington, live as Dr. King lived. Do it yourself. Change the way things are from the grassroots up. That’s how we honor his legacy. Thank you and God bless you all.

[Applause]

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