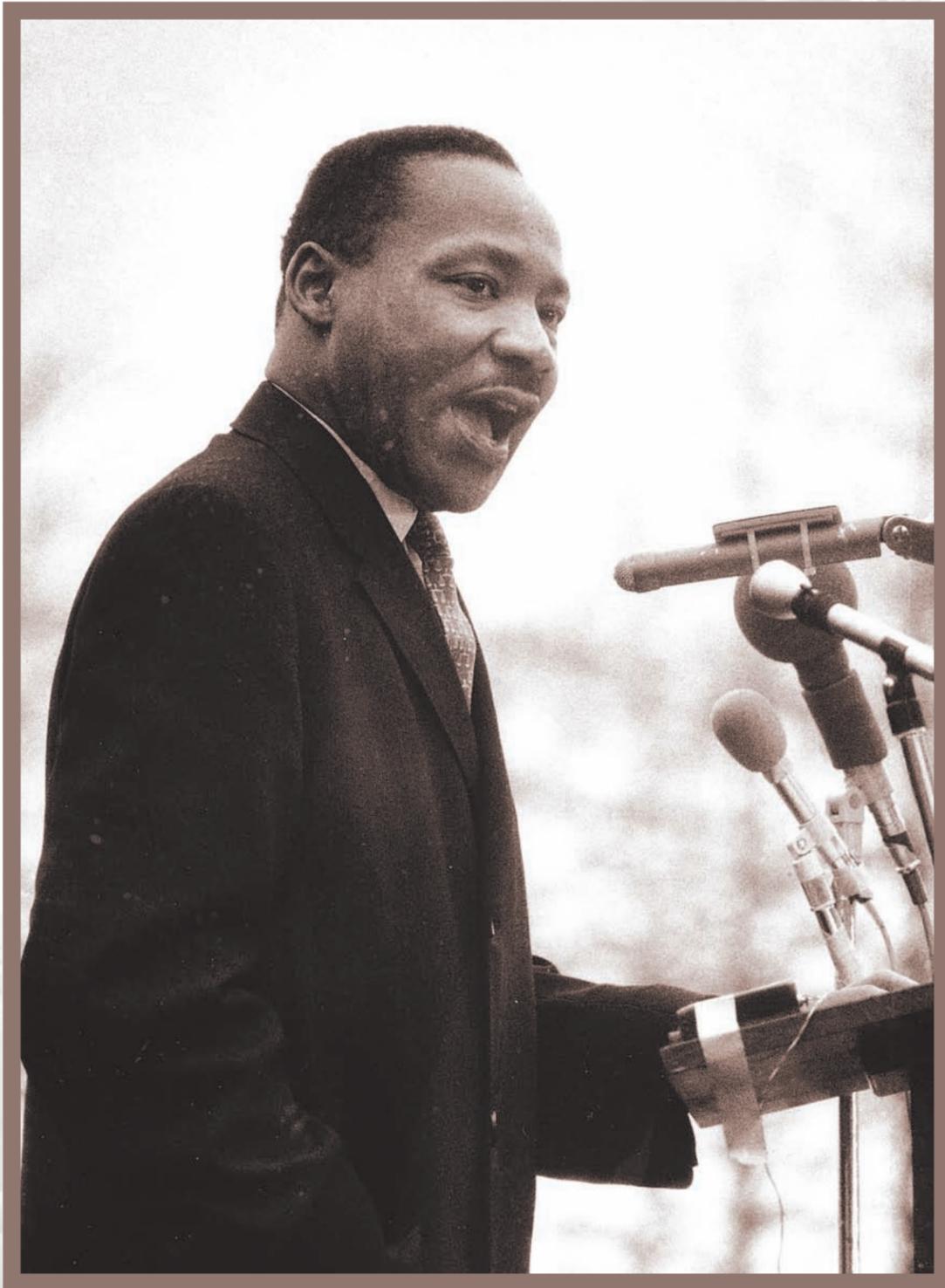


Honoring the 79th Birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

DR. KING

ON THE WAR IN VIETNAM



...We were taking the black young men who had been crippled by our society and sending them 8,000 miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in Southwest Georgia and East Harlem. So we have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools. So we watch them in brutal solidarity burning the huts of a poor village, but we realize that they would hardly live on the same block in Chicago. I could not be silent in the face of such cruel manipulation of the poor.

As I have walked among the desperate, rejected 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 conviction that social change comes most meaningfully through non-violent action. But they asked, and rightly so, "What about Vietnam?" They asked if our own nation wasn't using massive doses of violence to solve its problems, to bring about the changes it wanted. Their questions hit home, and I knew that I could never again raise my voice against the violence of the oppressed in the ghettos without having first spoken clearly to the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today: my own government. For the sake of those boys, for the sake of this government, for the sake of the hundreds of thousands trembling under our violence, I cannot be silent.

— Excerpted from the "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence" speech on April 4, 1967

A SPECIAL SECTION OF THE BAY STATE BANNER

Dr. King's march for peace

The call for nonviolence started in the Deep South and ended in Vietnam

Howard Manly

No real telling when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. began his public opposition to the Vietnam War.

For Dr. King, joining the peace movement was tantamount to walking a political tightrope. On one hand, the civil rights movement had a great supporter in President Lyndon Baines Johnson, who signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. But LBJ was also at the heart of the escalation of the war in Vietnam, and many believed Dr. King's anti-war statements could and would be used against the civil rights movement.

But Dr. King — who in 1964 received the Nobel Peace Prize — was a preacher at heart, and he saw the same moral issues in the Mekong Delta as he did in the Deep South.

By March 1965, his opposition started slowly leaking out. After



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (third from right) leads a march against the Vietnam conflict during a parade on State Street in Chicago on March 25, 1967. Joining King and the other protesters is leg-

endary pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock (tall, white-haired man with glasses), who also served as co-chairman of the National Committee for Sane Nuclear Policy. (AP photo)

delivering a speech at Howard University, Dr. King answered a few questions and told reporters that the war in Vietnam was "accomplishing nothing." Dr. King also called for a negotiated peace settlement.

A month later, just four days after LBJ signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Dr. King, head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), announced that he was launching his own peace mission. King urged leaders of all of the nations involved in the war, including LBJ and North Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh, to start serious negotiations.

Despite threats of funding cuts by SCLC donors, King still was determined to have his say on the war. During the August 1965 annual SCLC convention, Dr. King called for a halt to bombing in North Vietnam, and urged that the United Nations be empowered to mediate the conflict.

March, continued to page 3

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march

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“What is required,” he told the crowd, “is a small first step that may establish a new spirit of mutual confidence ... a step capable of breaking the cycle of mistrust, violence and war.”

Given the racial climate of the day, coupled with the mass opposition to President Johnson's Vietnam policies, Dr. King expected to be criticized.

“At times you do things to satisfy your conscience,” he told a friend in a conversation taped by the FBI at the time, “and they may be altogether unrealistic or worn tactically, but you feel better. I will get a lot of criticism and I know it can hurt the SCLC.”

But, he insisted, “I can no longer be cautious about this matter. I feel so deep in my heart that we are so wrong in this country. The time has come for real prophecy in this country and I'm willing to go that road.”

That road triggered all sorts of damnations from members of Congress and other critics — many of whom, both white and black, argued that his opposition to the war would threaten progress in the civil rights struggle. What Dr. King didn't expect was the depth of Johnson's conniving.

According to Stewart Burns' book, “To the Mountaintop,” Johnson had Dr. King briefed by United Nations Ambassador Arthur Goldberg, who told King that peace was near. Interactions with other Johnson minions were not so rosy



President Lyndon B. Johnson (right) talks with civil rights leaders in his White House office in Washington, D.C. The black leaders are (from left): Roy Wilkins, executive secretary of the NAACP; James Farmer, national director of the Congress of Racial Equality; Dr. King; and Whitney Young, executive director of the National Urban League. (AP photo)

and, in fact, left Dr. King with the distinct impression that he should know his place — and that wasn't in Vietnam.

“They told me that I wasn't an expert in foreign affairs, and they were all experts,” Dr. King told the late journalist David Halberstam in an interview that appeared in Harper's magazine in 1967. “... [They told me that] I knew only civil rights and I should stick to that.”

Dr. King would later tell friends that he didn't mind critics disagreeing with him, but that they should

at least respect his right to have an opinion.

In a September 1965 telephone call, also recorded by the FBI, Dr. King talked about being on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

“The press is being stacked against me,” he complained. “They accuse me of being power drunk and that I feel that I can do anything because I got the Nobel Peace Prize and it went to my head. I really don't have the strength to fight this issue and keep my civil rights fight going. They have all

the news media and TV and I just don't have the strength to fight all these things. The deeper you get involved, the deeper you have to go, and I'm already overloaded and almost emotionally fatigued. I think we have to admit that I am going too far.”

They dropped the protest and the war continued to escalate. Peace talks were just that — talk. The number of U.S. troops in Vietnam increased from about 17,000 in 1964 to about 130,000 in 1965. By 1966, the force was up to 317,000

“I can no longer be cautious about this matter. I feel so deep in my heart that we are so wrong in this country. The time has come for real prophecy in this country and I'm willing to go that road.”

— Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

troops. In 1967, Johnson had nearly 452,000 soldiers on the ground, and the number reached its highest point in 1968 at 537,000.

Despite those incredible numbers, the groundswell of opposition was equally as strong, as antiwar demonstrations spread across the country. According to Halberstam, some of Dr. King's brightest lieutenants were pulled away from the peace movement, a drain that underscored the war's sinister effect

March, continued on page 10

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Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following is excerpted text from Dr. King's April 4, 1967, address at Riverside Church in New York City, delivered to members of the group Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam.

I come to this magnificent house of worship tonight because my conscience leaves me no other choice. I join you in this meeting because I am in deepest agreement with the aims and work of the organization which has brought us together, Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam. The recent statements of your executive committee are the sentiments of my own heart, and I found myself in full accord when I read its opening lines: "A time comes when silence is betrayal." That time has come for us in relation to Vietnam.

The truth of these words is beyond doubt, but the mission to which they call us is a most difficult one. Even when pressed by the demands of inner truth, men do not easily assume the task of opposing their government's policy, especially in time of war. Nor does the human spirit move without great difficulty against all the apathy of conformist thought within one's own bosom and in the surrounding world. Moreover, when the issues at hand seem as perplexing as they often do

in the case of this dreadful conflict, we are always on the verge of being mesmerized by uncertainty. But we must move on.

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 surely this is the first time in our nation's history that a significant number of its religious leaders have chosen to move beyond the prophesying of smooth patriotism to the high grounds of a firm dissent based upon the mandates of conscience and the reading of history. Perhaps a new spirit is rising among us. If it is, let us trace its movement, and pray that our own inner being may be sensitive to its guidance. For we are deeply in need of a new way beyond the darkness that seems so close around us.

Over the past two years, as I have moved to break the betrayal of my own silences and to speak from the burnings of my own heart, as I have called for radical departures from the destruction of Vietnam, many persons have questioned me about the wisdom of my path. At the heart of their concerns, this query has often loomed large and loud: "Why are you speaking about the war, Dr. King? Why are you joining the



Wounded American paratroopers are helped by fellow soldiers to reach a medical evacuation helicopter on Oct. 5, 1965, during the Vietnam War. Paratroopers of the 173rd Airborne Brigade's

First Battalion suffered many casualties in the clash with Viet Cong guerrillas in the jungle of South Vietnam's "D" Zone, 25 miles northeast of Saigon. (AP photo)

voices of dissent?"

"Peace and civil rights don't mix," they say.

"Aren't you hurting the cause of your people?" they ask.

I come to this platform tonight to make a passionate plea to my beloved nation.

There is, at the outset, a very obvious and almost facile connection between the war in Vietnam and the struggle I and others have been



An infantryman from the U.S. 25th Division rushes to find cover behind some bushes as he comes under sniper fire near the village of Rach Kien, 20 miles southeast of Saigon in Vietnam's Mekong Delta, in 1967 during the Vietnam War. (AP photo)

waging in America. A few years ago, there was a shining moment in that struggle. It seemed as if there was a real promise of hope for the poor, both black and white, through the poverty program. There were experiments, hopes, new beginnings. Then came the buildup in Vietnam, and I watched this program broken and eviscerated as if it were some idle political plaything of a society gone mad on war. And I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continued to draw men and skills and money like some demonic, destructive suction tube. So I was increasingly compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor, and to attack it as such.

Now, it should be incandescently clear that no one who has any concern for the integrity and life of America today can ignore the present war. If America's soul becomes totally poisoned, part of the autopsy must read "Vietnam." It can never be saved so long as it destroys the deepest hopes of men the world over. So it is that those of us who are yet determined that

"America will be" are led down the path of protest and dissent, working for the health of our land.

And as I ponder the madness of Vietnam and search within myself for ways to understand and respond in compassion, my mind goes constantly to the people of that peninsula. I speak now not of the soldiers of each side, not of the ideologies of the Liberation Front, not of the junta in Saigon, but simply of the people who have been living under the curse of war for almost three continuous decades now. I think of them, too, because it is clear to me that there will be no meaningful solution there until some attempt is made to know them and hear their broken cries.

They must see Americans as strange liberators. The Vietnamese people proclaimed their own independence in 1954 — in 1945, rather — after a combined French and Japanese occupation and before the communist revolution in China. They were led by Ho Chi Minh. Even though they quoted the American Declaration of Independence in their own document

Silence, continued to page 5



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silence

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of freedom, we refused to recognize them. Instead, we decided to support France in its re-conquest of her former colony. Our government felt then that the Vietnamese people were not ready for independence, and we again fell victim to the deadly Western arrogance that has poisoned the international atmosphere for so long. With that tragic decision, we rejected a revolutionary government seeking self-determination and a government that had been established not by China — for whom the Vietnamese have no great love — but by clearly indigenous forces that included some communists. For the peasants this new government meant real land reform, one of the most important needs in their lives.

For nine years following 1945, we denied the people of Vietnam the right of independence. For nine years, we vigorously supported the French in their abortive effort to re-colonize Vietnam. Before the end of the war, we were meeting 80 percent of the French war costs. Even before the French were defeated at Dien Bien Phu, they began to despair of their reckless action, but we did not. We encouraged them with our huge financial and military supplies to continue the war even after they had lost the will. Soon we would be paying almost the full costs of this tragic attempt at re-colonization.

After the French were defeated, it looked as if independence and land reform would come again



A 17-year-old black civil rights demonstrator, defying a Birmingham, Ala., anti-parade ordinance, is held by a police officer and attacked by a police dog outside the Jockey Boy Restaurant on May 3, 1963. On the afternoon of May 4, 1963, during a meeting at the White House with members of a political group, President John F. Kennedy discussed this photo, which had appeared on the front page of that day's edition of *The New York Times*. (AP photo/Bill Hudson)

through the Geneva Agreement. But instead there came the United States, determined that Ho should not unify the temporarily divided nation, and the peasants watched again as we supported one of the most vicious modern dictators, our chosen man, Premier Diem. The peasants watched and cringed as Diem ruthlessly rooted out all opposition, supported their extortionist landlords and refused even to discuss re-unification with the North. The peasants watched as all

of this was presided over by United States influence and then by increasing numbers of United States troops who came to help quell the insurgency that Diem's methods had aroused. When Diem was overthrown they may have been happy, but the long line of military dictators seemed to offer no real change, especially in terms of their need for land and peace.

The only change came from America as we increased our troop commitments in support of gov-

ernments which were singularly corrupt, inept and without popular support. All the while, the people read our leaflets and received the regular promises of peace and democracy and land reform. Now they languish under our bombs and consider us, not their fellow Vietnamese, the real enemy. They move sadly and apathetically as we herd them off the land of their fathers into concentration camps where minimal social needs are rarely met. They know they must move on or

be destroyed by our bombs.

So they go, primarily women and children and the aged. They watch as we poison their water, as we kill a million acres of their crops. They must weep as the bulldozers roar through their areas, preparing to destroy the precious trees. They wander into the hospitals with at least 20 casualties from American firepower for one Vietcong-inflicted injury. So far we may have killed a million of them, mostly children. They wander into the towns and see thousands of the children, homeless, without clothes, running in packs on the streets like animals. They see the children degraded by our soldiers as they beg for food. They see the children selling their sisters to our soldiers, soliciting for their mothers.

What do the peasants think as we ally ourselves with the landlords and as we refuse to put any action into our many words concerning land reform? What do they think as we test out our latest weapons on them, just as the Germans tested out new medicine and new tortures in the concentration camps of Europe? Where are the roots of the independent Vietnam we claim to be building? Is it among these voiceless ones?

We have destroyed their two most cherished institutions: the family and the village. We have destroyed their land and their crops. We have cooperated in the crushing of the nation's only noncommunist revolutionary political force, the unified Buddhist Church. We have supported the enemies of the peasants of Saigon. We have corrupted

Silence, continued to page 6



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silence

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their women and children and killed their men.

Now there is little left to build on, save bitterness. Soon the only solid physical foundations remaining will be found at our military bases and in the concrete of the concentration camps we call "fortified hamlets." The peasants may well wonder if we plan to build our new Vietnam on such grounds as these. Could we blame them for such thoughts? We must speak for them and raise the questions they cannot raise. These, too, are our brothers.

Perhaps a more difficult, but no less necessary, task is to speak for those who have been designated as our enemies. What of the National Liberation Front, that strangely anonymous group we call "VC" or "communists"? What must they think of the United States of America when they realize that we permitted the repression and cruelty of Diem, which helped to bring them into being as a resistance group in the South? What do they think of our condoning the violence which led to their own taking up of arms? How can they believe in our integrity when now we speak of "aggression from the North" as if there were nothing more essential to the war? How can they trust us when now we charge them with violence after the murderous reign of Diem and charge them with violence while we pour every new weapon of death into their land? Surely we must understand their feelings, even if we do not condone their actions. Surely we must see that the men we supported pressed them to their violence. Surely we must see that our own computerized plans of destruction simply dwarf their



With a few salvaged belongings in the background, a Vietnamese woman carries a baby and pulls her daughter away as their home erupts in flames in July 1963. The woman and children may have been left behind so as not to slow other villagers as they made their escape into the jungle. (AP photo/Horst Faas)

greatest acts.

How do they judge us when our officials know that their membership is less than 25 percent communist, and yet insist on giving them the blanket name? What must they be thinking when they know that we are aware of their control of major sections of Vietnam, and yet we appear ready to allow national elections in which this highly organized political parallel government will not have a part? They ask how we can speak of free elections when the Saigon press is censored and controlled by the military junta.

And they are surely right to wonder what kind of new government we plan to help form without them, the only party in real touch with the peasants. They question our political goals and they deny the reality of a peace settlement from which they will be excluded. Their questions are frighteningly relevant. Is our nation planning to build on political myth again, and then shore it up upon the power of a new violence?

Here is the true meaning and value of compassion and nonviolence: when it helps us to see the enemy's point of view, to hear his

questions, to know his assessment of ourselves. For from his view, we may indeed see the basic weaknesses of our own condition and, if we are mature, we may learn and grow and profit from the wisdom of the brothers who are called the opposition.

So, too, with Hanoi. In the North, where our bombs now pummel the land and our mines endanger the waterways, we are met by a deep but understandable mistrust. To speak for them is to explain this lack of confidence in Western words, and especially their distrust of American intentions now. In Hanoi are the men who led the nation to independence against the Japanese and the French, the men who sought membership in the French Commonwealth and were betrayed by the weakness of Paris and the willfulness of the colonial armies. It was they who led a second struggle against French domination at tremendous costs, and then were persuaded to give up the land they controlled between the thirteenth and seventeenth parallel as a temporary measure at Geneva. After 1954, they watched us conspire with Diem to prevent elections which could have surely brought Ho Chi Minh to power over a united Vietnam, and they realized they had been betrayed again. When we ask why they do not leap to negotiate, these things must be remembered.

Also, it must be clear that the leaders of Hanoi considered the presence of American troops in support of the Diem regime to have been the initial military breach of the Geneva Agreement concerning foreign troops. They remind us that they did not begin to send troops in large numbers and even supplies into the South until American forces had moved into the tens of thousands.

Hanoi remembers how our leaders refused to tell us the truth about the earlier North Vietnamese overtures for peace, how the president claimed that none existed when they had clearly been made. Ho Chi Minh has watched as America has spoken of peace and built up its forces, and now he has surely heard the increasing international rumors of American plans

for an invasion of the North. He knows the bombing and shelling and mining we are doing are part of traditional pre-invasion strategy. Perhaps only his sense of humor and of irony can save him when he hears the most powerful nation of the world speaking of aggression as it drops thousands of bombs on a poor, weak nation more than 800, or rather, 8,000 miles away from its shores.

At this point I should make it clear that while I have tried in these last few minutes to give a voice to the voiceless in Vietnam and to understand the arguments of those who are called "enemy," I am as deeply concerned about our own troops there as anything else. For it occurs to me that what we are submitting them to in Vietnam is not simply the brutalizing process that goes on in any war where armies face each other and seek to destroy. We are adding cynicism to the process of death, for they must know after a short period there that none of the things we claim to be fighting for are really involved. Before long they must know that their government has sent them into a struggle among Vietnamese, and the more sophisticated surely realize that we are on the side of the wealthy and the secure, while we create a hell for the poor.

Somehow this madness must cease. We must stop now. I speak as a child of God and brother to the suffering poor of Vietnam. I speak for those whose land is being laid waste, whose homes are being destroyed, whose culture is being subverted. I speak for the poor of America who are paying the double price of smashed hopes at home, and dealt death and corruption in Vietnam. I speak as a citizen of the world, for the world as it stands aghast at the path we have taken. I speak as one who loves America, to the leaders of our own nation: The great initiative in this war is ours; the initiative to stop it must be ours.

Now, there is something seductively tempting about stopping there and sending us all off on what in some circles has become a popular crusade against the war in Vietnam. I say we must enter that struggle.

Silence, continued to page 7

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Black U.S. Marine artillerymen greet each other in passing with the clenched fist symbolizing black power at the large base at Con Thien, south of the demilitarized zone in Vietnam in December 1968 during the Vietnam War. (AP photo)



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. speaks to a crowd of 125,000 Vietnam War protesters in front of the United Nations during a peace parade in New York City on April 15, 1967. As he lead the protesters, King voiced a repeated command to "stop the bombing." (AP photo)

silence

continued from page 6

gle, but I wish to go on now to say something even more disturbing.

The war in Vietnam is but a symptom of a far deeper malady within the American spirit, and if we ignore this sobering reality [applause] ... and if we ignore this sobering reality, we will find ourselves organizing "clergy and laymen concerned" committees for the next generation. They will be concerned about Guatemala and Peru. They will be concerned about Thailand and Cambodia. They will be concerned about Mozambique and South Africa. We will be marching for these and a dozen other names and attending rallies without end unless there is a significant and profound change in American life and policy. [sustained applause]

In 1957, a sensitive American official overseas said that it seemed to him that our nation was on the wrong side of a world revolution. During the past 10 years, we have seen emerge a pattern of suppression which has now justified the presence of U.S. military advisors in Venezuela. This need to maintain social stability for our investments accounts for the counter-revolutionary action of American forces in Guatemala. It tells why American helicopters are being used against guerrillas in Cambodia and why American napalm and Green Beret forces have already been active

against rebels in Peru.

It is with such activity in mind that the words of the late John F. Kennedy come back to haunt us. Five years ago, he said, "Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable." [applause] Increasingly, by choice or by accident, this is the role our nation has taken, the role of those who make peaceful revolution impossible by refusing to give up the privileges and the pleasures that

come from the immense profits of overseas investments.

I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin [applause] ... we must rapidly begin the shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights, are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism and militarism are incapable of being conquered.

A true revolution of values will soon cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies. On the one hand, we are called to play the Good Samaritan on life's roadside, but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho Road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life's highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring. [applause]

America, the richest and most powerful nation in the world, can well lead the way in this revolution of values. There is nothing except a tragic death wish to prevent us from reordering our priorities so that the pursuit of peace will take precedence over the pursuit of war. There is nothing to keep us from

molding a recalcitrant status quo with bruised hands until we have fashioned it into a brotherhood.

This kind of positive revolution of values is our best defense against communism. [applause] War is not the answer. Communism will never be defeated by the use of atomic bombs or nuclear weapons. Let us not join those who shout war and, through their misguided passions, urge the United States to relinquish its participation in the United Nations. These are days which demand wise restraint and calm reasonableness. We must not engage in a negative anti-communism, but rather in a positive thrust for democracy [applause], realizing that our greatest defense against communism is to take offensive

action in behalf of justice. We must with positive action seek to remove those conditions of poverty, insecurity and injustice, which are the fertile soil in which the seed of communism grows and develops.

These are revolutionary times. All over the globe, men are revolting against old systems of exploitation and oppression, and out of the wounds of a frail world, new systems of justice and equality are being born. The shirtless and bare-foot people of the land are rising up as never before. The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light. We in the West must support these revolutions.

It is a sad fact that because of comfort, complacency, a morbid fear of communism and our proneness to adjust to injustice, the Western nations that initiated so much of the revolutionary spirit of the modern world have now become the arch anti-revolutionaries. This has driven many to feel that only Marxism has a revolutionary spirit. Therefore, communism is a judgment against our failure to make democracy real and follow through on the revolutions that we initiated.

Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and 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 and unjust mores, and thereby speed the day when "every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low [Audience: 'Yes']; the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain."

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.

We are now faced with the fact, my friends, that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there is such a thing as being too late. Procrastination is still the thief of time. Life often leaves us standing bare, naked and dejected with a lost opportunity. The tide in the affairs of men does not remain at flood — it ebbs. We may cry out desperately for time to pause in her passage, but time is adamant to every plea and rushes on. Over the bleached bones and jumbled residues of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words, "Too late." There is an invisible book of life that faithfully records our vigilance or our neglect.

We still have a choice today: nonviolent coexistence or violent co-annihilation. We must move past indecision to action. We must find new ways to speak for peace in Vietnam and justice throughout the developing world, a world that borders on our doors. If we do not act, we shall surely be dragged down the long, dark and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without sight.

Now let us begin. Now let us re-dedicate ourselves to the long and bitter, but beautiful, struggle for a new world.



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Martin Luther King Jr. Chronology

1929

- Born at noon on Jan. 15 to the Rev. and Mrs. Martin Luther King Sr. of 501 Auburn Avenue N.E. in Atlanta.

1944

- Graduates from Booker T. Washington High School and is admitted to Morehouse College at age 15.

1948

- Graduates from Morehouse College and enters Crozer Theological Seminary.

- Ordained to the Baptist ministry on Feb. 25 at age 19.

1951

- Enters Boston University for graduate studies.

1953

- Marries Coretta Scott and settles in Montgomery, Ala.

1955

- Receives Ph.D. in systematic theology from Boston University on June 5. Dissertation title: "A Comparison of God in the Thinking of Paul Tillich and Henry Wiseman."

- Joins the bus boycott after Rosa Parks was arrested on Dec. 1.

- On Dec. 5, he is elected president of the Montgomery Improvement Association, making him the official spokesman for the boycott.

1956

- On Nov. 13, the U.S. Supreme Court rules that bus segregation is illegal, ensuring victory for the boycott.

1957

- King forms the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to fight segregation and achieve civil rights.

- On May 17, King speaks to a crowd of 15,000 in Washington, D.C.

1958

- The U.S. Congress passes the first Civil Rights Act since reconstruction.

- King's first book, "Stride Toward Freedom," is published.

- In Harlem for a speaking engagement, King is nearly killed when stabbed by an assailant.

- Meets with President Eisenhower along with Roy Wilkins, A. Philip Randolph and Lester Grange to discuss problems affecting black



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. signed this copy of the Jan. 3, 1964, edition of Time magazine, which named him as Man of the Year. (AP photo/Gerald Herbert)

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Americans.

1959

- Visits India to study Mohandas Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence.

- Resigns from his role as pastor of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery to concentrate on civil rights full time.

- Moves to Atlanta to direct the activities of the SCLC.

1960

- Becomes co-pastor, with his father, at the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta.

- Lunch counter sit-ins begin in Greensboro, N.C.

- In Atlanta, King is arrested during a sit-in while waiting to be served at a restaurant. He is sentenced to four months in jail, but after intervention by John Kennedy and Robert Kennedy, he is released.

- The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) is founded to coordinate protests at Shaw University, Raleigh, N.C.

1961

- On a Greyhound bus, the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) begins the first "Freedom Ride" through the South after the Supreme Court outlaws segregation in interstate transportation.

- In November, the Interstate Commerce Commission bans segregation in interstate travel due to work of King and the Freedom Riders.

1962

- During the unsuccessful Albany, Ga., movement, King is arrested on July 27 and jailed.

1963

- On Good Friday, April 12, King is arrested with Ralph Abernathy by Police Commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor for demonstrating without a permit.

- The following day, the Birmingham campaign is launched. This would prove to be the turning point in the war to end segregation in the South.

- During the 11 days he spent in jail, King writes his famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail."



A brace of plow mules drawing the farm wagon bearing the mahogany casket of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. moves along the funeral procession route in Atlanta on April 9, 1968. The Rev. Jesse Jackson (top left) and Andrew Young, at the left corner of the casket, are among the host of mourners. (AP photo)

chronology

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- On May 10, the Birmingham agreement is announced; stores, restaurants and schools will be desegregated, hiring of blacks will be implemented, and charges will be dropped.

- On June 23, King leads 125,000 people on a Freedom Walk in Detroit.

- The March on Washington, held Aug. 28, is the largest civil rights demonstration in history, with nearly 250,000 people in attendance. At the march, King makes his famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

- On Nov. 22, President Kennedy is assassinated.

Peace Prize on Dec. 10. At age 35, he is the youngest person to receive the award.

1965

- On Feb. 2, King is arrested in Selma, Ala., during a voting rights demonstration.

- After President Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act into law, King turns his attention to socioeconomic problems.

1966

- On Jan. 22, King moves into a Chicago slum tenement to attract attention to the living conditions of the poor.

- In June, King and others begin the March Against Fear through the South.

- On July 10, King initiates a campaign to end discrimination in housing, employment and schools in Chicago.

1967

- In January, King writes his book, "Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?" while in Jamaica.

- On March 12, Alabama is ordered to desegregate all public schools.

- On March 25, King attacks the government's Vietnam policy in a speech at the Chicago Coliseum.

- On April 4, King delivers his "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence" address at the Riverside Church in New York City.

- One black student is killed during a May 10-11 riot on the campus of all-black Jackson State College in Jackson, Miss.

- On July 6, the Justice Department reports that more than 50 percent of all eligible black voters are registered in Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana and South Carolina.

gia, Alabama, Louisiana and South Carolina.

- Twenty-three people die and 725 are injured in riots in Newark, N.J., that last from July 12-17.

- Forty-three die and 324 are injured during the July 23-30 Detroit riots — the worst of the century.

- On July 26, black leaders King, Randolph, Wilkins and Whitney Young appeal for an end to the Detroit riots, which they say "have proved ineffective and damaging to the civil rights cause and the entire nation."

- On Oct. 30, the Supreme Court upholds the contempt-of-court convictions of King and seven other black leaders who led the 1963 marches in Birmingham. King and his aides enter jail to serve four-day sentences.

- On Nov. 27, King announces the formation by SCLC of a Poor People's Campaign, with the aim of representing the problems of both poor blacks and whites.

1968

- King announces that the Poor People's Campaign will culminate in a March on Washington, demanding a \$12 billion Economic Bill of Rights that guarantees employment to the able-bodied, incomes to those unable to work, and an end to housing discrimination.

- King marches in support of sanitation workers on strike in Memphis, Tenn.

- On March 28, King leads a

march that turns violent, the first time this has happened during one of his events

- On April 3, King delivers the "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech at Mason Temple in Memphis.

- At sunset on April 4, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is fatally shot while standing on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tenn. There are riots and disturbances in 130 American cities that culminate in 20,000 arrests.

- King's April 9 funeral is an international event.

- Within a week of King's assassination, Congress passes the federal Fair Housing Act.

1986

- On Nov. 2, a national holiday is proclaimed in King's honor.



Coretta Scott King, widow of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., embraces singer Stevie Wonder during a celebration on the steps of the U.S. Capitol Building on Nov. 3, 1986, after President Ronald Reagan signed a bill making the civil rights leader's birthday, Jan. 15, a national holiday. (AP photo/Ron Edmonds)

1964

- On Jan. 3, King appears on the cover of Time magazine as its Man of the Year.

- King attends the signing ceremony of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 at the White House on July 2.

- During the summer, King experiences his first hurtful rejection by black people when he is stoned by black Muslims in Harlem.

- King is awarded the Nobel



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TOYOTA
moving forward

march

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— “taking all the time, money, energy and resources of America away from its ghetto problems and focusing them thousands of miles away on a war the wisdom of which he doubted in the first place.”

At best, King was a reluctant war protestor, but protest he did.

Part of his rationale for opposition stemmed from a January 1967 occurrence at the airport in Atlanta, where he purchased a magazine that showed graphic photographs of Vietnamese women holding their dead babies, killed by U.S. troops and napalm bombs.

An even more poignant point was made two years earlier, when a Buddhist monk wrote King a letter in 1965 in which he tried to explain why his brother monks were setting themselves on fire to protest the war. The monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, pleaded with King to oppose the war loudly.

“The Vietnamese monk,” wrote Hanh, “by burning himself, says with all his strength and determination that he can endure the greatest sufferings to protect his people. The importance is not to take one’s life, but to burn. What he really aims at is the expression of his will and determination, not death. To express will by burning oneself, therefore, is not to commit an act of destruction, but to perform an act of construction, i.e., to suffer and die for the sake of one’s people.”

Hanh continued: “I am sure that since you have been engaged in one of the hardest struggles for equality and human rights, you are among those who understand fully, and who share with all their hearts, the indescribable suffering of the Vietnamese people.



Quang Duc, a Buddhist monk, burns himself to death on a Saigon street on June 11, 1963, to protest the alleged persecution of Buddhists by the South Vietnamese government. In a 1965 letter entreating Dr. King to voice his opposition to the

war, Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh explained that his brethren set themselves on fire in protest as an expression of their willingness “to suffer and die for the sake of one’s people.” (AP photo/Malcolm Browne)

“The world’s greatest humanists would not remain silent,” Hanh wrote. “You yourself cannot remain silent. You cannot be silent since you have already been in action and you are in action because in you, God is in action too.”

King led his first anti-war march in Chicago on March 25, 1967, and blurred the lines between injustice at home and abroad.

“The bombs in Vietnam explode at home,” he declared, “they destroy the dream and possibility for a decent America.”

By 1967, King had become the country’s most prominent opponent of the Vietnam War, and a staunch critic of overall U.S. foreign policy, which he deemed militaristic. In his “Beyond Vietnam” speech delivered at New York’s Riverside

Church on April 4, 1967 — a year to the day before he was murdered — King called the United States “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today.”

If the speech cleared Dr. King’s conscience, it rankled those of the media and other critics, who dumped all sorts of venom on him.

Time magazine called the speech “demagogic slander that sounded like a script for Radio Hanoi.” The Washington Post declared two days after the speech that King’s “sheer inventions of unsupported fantasy” caused “grave injury to those who are his natural allies.”

“Many who have listened to him with respect will never again accord him the same confidence,” the Post wrote. “He has diminished his usefulness to his cause, to his country

and to his people. And that is a great tragedy.”

Life magazine was even worse. “In linking the civil rights movement with total opposition to our position in Vietnam,” Life editorialized, “[King] comes close to betraying the cause for which he has worked so long. He goes beyond his personal right to dissent when he connects progress in civil rights here with a proposal that amounts to abject surrender in Vietnam ...”

The mainstream media drowned out the black press and even liberal black columnists were opposed to King’s outspokenness on Vietnam. In a Reader’s Digest article, black columnist Carl Rowan, the former director of the U.S. Information Agency, condemned King’s “tragic decision” to oppose the war and

“The bombs in Vietnam explode at home ... they destroy the dream and possibility for a decent America.”

— Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

blamed King’s hubris and his communist ties. The NAACP also gave King the cold shoulder.

King marched on. Two weeks after his Riverside speech, on April 15, 1967, King led 10,000 demonstrators on an antiwar march to the United Nations. He continued his opposition until his assassination on April 4, 1968.

In his final Sunday sermon, delivered at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., on March 31, 1968, King said that he was “convinced that [Vietnam] is one of the most unjust wars that has ever been fought in the history of the world.”

Whether everyone understood Dr. King’s opposition to the war at the time didn’t really matter to one of his most trusted advisers — his father, the Rev. Martin Luther King Sr.

“A lot of people don’t understand what he’s doing and don’t like it, and I tell them he has to do these things, things that aren’t popular,” Daddy King told Halberstam. “Prophets are like that, they have special roles. Martin is just a 20th-century prophet.”

“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, what are you doing for others?”

— Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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The conscience of the King

Charles J. Ogletree Jr.

There are times in life when individuals have to step outside their comfort zone to deal with issues of great significance and concern. Expressing firm opinions on moral issues, even when they generate an enormous amount of controversy and opposition, marks one of the most difficult challenges that a leader must face. Dr. King was a master at getting down to the moral foundations of problems dividing America in the 20th century — and he did so on many occasions, with great clarity of vision.

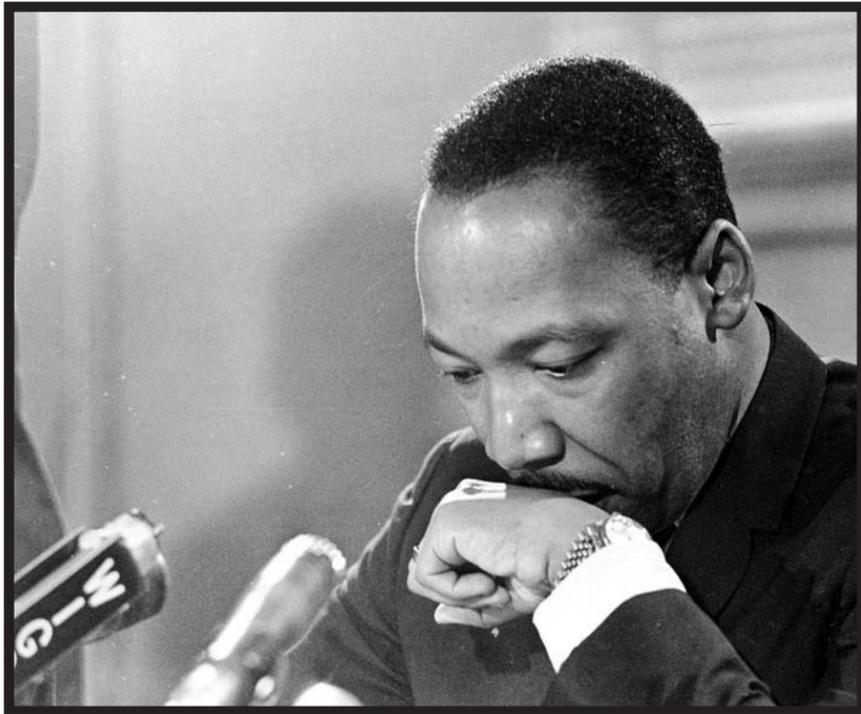
While most people describe Dr. King's Aug. 28, 1963, "I Have a Dream" speech during the March on Washington as his greatest, I think such a conclusion misses some important decisions made by Dr. King after 1963. Perhaps his most significant and least appreciated address occurred in New York City at the Riverside Church on April 4, 1967. By the time Dr. King arrived at the Riverside Church, the 1964 Civil Rights Act had been passed. The 1965 Voting Rights Act had been adopted. He had marched with workers throughout America in the North and the South fighting against racial segregation. He had won the Nobel Peace Prize for his leadership of the civil rights movement.

And yet, despite King's great successes, he was far from finished in pushing issues of moral consciousness. Indeed, when King took the podium at Riverside Church, he had a message that was deeply divisive, hopelessly controversial and in direct conflict with what many national political leaders hoped he would say. He talked about the Vietnam War in clear and unequivocal terms.

Talking about the Vietnam War was not an easy thing to do. Thousands of African Americans were drafted to participate in the war. The mounting casualties of all Americans captured enormous attention in the news. It was a colossal distraction for President Lyndon Baines Johnson, and deeply impacted his ability to seek and receive the nomination for a second term. Moreover, the war ultimately provided the pathway for Richard Nixon to be elected president in 1968.

When Dr. King gave his historic address at Riverside to a cross-section of those opposing the war, he understood that it was a difficult thing to do and that it was deeply divisive. Nevertheless, he felt compelled by conscience to do it.

His words are as powerful today as they were 40 years ago: "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



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. appears in deep thought at a press conference in Atlanta on April 25, 1967. At the conference, King announced that he would not be a candidate for the presidency of the United States and predicted that black and white students will go to jail rather than fight in the Vietnam conflict. (AP photo)

speak. And we must rejoice as well, for surely this is the first time in our nation's history that a significant number of its religious leaders have chosen to move beyond the prophesying of smooth patriotism to the high grounds of a firm dissent based upon the mandates of conscience and the reading of history. Perhaps a new spirit is rising among us."

For King, opposing the war was a way to press for nonviolent solutions to conflict in a time of militarism and violence. He viewed those we were fighting as human beings deserving of respect, not simply as enemies. He realized that the forces of peace and hope were more powerful than the forces of war and destruction. His goals were clear. He argued that we should end the bombing in South Vietnam and declare a unilateral ceasefire to create a spirit of negotiation. He insisted that we remove our troops from Vietnam in accordance with the 1954 Geneva Agreement. He advised young men who were drafted in the service to enter as conscientious objectors. He classified that as an honorable and just thing to do. He urged clergy to become conscientious objectors as well, as a way of avoiding participating in an unjust war.

King's clairvoyant voice forced us to see the war as reflective of a set of values that were neither democratic nor just. He understood the urgency to end the war in Vietnam and the wide-ranging implications for the world if it were prolonged. To make that clear, he stated: "We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there is such a thing as being too late. Procrastination is still the thief of time. Life often leaves us standing bare, naked and dejected with a lost opportunity. The 'tide in the affairs of men' does not remain at the flood; it ebbs. We may cry out desperately for time

to pause in her passage, but time is deaf to every plea and rushes on."

He went further to say: "We must move past indecision to action. We must find new ways to speak for peace in Vietnam and justice throughout the developing

world — a world that borders on our doors. If we do not act, we shall surely be dragged down the long, dark and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without sight."

Dr. King noted the hypocrisy of a country that engaged in a war to protect freedom and democracy in a foreign land while freedom and democracy eluded many of its citizens. Dr. King could not have been more eloquent or profound when he stated: "[W]e have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools. And

so we watch them in brutal solidarity burning the huts of a poor village, but we realize that they would hardly live on the same block in Chicago."

Dr. King was roundly criticized throughout the country for his remarks. Life magazine labeled his speech "a demagogic slander that sounded like a script for Radio Hanoi." Despite these criticisms, his commitment to conscious resistance to war resonated in a way that ultimately led the United States government to withdraw from Vietnam.

In 1963, Dr. King had a dream of an America that would accept all its citizens and judge them by the content of their character and not the color of their skin. In 1967, he urged us to promote peace, not war. In 2008, it is our time to heed Dr. King's dream and his plea for peace. He left us a message ahead of its time, one that continues to point the way to democracy and justice throughout the world.

Charles J. Ogletree Jr. is the Jesse Climenko Professor of Law at Harvard University and the executive director of the Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race & Justice at Harvard Law School.

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