



Ambassador Jeffrey L. Bleich – Citizen King

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**Remarks of Ambassador Bleich  
Inaugural Screening of the 2010 Documentary Film Series  
National Library of Australia**

*(As prepared for delivery – March 16, 2010)*

Welcome, everyone. Thank you for joining us tonight.

Thank you, Warwick, for your kind introduction. I'd like to thank the National Library, Assistant Director-General Cathro and the library staff for their partnership. It allows us to screen these important programs and to work with a prestigious Australian institution. It's also a chance for us to have a real exchange -- Australians and Americans together -- about who we are and where we come from.

Tonight the U.S. Embassy is delighted to partner again with the National Library to bring you ***Citizen King***, the first in our 2010 monthly series of documentary films.

We all know Martin Luther King, Jr. as a great man.

What is often forgotten about great men is that they are men – flesh and bone with strengths and weaknesses. Martin Luther King, Jr. did not always have perfect understanding or perfect discipline every minute of every day. Despite his wisdom, he was a young man in uncharted territory – trying to navigate the civil rights movement through a world that was on fire -- with a war in Vietnam and a war on poverty and a generational war.

In April 1963, when he was just 34-year-old, Dr. King discovered what would be his guiding principle. He described it while locked down in a Birmingham Alabama jail for his peaceful resistance. He wrote: *“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”* This motto was both his strength and his weakness. It gave meaning to everything he did, but it meant that he had to do everything. Because there was injustice everywhere. There was injustice in Vietnam. There was injustice in the plight of the working poor. The broader his fight the greater the conflict even within his own circle of advisers. These included battles of conscience and ego. These differences revealed the blind spots and uncertainties even among some of the most visionary people in the cause of civil rights. His struggle was lonely at times, and it ended in tragic senseless violence, before he saw the promised land. But this does not diminish his legacy. Just the opposite; it proves the greatness of what he did.



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Because despite being just a man; despite having the same temptations and limitations that we all have, he rose above them -- undeterred and not discouraged -- to remind us of a vision for a better society.

Like many people around the world, I remember where I was on the day Dr. King was assassinated. His life and his words have had a profound impact on me and millions of people in my generation. By his example, by his clear articulation of his dreams for a better America, he inspired all of us to believe in the best in people and believe that positive change was inevitable. He dreamed of a day when men and women would be judged by the content of their character rather than the color of their skin. It seemed like an impossible dream when he described it and yet, 42 years later, another man, an African-American man, stood on the same mall where he delivered that speech, and was sworn in as the President of the United States. We have witnessed living, breathing proof that that dream could be reality. Dr. King's actions, his sacrifices and his words continue to inspire people all around the world. He challenges us to this day with what he called "Life's most persistent and urgent question." That question is "What are you doing for others?"

Films like this documentary – honest films – allow Americans and Australians to know one another honestly and share our history and our humanity. Last year's films included studies of Muslims in America, the women's suffragette movement, the influence of the corn industry, landing a man on the moon, and the U.S. Congress. This year's films study American language with *Up North: Do You Speak American*, to American innovation with *Thomas A. Edison, The Father of Invention*, to race and war with the powerful drama of *The Tuskegee Airmen*.

These movies do what Dr. King challenged us to do. Hold a mirror up to ourselves and see who we are and who we can be.

I look forward to discussing the film with you after the screening.