I’d Rather Be Maladjusted

There are certain technical words in the vocabulary of every academic discipline which tend to become stereotypes and clichés. Psychologists have a word which is probably used more frequently than any other word in modern psychology. It is the word “maladjusted.” This word is the ringing cry of the new child psychology. Now in a sense all of us must live the well-adjusted life in order to avoid neurotic and schizophrenic personalities. But there are some things in our social system to which I am proud to be maladjusted and to which I suggest that you too ought to be maladjusted.

I never intend to adjust myself to the viciousness of mob-rule. I never intend to adjust myself to the evils of segregation and the crippling effects of discrimination. I never intend to adjust myself to the tragic inequalities of an economic system which take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few. I never intend to become adjusted to the madness of militarism and the self-defeating method of physical violence.

I call upon you to be maladjusted. The challenge to you is to be maladjusted -- as maladjusted as the prophet Amos, who in the midst of the injustices of his day, could cry out in words that echo across the centuries, “Let judgment run down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream;” as maladjusted as Lincoln, who had the vision to see that this nation could not survive half slave and half free; as maladjusted as Jefferson, who in the midst of an age amazingly adjusted to slavery could cry out, in words lifted to cosmic proportions, “All men are created equal, and are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” As maladjusted as Jesus who dared to dream a dream of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of men. The world is in desperate need of such maladjustment.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

April 25, 1957