

Martin Sheen: Find Something Worth Fighting For (2010)

The American actor and activist [Martin Sheen](#) delivered this speech at [We Day](#) in Vancouver, 2010, to an audience of young people encouraged to take action on local and global issues.

The speech concludes with a poem called Chitto Jetha Bhayashunyo ([Where the mind is without fear](#)) written by Rabindranath Tagore before India's independence which represents Tagore's dream of how the new India should be. Originally in Bengali, the poem was translated into English by Tagore in 1912. [Rabindranath Tagore](#) (1861 – 1941), a Bengali poet, musician, painter, dramatist, thinker, nationalist, and writer, who shaped Bengali literature and music in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He became the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature.

The transcript is from [Find Something Worth Fighting For: 2010 We Day Speech by Martin Sheen](#). The video is from [the empoweredmerchants Youtube channel](#).

Martin Sheen:

You got the message.

I've been an actor all of my life. In fact I have no conscious memory of ever not being an actor, but while acting is what I do for a living, activism is what I do to stay alive.

And I am often asked how I manage to unite the two and the answer is quite simple; I don't have a clue because it was far less a conscious effort than it was a natural progression.

Of course if you grew up in a poor large immigrant family chances are you're either Irish Catholic or Hispanic and I was

lucky enough to be both, so I had a head start when it came to social justice activism.

Both of my parents were immigrants. My father was Francisco Estevez or as they say in Spain, Estévez. He was born in northern Spain on a little village called Vigo on July the second 1897 the very day the United States declared war on Spain.

My mother was Mary-Ann Phelan. She was born May the 22nd, 1903 on a tiny village in the center of the Irish Republic, Borrisokane, in County Tipperary. They immigrated separately of course to the United States, but they met in Dayton, Ohio and were married in 1924. They had 12 pregnancies, 10 survived, 9 boys and one girl, I was their seventh son – my real name is Ramon.

I stayed in Dayton and then I finished high school and I decided to go to New York to pursue a career on the theater. John Kennedy was in the White House and Pope John 23rd was in the Vatican. We held our breath during the Cuban missiles crisis and we were lifted up by Martin Luther King's dream as civil rights, Vietnam, all came into the national consciousness.

Then suddenly we lost John Kennedy and we still don't know how or why but it seemed as the worst of the sixties was yet to come. 1968 started with the Tet offense of Vietnam and ended with the return of Richard Nixon. In between, we lost both Martin Luther King Junior and Bobby Kennedy, and we lost them just eight weeks apart.

We backed out of the sixties, still broken but clutching the absolute certainty that lost causes were still the only causes worth fighting for, and that non-violence is the only weapon to use to fight with. "Each time someone stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, they stand for a tiny ripple of hope and,

crossing, each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build the current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and injustice.”

Those words were spoken at Cape Town, South Africa, at the university there in 1966 by Robert Francis Kennedy. They are enshrined on his memorial at Arlington National Cemetery as well and they have been a powerful source of inspiration for my generation ever since. The more the world changes, the more it remains the same, I believe, because the three most important needs of every human being on earth are not food, clothing, and shelter as much as the need for freedom, justice, and healing.

It is the gross inequality of food, clothing, and shelter that divides us and the absolute necessity for freedom, justice, and healing that unites us. Clearly we need a more realistic understanding of who we are and why we are here in order to have a honest relationship with each other. Consider the following please, from ‘Earth as a Village’ by Phillips M. Harter, Stanford School of Medicine:

“If we could shrink the earth’s population of over six and a half billion people down to a single village consisting of one hundred people, with all the existing ratios the same, it would look something like this; there would be 57 Asians, 8 Europeans, 21 Africans, and 14 people from the Western hemisphere. There would be 52 women and 48 men. There would be 70 non-whites and 30 whites. There would be 70 non-Christians and 30 Christians.

There would be no doctor, no nurse, no dentist, no hospital or clinic and no school, there would be no safe drinking water, there would be no common language, there would be no electricity and no paved roads, there would be 70 people unable to read or write, there would be 50 people suffering from malnutrition, there would be one person near death and one person near birth. The entire food supply for the village

would depend entirely on outside sources. Six people on that village would possess 59% of the entire world's wealth, and all 6 would be US citizens. There would be one college graduate, one TV, one computer, and the average person on that village would be a 13-year-old Chinese girl."

Whether we choose to acknowledge it or not we are all responsible for each other and the world which is exactly the way it is because, consciously or unconsciously, we have made it so. And while none of us made the any of the rules that govern the universe, we do make all the rules that govern our own hearts, and we are all beneficiaries of those many heroic strangers who've gone before us over the centuries who assure us that the world is still a wonderful and safe place despite our fears, and we're not asked to do great things – we're asked to do all things with great care.

Such an ideal is rare in a culture of so many compromised values and so much cynicism, a culture that all too often knows the price of everything and the value of nothing, and yet there remains a very real and mysterious yearning, deep within every human heart, that compels us to reach outside of ourselves and help others for our own sake.

This yearning is a true manifestation of our true selves, and it can lead to the very first small conscious acts of personal courage which can bring rejection from the crowd and satisfaction from the heart. But this yearning can also be very costly as well. If we're not so we'd be left to question its value, and this, above all; one heart with courage, is a majority.

Over the entire history of the world, every truth started as a blasphemy and no one has ever made a contribution of any real work without self sacrifice, personal sufferings and sometimes, even death.

The Irish tell a story of a man who came to the gates of

heaven and asked to be led in, Saint Peter said "Of course! Just show us your scars!" The man says "I have no scars." Saint Peter says "What a pity! Was there nothing worth fighting for?"

My fondest wish for each and every one of the young people here today is that you will find something in your life worth fighting for, because when you do, you would have discovered a way to unite the will of the spirit to the work of the flesh, and all of humanity would have discovered fire for the second time.

It is my profound wish that the light from that fire will illuminate your path to that place...

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;

Where knowledge is free;

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;

Where words come out from the depth of truth;

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action;

Into that heaven of freedom

Let us all awake.

Thank you.

Lupita Nyong'o: Best Supporting Actress, Oscars, 2014

The Kenyan/Mexican actress [Lupita Amondi Nyong'o](#) won an Oscar for Best Supporting Actress in 2014 for her role in the British-American historical drama film "[12 Years a Slave](#)," directed by Steve McQueen. The movie told the story of Solomon Northup, a New York State-born free African American man who was kidnapped in Washington, D.C. in 1841 and sold into slavery, working on plantations in Louisiana for twelve years before his release. Lupita played the role of Patsey, a young slave who is abused in the cotton plantation in Louisiana.

The transcript is from [the Washington Post](#). The video is from [the Daily Motion website](#).

Lupita Nyong'o:

Thank you to the Academy for this incredible recognition. It doesn't escape me for one moment that so much joy in my life is thanks to so much pain in someone else's. And so I want to salute the spirit of Patsey for her guidance. And for Solomon, thank you for telling her story and your own.

Steve McQueen, you charge everything you fashion with a breath of your own spirit. Thank you so much for putting me in this position, it's been the joy of my life. [Tears, applause.] I'm certain that the dead are standing about you and watching and they are grateful and so am I.

Chiwetel, thank you for your fearlessness and how deeply you

went into Solomon, telling Solomon's story. Michael Fassbender, thank you so much. You were my rock. Alfre and Sarah, it was a thrill to work with you. Joe Walker, the invisible performer in the editing room, thank you. Sean Bobbitt, Kalaadevi, Adruitha, Patty Norris, thank you, thank you, thank you – I could not be here without your work.

I want to thank my family, for your training [laughs] and the Yale School of Drama as well, for your training. My friends the Wilsons, this one's for you. My brother Junior sitting by my side, thank you so much, you're my best friend and then my other best friend, my chosen family.

When I look down at this golden statue, may it remind me and every little child that no matter where you're from, your dreams are valid. Thank you.

US President Lyndon B. Johnson: War on Poverty, 1964

The [War on Poverty](#) was the unofficial name for legislation introduced by U.S. President [Lyndon B. Johnson](#) (1908 – 1973) during his State of the Union address on January 8, 1964 to address high levels of poverty in the US.

The transcript of which this video is a small extract can be downloaded from [the Miller Center website of the University of Virginia](#). The video is also from [the Miller Center, from its Youtube channel](#).

President Lyndon B. Johnson:

This administration today, here and now, declares unconditional war on poverty in America. I urge this Congress and all Americans to join with me in that effort.

It will not be a short or easy struggle, no single weapon or strategy will suffice, but we shall not rest until that war is won. The richest nation on earth can afford to win it. We cannot afford to lose it. One thousand dollars invested in salvaging an unemployable youth today can return \$40,000 or more in his lifetime.

Poverty is a national problem, requiring improved national organization and support. But this attack, to be effective, must also be organized at the state and the local level and must be supported and directed by state and local efforts.

For the war against poverty will not be won here in Washington. It must be won in the field, in every private home, in every public office, from the courthouse to the White House.

The program I shall propose will emphasize this cooperative approach to help that one-fifth of all American families with incomes too small to even meet their basic needs.

Our chief weapons in a more pinpointed attack will be better schools, and better health, and better homes, and better training, and better job opportunities to help more Americans, especially young Americans, escape from squalor and misery and unemployment rolls where other citizens help to carry them.

Ernest Hemingway: Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, 1954

Ernest [Hemingway](#) (1899 – 1961) was an American author and journalist whose economical style had a strong influence on 20th-century fiction, and who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954.

The transcript can be downloaded from [the Nobel Prize website](#). The video is from [the Misery of Existence channel on Youtube](#).

Ernest Hemingway:

No writer who knows the great writers who did not receive the Prize can accept it other than with humility. There is no need to list these writers. Everyone here may make his own list according to his knowledge and his conscience.

It would be impossible for me to ask the Ambassador of my country to read a speech in which a writer said all of the things which are in his heart. Things may not be immediately discernible in what a man writes, and in this sometimes he is fortunate; but eventually they are quite clear and by these and the degree of alchemy that he possesses he will endure or be forgotten.

Writing, at its best, is a lonely life. Organizations for writers palliate the writer's loneliness but I doubt if they improve his writing. He grows in public stature as he sheds his loneliness and often his work deteriorates. For he does his work alone and if he is a good enough writer he must face eternity, or the lack of it, each day.

For a true writer each book should be a new beginning where he tries again for something that is beyond attainment. He should always try for something that has never been done or that

others have tried and failed. Then sometimes, with great luck, he will succeed.

How simple the writing of literature would be if it were only necessary to write in another way what has been well written. It is because we have had such great writers in the past that a writer is driven far out past where he can go, out to where no one can help him.

I have spoken too long for a writer. A writer should write what he has to say and not speak it.

Again I thank you

Robin Cook: Resignation Speech as UK Foreign Secretary, 2003

The British Labour party politician [Robin Cook](#) (1946 – 2005) was the the UK Foreign Secretary from 1997 to 2001 under Prime Minister Tony Blair. Cook resigned dramatically from the cabinet in March 2003 in protest against [the invasion of Iraq](#).

The transcript can be downloaded from [the BBC website](#). The video is from [Youtube](#).

Robin Cook:

This is the first time for 20 years that I have addressed the House from the back benches.

I must confess that I had forgotten how much better the view

is from here.

None of those 20 years were more enjoyable or more rewarding than the past two, in which I have had the immense privilege of serving this House as Leader of the House, which were made all the more enjoyable, Mr Speaker, by the opportunity of working closely with you.

It was frequently the necessity for me as Leader of the House to talk my way out of accusations that a statement had been preceded by a press interview.

On this occasion I can say with complete confidence that no press interview has been given before this statement.

I have chosen to address the House first on why I cannot support a war without international agreement or domestic support.

The present Prime Minister is the most successful leader of the Labour party in my lifetime.

I hope that he will continue to be the leader of our party, and I hope that he will continue to be successful. I have no sympathy with, and I will give no comfort to, those who want to use this crisis to displace him.

I applaud the heroic efforts that the prime minister has made in trying to secure a second resolution.

I do not think that anybody could have done better than the foreign secretary in working to get support for a second resolution within the Security Council.

But the very intensity of those attempts underlines how important it was to succeed.

Now that those attempts have failed, we cannot pretend that getting a second resolution was of no importance.

France has been at the receiving end of bucket loads of commentary in recent days.

It is not France alone that wants more time for inspections. Germany wants more time for inspections; Russia wants more time for inspections; indeed, at no time have we signed up even the minimum necessary to carry a second resolution.

We delude ourselves if we think that the degree of international hostility is all the result of President Chirac.

The reality is that Britain is being asked to embark on a war without agreement in any of the international bodies of which we are a leading partner – not NATO, not the European Union and, now, not the Security Council.

To end up in such diplomatic weakness is a serious reverse.

Only a year ago, we and the United States were part of a coalition against terrorism that was wider and more diverse than I would ever have imagined possible.

History will be astonished at the diplomatic miscalculations that led so quickly to the disintegration of that powerful coalition.

The US can afford to go it alone, but Britain is not a superpower.

Our interests are best protected not by unilateral action but by multilateral agreement and a world order governed by rules.

Yet tonight the international partnerships most important to us are weakened: the European Union is divided; the Security Council is in stalemate.

Those are heavy casualties of a war in which a shot has yet to be fired.

I have heard some parallels between military action in these

circumstances and the military action that we took in Kosovo. There was no doubt about the multilateral support that we had for the action that we took in Kosovo.

It was supported by NATO; it was supported by the European Union; it was supported by every single one of the seven neighbours in the region. France and Germany were our active allies.

It is precisely because we have none of that support in this case that it was all the more important to get agreement in the Security Council as the last hope of demonstrating international agreement.

The legal basis for our action in Kosovo was the need to respond to an urgent and compelling humanitarian crisis.

Our difficulty in getting support this time is that neither the international community nor the British public is persuaded that there is an urgent and compelling reason for this military action in Iraq.

The threshold for war should always be high.

None of us can predict the death toll of civilians from the forthcoming bombardment of Iraq, but the US warning of a bombing campaign that will "shock and awe" makes it likely that casualties will be numbered at least in the thousands.

I am confident that British servicemen and women will acquit themselves with professionalism and with courage. I hope that they all come back.

I hope that Saddam, even now, will quit Baghdad and avert war, but it is false to argue that only those who support war support our troops.

It is entirely legitimate to support our troops while seeking an alternative to the conflict that will put those troops at risk.

Nor is it fair to accuse those of us who want longer for inspections of not having an alternative strategy.

For four years as foreign secretary I was partly responsible for the western strategy of containment.

Over the past decade that strategy destroyed more weapons than in the Gulf war, dismantled Iraq's nuclear weapons programme and halted Saddam's medium and long-range missiles programmes.

Iraq's military strength is now less than half its size than at the time of the last Gulf war.

Ironically, it is only because Iraq's military forces are so weak that we can even contemplate its invasion. Some advocates of conflict claim that Saddam's forces are so weak, so demoralised and so badly equipped that the war will be over in a few days.

We cannot base our military strategy on the assumption that Saddam is weak and at the same time justify pre-emptive action on the claim that he is a threat.

Iraq probably has no weapons of mass destruction in the commonly understood sense of the term – namely a credible device capable of being delivered against a strategic city target.

It probably still has biological toxins and battlefield chemical munitions, but it has had them since the 1980s when US companies sold Saddam anthrax agents and the then British Government approved chemical and munitions factories.

Why is it now so urgent that we should take military action to disarm a military capacity that has been there for 20 years, and which we helped to create?

Why is it necessary to resort to war this week, while Saddam's ambition to complete his weapons programme is blocked by the presence of UN inspectors?

Only a couple of weeks ago, Hans Blix told the Security Council that the key remaining disarmament tasks could be completed within months.

I have heard it said that Iraq has had not months but 12 years in which to complete disarmament, and that our patience is exhausted.

Yet it is more than 30 years since resolution 242 called on Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories.

We do not express the same impatience with the persistent refusal of Israel to comply.

I welcome the strong personal commitment that the prime minister has given to middle east peace, but Britain's positive role in the middle east does not redress the strong sense of injustice throughout the Muslim world at what it sees as one rule for the allies of the US and another rule for the rest.

Nor is our credibility helped by the appearance that our partners in Washington are less interested in disarmament than they are in regime change in Iraq.

That explains why any evidence that inspections may be showing progress is greeted in Washington not with satisfaction but with consternation: it reduces the case for war.

What has come to trouble me most over past weeks is the suspicion that if the hanging chads in Florida had gone the other way and Al Gore had been elected, we would not now be about to commit British troops.

The longer that I have served in this place, the greater the respect I have for the good sense and collective wisdom of the British people.

On Iraq, I believe that the prevailing mood of the British people is sound. They do not doubt that Saddam is a brutal

dictator, but they are not persuaded that he is a clear and present danger to Britain.

They want inspections to be given a chance, and they suspect that they are being pushed too quickly into conflict by a US Administration with an agenda of its own.

Above all, they are uneasy at Britain going out on a limb on a military adventure without a broader international coalition and against the hostility of many of our traditional allies.

From the start of the present crisis, I have insisted, as Leader of the House, on the right of this place to vote on whether Britain should go to war.

It has been a favourite theme of commentators that this House no longer occupies a central role in British politics.

Nothing could better demonstrate that they are wrong than for this House to stop the commitment of troops in a war that has neither international agreement nor domestic support.

I intend to join those tomorrow night who will vote against military action now. It is for that reason, and for that reason alone, and with a heavy heart, that I resign from the government.