

Letter From a Birmingham Jail

[\[Audio Link\]](#)

In A Letter from a Birmingham Jail King wrote, “We are caught in an escapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.

Can you comment on King’s vision of an interconnected world? As well as what movements today can learn from this vision?

Dr. Clayborne Carson: I think the quote points to one of the basic foundations of King’s ideals. I think that when we look at what has happened over the last few hundred years in terms of the invention of the modern notion of human – and universal human rights, it really starts with an increasing sense of empathy. That people begin to feel as they moved away from their limited surroundings, their you know, what King would call kind of their connection with their community, their tribe, their race.

And began to recognize that there were other people in the world that they should care about. I mean we can trace that back to in the Judaic Christian tradition to the Good Samaritan story. You know, which is essentially a story about how we need to move beyond the notion that we only have a moral obligation to people of our own tribe.

The Good Samaritan is a person from another tribe who helps the person in need along the highway. And the point of the story, when Jesus tells it, is that people of his own tribe walk by. They didn’t have that sense. Even for someone in their own group, that they needed to stop and help. But someone from another group was able to see that.

And he’s using that as a way of saying that that happens in – that says that our moral obligations are not something that emerged from our sense of belonging to a group, a tribe or a race, or a nation.

Instead, it has to come out of a sense of obligation toward all of humanity, all living things, really. And once it does, then we can change the world. And he’s saying in a sense that that is in our long-term self interest. Because the world is becoming more interconnected. The world.

And we can see how that has played such a role in the development of human rights. I mean you can’t even have a concept of universal human rights unless you are essentially saying that there’s a person on another continent that I might not even know, of a different race, different religion, whatever. And yet, I have a sense that that person’s destiny affects me. Now, we talk about globalization. But we rarely – we talk about it mainly in economic terms. You know, the economies of the world being interconnected.

We are still in the early stage of trying to understand that in moral empathetic terms, that we are interconnected. That we have a relationship with other people, wherever they are in the world.

[\[Understanding the Legacy of MLK\]](#)