



Dr. Martin Luther King, On War...

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke out against the injustices heaped upon people of Africa descent, the poor, and those without voices in his day. In this current atmosphere of war hysteria, it is most appropriate that we re-look at his comments about Vietnam and why he was most opposed to that war. We think his comments are just as if not more appropriate in this country's build up of its war machine against Iraq.

For Dr. King, his conscience provided no other alternative but to oppose the war. He acknowledged that trying to rationalize, identify a scapegoat, create invisible boogymen, all lead us to what he

"psychological cataracts" which has that blinded us from the truth. He was also critical of the superficial waving of patriotism—how appropriate, since 9-11, when the US flag is seen everywhere, and used to promote consumerism and a blind following to a foreign policy that has reduced us to buying duct tape and plastic to protect us from the impending crisis.

"The hottest places in Hell, are reserved for those who in a period of great moral crisis, turmoil, maintain their neutrality." -Dante

Excerpts from Dr. King's speech on "Why I am Opposed to the War in Vietnam". This speech was originally given on April 16, 1967 at Ebenezer Baptist Church, in Atlanta, GA.

...Some of us who have already begun to break the silence of the night have found that the calling to speak is often a vocation of agony. But we must speak. We must speak with all the humility that is appropriate to our limited vision, but we must speak. And we must rejoice as well, for in the all our history there has never been such a monumental dissent during a war by the American people. Polls reveal that almost 15 million Americans explicitly oppose the war in Vietnam...

...I come... to make a passionate plea to my beloved nation. This sermon is not addressed to Hanoi or the National Liberation Front. It is not addressed to China or to Russia. Nor is it an attempt to overlook the ambiguity of the total situation and the need for collective solution to the tragedy of Vietnam. Neither is it an attempt to make North Vietnam or the National Liberation Front paragons of virtue. Nor to overlook the role they must play in a successful resolution to the problem...I wish not to speak with Hanoi, the National Liberation Front, but rather to my fellow Americans. Who bears the greatest responsibility at ending a conflict that has exacted a heavy price on both continents?

I have major reasons for bringing Vietnam into the field of my moral vision.

...The obvious connection between the war in Vietnam and the struggle I and others have waged in America.... The Poverty Program was a new beginning...then the build-up for the War in Vietnam... I watched the program broken... I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in the rehabilitation of its poor...We spent 500,000 dollars to kill each enemy soldier...and only \$53 spent on the poor—much of that to the salaries of those who are not poor...

...It became clear to me that the war was doing far more than devastating the hopes of the poor at home... It was sending their sons, brothers, and husbands to fight and die in

extraordinarily higher proportion [than] that of the rest of the population. Black men... crippled by society are sent away to guarantee liberties in SE Asia which had not found in SE Mississippi or Harlem. I could not be silent... in this cruel manipulation of the poor.

...I became aware of my experiences in the ghettos in the North in the last three years...especially the summers. I have walked among the desperate and dejected and angry young men. I have told them that Molotov cocktails and rifles would not solve their problems. I have tried to offer them my deepest compassion while maintaining my convictions that social change comes most meaningfully through non-violent action. And they ask and rightly so, "...but what about Vietnam?" They ask if our own nation wasn't using is using massive violence to solve its problem to bring about the changes it wants? Their questions hit home. I knew that I could never raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos...without speaking clearly against to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today, my own government. I cannot be silent.

They have applauded me...In Montgomery...when my home was bombed... They applauded the sit-in movement... they applauded us on the freedom rides...when we accepted blows, without retaliation. They praised us in Birmingham...in Selma, Alabama. There is something strangely inconsistent about a nation and a press that will praise you when you say you are non-violent against Jim Clark, yet condemn you when you say you are non-violent towards little brown Vietnamese children. There's something wrong with that Press.

The burden of responsibility was placed upon me in 1964...when the Nobel Peace Prize was given to me. It was not just something taking place. It was a commission to work harder...for the brotherhood of man. This is a calling that takes me beyond national allegiances, but even if it was not present, I would have to live with the meaning of my commitment to the ministry of Jesus Christ.

I must be true to my conviction to be a Son of the Living God... The Father is deeply concerned for the suffering and helpless outcast children. I come to speak for them

To understand the people who have been under the curse of war for almost three consecutive decades...we must hear their broken cries...they must see America as strange liberators.

...The Vietnamese declared their own freedom in 1945. They were led by Ho Chi Minh, ...they quoted OUR Declaration of Independence in their document of freedom. President Truman said, "...They are not ready for independence." France sought out to reconquer their former colony... fighting 8 long...brutal years... You know who helped France? It was the United States of America. We met over 80 percent of the war costs... In 1954 at [the] Geneva Conference... an agreement reached because France had been defeated at Diem Bien Phu, even after the Geneva accords...our government sought to sabotage the Geneva Accords.

...The US began to support Diem—one of the most ruthless dictators of the world... People were murdered because they raised their voices against the policies of Diem...Increasing numbers of troops to hold back the insurgencies that Diem's policies had aroused. General Ky fought with the French against the Vietnamese...We supported General Ky.

We increased our troop commitment...we issued promises of peace and land reform... [The Vietnamese] watch as we poisoned their water... as bulldozers destroy the precious trees...as thousands are homeless with out food, water...as children are degraded by begging for food...as their sisters are prostituted for sex, and drugs. We have destroyed their two cherished institutions: the family and the village their land and their crops...

...If we are to get on the right side of the world revolution...we must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society. When machines, computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, militarism, and economic exploitation are incapable

of being conquered.

A true revolution of values will cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our present policies. On the one hand we are called to play the Good Samaritan. On life's roadside, that will be only the initial act. One day we must come to see that must see that the whole Jericho road must be changed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make journey on life's highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrasts of poverty and wealth with righteous indignation.

It will look across the seas and see Individual capitalists of the west, investing huge sums of money Asia, Africa South America, South America, only to take out profits with no concern for the social betterment of the country...

Oh, my friends if there is any one thing that we must see today, that these are revolutionary times. All over the globe, men are revolting against systems of exploitation and oppression. Out of the wounds of a frail world, new systems of justice and equality are being born. The shirtless and barefoot people of the land are rising up, as never before. People who sat in darkness have seen a great light.... They are saying, unconsciously, as we say in one of our freedom songs, "Aint gon' let nobody turn me 'round." It is a sad fact, that because of content complacency, a morbid fear of communism... our proneness to adjust to injustice. The Western nations that initiated so much of the revolutionary spirit of the modern world... [have inspired others with revolutionary spirit, to]... go out into a sometimes-hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty racism and militarism. With this powerful commitment, we shall boldly challenge the status quo. We shall boldly challenge unjust mores, and thereby speed up the day, when every valley has been exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The rough places shall be made plain, and the crooked places straight... the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together...

A genuine revolution of values means in the final analysis, that our loyalties must become ecumenical, rather than sectional. Every nation must now develop an overriding loyalty to mankind as a whole in order to preserve the best in their individual societies. This calls for a worldwide fellow ship that lifts neighborly concerns beyond ones tribe, or race, class or nation, because in reality it calls upon all embracing unconditional love for all men. This oft misunderstood and misinterpreted concept so readily dismissed by the Niche's of the world, as a weakened and cowardly force has now become an absolute necessity. For the survival of mankind. When I speak of love, I'm not speaking of a sentimental and weak response, I am speaking of that force which all of the great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life.

Love is somehow the key that unlocks the door, which leads to ultimate reality. This Hindu, Moslem, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist belief about ultimate reality is beautifully summed up in the first apostle of John, " Let us Love one another. For god is love."

Every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God, he that loveth not, knoweth not God. For God is love. We love one another, god dwelleth in us. His love is perfected in us. Let me say finally that I oppose the war in Viet Nam because I love America.

I speak out against this war not in anger, but with anxiety and sorrow in my heart, above all with a passionate desire to see our beloved country stand as the moral example of the world. I speak out against this war because I am disappointed with America. There can be no great disappointment where there is no great love. I am disappointed with our failure to deal positively and forthrightly with the triple evils with racism, economic exploitation and militarism. We are presently moving down a dead end road that can lead to national disaster. America has strayed to the far country of racism and militarism. A home that all too many Americans left was solidly structured idealistically. Its pillars were soundly grounded in the insights of our Judeo-Christian heritage.

All men are made in the image of God, all men are brothers, and all men are created equal. Every man is an heir to a legacy of dignity and worth. Every man has rights that are neither conferred by nor derived from the state, they are God given. Out of one blood, God made all men to dwell upon the face of the earth. What a marvelous foundation for any home. What a glorious and healthy place to inhabit. America strayed away. This unnatural excursion has brought only confusion and bewilderment, and left hearts aching with guilt, and minds distorted with irrationality. It is time for all people of conscience should call on America to come back home.

Come home, America. Omar Kayak writes, "The moving finger writes, and having writ, moves on..." I call on Washington today. I call on every man and woman of good will, all over America today. I call upon the young men of America who must make a choice today, to take a stand on this issue. Tomorrow may be too late! The book may close... Don't let anybody make you think that God chose America as his divine messianic force to be. A sort of the policeman of the world. God has a way of standing before the nations with judgment, and it seems like I can hear God saying to America, "you [America] are too arrogant. If you don't change your ways, I will rise up and break the backbone of your power and...place it in the hands of a nation that does not even know my name, be still and know, that I'm God.

And it isn't easy to stand up for truth and for justice. Sometimes it means being frustrated. When you tell the truth and take a stand, some times, it means you walk the streets, with a burdened heart. Sometimes it means loosing a job, it means being abused, and scarred. It may mean having a 7-8 year old child ask, "Daddy why do yo have to go to jail so much?" I' have... learned that being a follower of Jesus Christ, means taking up the cross. My Bible tells me that Good Friday comes before Easter. For the crown we wear there is a cross that we must bear. Let us bear it, Bear it for truth. Bear it for Justice. Bear it for Peace.

Let us go out this morning, with that determination. I have not lost faith; I'm not in despair because I know that there is a moral order. I haven't lost faith. Because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice. I can still sing "We Shall Overcome", because Carlyle was right. No lie can live forever. We shall overcome because William C. Bryant was right, truth crushed to the earth, will rise again. We shall overcome because James Russell Lowell was right. Truth forever on the scaffold, wrong forever on the throne, yet that scaffold sways the future. We shall overcome because the Bible is right, you shall reap what you sow. With this faith, we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to go out to transform the jangling discord of our world into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to speed up the day when justice will roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream. With this faith, we will be able to speed up the day when the lion and the lamb will lay down together. And every man will sit under his own pine and fig tree and none shall be afraid, because the word of the Lord has spoken.

With this faith, we will be able to speed up the day when all over the world we will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at Last, Free at Last, thank God, almighty, we're free at last." With this faith we will sing it and we're getting ready to sing it now. Men will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations will not rise up against nations; neither shall they study war any more... I don't now about you, but I ain't gon' study war, no more!