

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., speech in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, on Thursday evening, March 14, 1968.

For such a time as this.

This sole original reel-to-reel audio tape recording, previously unknown to exist prior to auction in October 2017, is the only witness of the actual text, spoken or written, of Dr. King's long-referred to "lost speech" he gave in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, just three weeks to the day of his assassination by the rifle bullet of a white racist.

Dr. King's "lost speech" of Grosse Pointe was so-called (initially by noted MLK scholar, James Melvin Washington) for two reasons. The speech had no known audio or video recording of it. It also has no known paper trail of speech notes or draft transcription of it located in any collection of MLK papers or archives.

This total absence of documentation, audio or video or textual, for nearly half a century makes Dr. King's remarks in Grosse Pointe unique, unlike any other in his canon of speeches since becoming a national figure, especially by the last year and in the final month of his life.

Only a single second copy, of very poor audio quality, was made in 1968 from the original reel-to-reel now up for auction. The copy was donated in 1968 to the local public library in Grosse Pointe, only to disappear in 1968 from that library's collection.

The single known copy made from the original resurfaced for the first time in 2012 as an anonymous gift to the Grosse Pointe Historical Society, by whom and for reasons that can only be speculated on. The audio copy and its transcription on the GPHS website have had only limited attention and circulation, mostly regional and local.

As a result, the speech in Grosse Pointe remains unstudied and unquoted in the secondary, scholarly literature of all academic disciplines, concerning The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the civil rights movement his work epitomizes in mid-twentieth century American history.

A tunnel of silence describes the uniqueness enveloping the Grosse Pointe speech, one of the very last in Dr. King's prolific canon. Its undocumented status over a half century, since first given, is reckoned by the singularly repeated listing of "[Untitled]" in the meagre literature making note of the speech, until after 2012. The GPHS website uses Dr. King's own words for his speech title, becoming known only in 2012 and calling it, for the first time since 1968, when Dr. King presented it to his original Grosse Pointe audience, "The Other America."

The speech title identified in 2012 clears up much of the half-century mystery surrounding the apparent absence of any archive transcription or even preparatory material for the "lost speech" Dr. King gave in Grosse Pointe. We now know, fifty years later, that Dr. King was echoing, through his impressive, highly trained use of verbatim oral memory on the evening of March 14, 1968, the speech he gave the year before by

the same title, “The Other America” (1967), in California at Stanford University.

Students of all literature, from the sacred to the secular, learn that literary criticism’s first rule is “context alters text.” Dr. King, the master speechmaker who moved a nation and a world with the power and passion of his vision in words, understood that his California university audience of “The Other America” in 1967 was oppositional to his audience of wealthy Michigan industrialists, when using the same text and title a year later in 1968, just days before his violent assassination that traumatized the entire nation.

Textually, regarding near verbatim content, Dr. King gave the same major speech twice, in 1968 at Grosse Pointe and at Stanford University in 1967, the only such instance of his verbatim usage of one major address on two occasions, and in such a short frame of time. But Dr. King also understood that, contextually, he was making two radically different, oppositional speeches only months apart from each other, though using the same speech text.

The context informing the Grosse Pointe speech was Dr. King’s highly controversial, news grabbing speech only days before at Riverside Church in New York City, when he spoke openly for the first time against militarism and the Vietnam war. His powerful Michigan auditors needed to hear most about “The Other America,” but the sole questioner approaching the mic the night of March 14, 1968, challenges Dr. King not about America’s distribution of poverty and wealth but his unsparing criticism of America’s war in Vietnam, in the news just before he makes his final journey to the Detroit area, by speaking in Grosse Pointe.

The two audiences of “The Other America,” whom Dr. King addressed, were striking in their other telling differences from each other.

The Stanford audience was large and worshipful. The Stanford speaker’s podium at which Dr. King stood was festooned with nearly a dozen microphones to record his words. Another podium was positioned to the side of the main podium, with just as many working microphones attached to it. One large, unwieldy film camera of the era, requiring a small crane to hoist and control its operation and direction, was video recording the speech for posterity and is available on YouTube today, in multiple clips of varying lengths and in the full version.

Not so the Grosse Pointe speech, bearing the same title and words. Though well publicized in advance, as was the Stanford speech, and moved to a larger location than initially planned to accommodate an estimated final crowd of 2,300–2,700, the Grosse Pointe audience was overtly hostile and openly antagonistic to Dr. King.

The original reel-to-reel of the speech up for auction captures the shocking animosity heaped on Dr. King by the wealthiest audience—the families and management class of American industrialists in cars and chemicals, food and agriculture—who ever gathered in one place and time to hear him speak to *them*. Their catcalls, cruel laughter and hateful, racist words are the antithesis of the Stanford

audience response.

The unprecedented, openly racist, audio affront to Dr. King is entirely absent from the sanitized transcription of the speech placed on the GPHS website, reportedly made with difficulty from the second poor audio copy resurfacing in 2012 as an anonymous donation.

Lest there be any doubt, the Episcopal bishop, who accompanied and introduced Dr. King in Grosse Pointe the day and evening of his speech, had a letter published the next week in the local Grosse Pointe newspaper. The bishop gives a firsthand report in writing that Dr. King himself told the bishop, after the speech, that his Grosse Pointe audience response was “the worst” he had ever received.

(Presumably that means worse than Birmingham.)

The intentional deliberateness of such hostile response, planned for in advance of the speech, is made evident by the public threats of some Grosse Pointe residents to use sunsetted municipal laws to deny Dr. King liberty to walk or travel by car on local streets, unaccompanied by a white man, or face arrest. These and other circulated threats compel the Episcopal bishop to provide Dr. King safe escort from such overt racist harassment while travelling within Grosse Pointe to speak to its privileged residents.

Unlike the two banks of microphones producing several original recordings of Dr. King’s Stanford speech on “The Other America,” only one original reel-to-reel audio recording was made of Dr. King’s Grosse Pointe speech about “The Other America.” Absent any other audio record, it is the second incontrovertible evidence of intentionality to racist hate baiting of Dr. King when he came to speak by invitation.

The reel-to-reel up for auction of the sole recording of Dr. King’s speech in Grosse Pointe is a slap-dash, hurry-up, homemade audio recording on a twice used tape. It was made at the last minute by the family of The Reverend Perry Porter, who first invited Dr. King to speak at Christ Church in Grosse Pointe, soon moved to Grosse Pointe High School to accommodate larger crowds, when inviting Dr. King became a matter of organized support citywide, and Rev. Porter lost his job over it.

If the Perry Porter family had not acted, any record of Dr. King’s historic speech in Grosse Pointe—to the other America about “The Other America”—audio or textual, would have been forever lost.