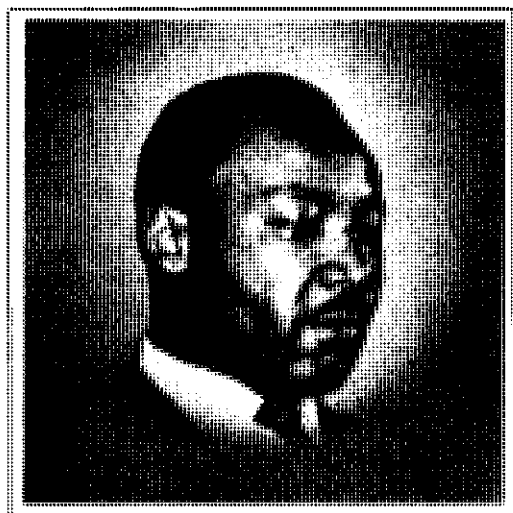


SPEECHES

by
The Rev. Dr.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, Jr.



About the

WAR IN VIETNAM

Martin Luther King was a peacemaker. For him peace was no static concept signifying the absence of conflict. Rather did he seek peace that is a wholeness constructed by justice, penetrated by love and forever pursued in hope. He could not separate peace in Harlem from peace in the Mekong Delta. Hailed as a civil rights leader, he was criticized by some for "confusing the issues" by his protest against America's bloodied course in Vietnam. But for Martin Luther King peace was indivisible.

What follow are three speeches which Dr. King gave during the past fourteen months concerning the Vietnamese war and the inter-relatedness of our present domestic crisis. As a Co-Chairman of Clergy And Laymen Concerned About Vietnam, Dr. King's first address, "Vietnam and the Struggle for Human Rights," was delivered at historic Riverside Church on Tuesday evening, April 4, 1967. The second speech, "The Domestic Impact of the War in Vietnam," was delivered at the National Labor Leadership Conference, the University of Chicago, on November 11, 1967. Dr. King delivered the final address included in this pamphlet, "Vietnam Is Upon Us," at the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., on February 6, 1968, to members of Clergy And Laymen Concerned About Vietnam.



Vietnam and The Struggle For Human Rights

April 4, 1967

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 statement 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 movements well 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 voices of dissent? Peace and civil rights don't mix, they say. Aren't you hurting the cause of your people, they ask? And when I hear them, though I often understand the sources of their concern, I am nevertheless greatly saddened, for such questions mean that the inquirers have not really known me, my **commitment** or my **calling**. Indeed, their questions suggest that they do not know the world in which they live.

In the light of such tragic misunderstanding, I deem it of signal importance to try to state clearly, and I trust concisely, why I believe that the path from Dexter Avenue Baptist Church—the church in Montgomery, Alabama where I began my pastorate—leads clearly to this sanctuary tonight.

I come to this platform tonight to make a passionate plea to my beloved nation. This speech is not addressed to Hanoi or to 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 a 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 can play in a successful resolution of the problem. While they both may have justifiable reason to be suspicious of the good faith of the United States, life and history give eloquent testimony to the fact that conflicts are never resolved without trustful give and take on both sides.

Tonight, however, I wish not to speak with Hanoi and the NLF, but rather to my fellow Americans who, with me, bear the greatest responsibility in ending a conflict that has exacted a heavy price on both continents.

Since I am a preacher by trade, I suppose it is not surprising that I have several reasons for bringing Vietnam into the field of my moral vision. 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 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 build-up in Vietnam and I watched the 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 demoni-

cal destructive suction tube. So I was increasingly compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor and to attack it as such.

Perhaps the more tragic recognition of reality took place when 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 and their brothers and their husbands to fight and to die in extraordinarily high proportions relative to the rest of the population. 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 never live on the same block in Detroit. I could not be silent in the face of such cruel manipulation of the poor.

My third reason moves to an even deeper level of awareness, for it grows out of my experience in the ghettos of the north over the last three years—especially the last three summers. 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.

For those who ask the question, "Aren't you a Civil Rights leader?" and thereby mean to exclude me from the movement for peace, I have this further answer. In 1957 when a group of us formed the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, we chose as our motto: "To save the soul of America." We were convinced that we could not limit our vision to certain rights for black people, but instead affirmed the conviction that America would never be free or saved from itself unless the descendants of its slaves were loosed completely from the shackles they still wear. In a way we were agreeing with Langston Hughes, that black bard of Harlem, who had written earlier:

O yes,
I say it plain,
America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath—
America will be!

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.

As if the weight of such a commitment to the life and health of America were not enough, another burden of responsibility was placed upon me in 1964; and I cannot forget that the Nobel Prize for Peace was also a commission—a commission to work harder than I had ever worked before for “the brotherhood of man.” This is a calling that takes me beyond national allegiances, but even if it were not present I would yet have to live with the meaning of my commitment to the ministry of Jesus Christ. To me the relationship of this ministry to the making of peace is so obvious that I sometimes marvel at those who ask me why I am speaking against the war. Could it be that they do not know that the good news was meant for all men—for communist and capitalist, for their children and ours, for black and for white, for revolutionary and conservative? Have they forgotten that my ministry is in obedience to the one who loved his enemies so fully that he died for them? What then can I say to the Vietcong or to Castro or to Mao as a faithful minister of this one? Can I threaten them with death or must I not share with them my life?

Finally, as I try to delineate for you and for myself the road that leads from Montgomery to this place I would have offered all that was most valid if I simply said that I must be true to my conviction that I share with all men the calling to be a son of the Living God. Beyond the calling of race or nation or creed is this vocation of sonship and brotherhood, and because I believe that the Father is deeply concerned especially for his suffering and helpless and outcast children, I come tonight to speak for them.

This I believe to be the privilege and the burden of all of us who deem ourselves bound by allegiances and loyalties which are broader and deeper than nationalism and which go beyond our nation's self-defined goals and positions. We are called to speak for the weak, for the voiceless, for victims of our nation and for those it calls enemy, for no document from human hands can make these humans any less our brothers.

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 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 1945 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 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 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% of the French war costs. Even before the French were defeated at Dien Bien Phu, they began to despair of the 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 recolonization.

After the French were defeated it looked as if independence and land reform would come again through the Geneva agreements. 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 routed out all opposition, supported their extortionist landlords and refused even to discuss re-unification with the North. The peasants watched as all this was presided over by the U.S. influence and then by increasing numbers of U.S. 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 mili-

tary dictatorships 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 governments which were singularly corrupt, inept and without popular support. All the while the people read our leaflets and received 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 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. 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 non-communist revolutionary political force—the Unified Buddhist Church. We have supported the enemies of the peasants of Saigon. We have corrupted their women and children and killed their men. What liberators!

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 the 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 us in 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 greatest acts.

How do they judge us when our officials know that their membership is less than 25 per cent 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 have no 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 with the power of new violence?

Here is the true meaning and value of compassion and non-violence 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 13th and 17th parallel as a temporary measure at Geneva. After 1954 they watched us conspire with Diem to prevent elections which would 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 Agreements concerning foreign troops, and they remind us that they did not begin to send in any large number of supplies or men 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 we 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 Americans plans for an invasion of the North. Perhaps only his sense of humor and irony can save him when he hears the most powerful nation of the world speaking of **his** aggression as it drops thousands of bombs on a poor weak nation more than 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 on 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 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 an American to the leaders of my own nation. The great initiative in this war is ours. The initiative to stop it must be ours.

This is the message of the great Buddhist leaders of Vietnam. Recently one of them wrote these words: "Each day the war goes on, the hatred increases in the heart of the Vietnamese and in the hearts of those of humanitarian instinct. The Americans are forcing even their friends into becoming their enemies. It is curious that the Americans who calculate so carefully on the possibilities of military victory,

do not realize that in the process they are incurring deep psychological and political defeat. The image of America will never again be the image of revolution, freedom and democracy, but the image of violence and militarism."

If we continue there will be no doubt in my mind and in the mind of the world that we have no honorable intentions in Vietnam. It will become clear that our minimal expectation is to occupy it as an American colony and men will not refrain from thinking that our maximum hope is to goad China into a war so that we may bomb her nuclear installations. If we do not stop our war against the people of Vietnam immediately the world will be left with no other alternative than to see this as some horribly clumsy and deadly game we have decided to play.

The world now demands a maturity of America that we may not be able to achieve. It demands that we admit that we have been wrong from the beginning of our adventure in Vietnam, that we have been detrimental to the life of the Vietnamese people.

In order to atone for our sins and errors in Vietnam, we should take the initiative in bringing a halt to this tragic war. I would like to suggest five concrete things that our government should do immediately to begin the long and difficult process of extricating ourselves from this nightmarish conflict:

1. End all bombing in North and South Vietnam.
2. Declare a unilateral cease-fire in the hope that such action will create the atmosphere for negotiation.
3. Take immediate steps to prevent other battlegrounds in Southeast Asia by curtailing our military build-up in Thailand and our interference in Laos.
4. Realistically accept the fact that the National Liberation Front has substantial support in South Vietnam and must thereby play a role in any meaningful negotiations and in any future Vietnam government.
5. Set a date that we will remove all foreign troops from Vietnam in accordance with the 1954 Geneva Agreement.

Part of our ongoing commitment might well express itself in an offer to grant asylum to any Vietnamese who fears for his life under a new regime which included the Liberation Front. Then we must make what reparations we can for the damage we have done. We must provide the medical aid that is badly needed, making it available in this country if necessary.

Meanwhile we in the churches and synagogues have a continuing task while we urge our government to disengage itself from a disgraceful commitment. We must continue to raise our voices if our nation persists in its perverse ways in Vietnam. We must be prepared

to match actions with words by seeking out every creative means of protest possible.

As we counsel young men concerning military service we must clarify for them our nation's role in Vietnam and challenge them with the alternative of conscientious objection. I am pleased to say that this is the path now being chosen by more than seventy students at my own Alma Mater, Morehouse College, and I recommend it to all who find the American course in Vietnam a dishonorable and unjust one. Moreover I would encourage all ministers of draft age to give up their ministerial exemptions and seek status as conscientious objectors. These are the times for real choices and not false ones. We are at the moment when our lives must be placed on the line if our nation is to survive its own folly. Every man of humane convictions must decide on the protest that best suits his convictions, but we must all protest.

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, 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 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. Such thoughts take us beyond Vietnam, but not beyond our calling as sons of the living God.

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 now has 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 Colombia 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."

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 investment.

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 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, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered.

A true revolution of value 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 is not haphazard and superficial. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs re-structuring. A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast 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 in Asia, Africa and South America, only to take the profits out with no concern for the social betterment of the countries, and say: "This is not just." It will look at our alliance with the landed gentry of Latin America and say: "This is not just." The Western arrogance of feeling that it has everything to teach others and nothing to learn from them is not just. A true revolution of values will lay hands on the world of order and say of war: "This way of settling differences is not just." This business of burning human beings with napalm, of filling our nation's homes with orphans and widows, of injecting poisonous drugs of hate into the veins of peoples normally humane, of sending men home from dark and bloody battlefields physically handicapped and psychologically deranged, cannot be reconciled with wisdom, justice, and love. A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.

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 re-ordering 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. 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 call everyone a Communist or an appeaser who advocates the seating of Red China in the United Nations and who recognizes that hate and hysteria are not the final answers to the problem of these turbulent days. We must not engage in a negative anti-Communism, but rather in a positive thrust for democracy, 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 wombs 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. "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 the 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, and 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.

This call for a world-wide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one's tribe, race, class and nation is in reality a call for an all-embracing and unconditional love for all men. This oft misunderstood and misinterpreted concept so readily dismissed by the Nietzsches of the world as a weak and cowardly force—has now become an absolute necessity for the survival of man. When I speak of love I am not speaking of some 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 epistle of Saint John:

Let us love one another; for love is God and everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

Let us hope that this spirit will become the order of the day. We can no longer afford to worship the God of Hate or bow before the altar of retaliation. The oceans of history are made turbulent by the ever-rising tides of hate. History is cluttered with the wreckage of nations and individuals that pursued this self-defeating path of hate. As Arnold Toynbee says: "Love is the ultimate force that makes for the saving choice of life and good against the damning choice of death and evil. Therefore the first hope in our inventory must be the hope that love is going to have the last word."

We are not 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. Over the bleached bones and jumbled residue 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. "The moving finger writes and having written moves on. . ." We shall have a choice today: non-violent co-existence 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. This is the calling of the sons of God, and our brothers wait eagerly for our response. Shall we say the odds are too great? Shall we tell them the struggle is too hard? Will our message be that the forces of American life militate against their arrival as full men, and we send our deepest regrets? Or will there be another message of longing, of hope, of solidarity with their yearnings, of commitment to their cause, whatever the cost? The choice is ours, and though we might prefer it otherwise we **must** choose in this crucial moment of human history.



Silent Memorial Prayer Service at Arlington Cemetery, February 6, 1968. L to R, front row: Most Rev. James P. Shannon, Roman Catholic Bishop, Minneapolis-St. Paul; Rabbi Abraham J. Heschel, Professor, Jewish Theological Seminary, N.Y., and Co-chairman of Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam; Dr. King; Rev. Ralph D. Abernathy, Dr. King's successor as President, Southern Christian Leadership Conference; Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath, President, Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

The Domestic Impact Of the War in Vietnam

November 11, 1967

What are some of the domestic consequences of the war in Vietnam? It has made the Great Society a myth and replaced it with the troubled and confused society. The war has strengthened domestic reaction. It has given the extreme right, the anti-labor, anti-Negro and anti-humanist forces a weapon of spurious patriotism to galvanize its supporters into reaching for power right up to the White House. It hopes to use national frustration to take control and restore the America of social insecurity and power for the privileged. When a Hollywood performer, lacking distinction even as an actor, can become a leading war hawk candidate for the presidency only the irrationalities induced by a war psychosis can explain such a melancholy turn of events. The war has produced a shameful order of priorities in which the decay, squalor and pollution of the cities are neglected even though seventy percent of our population now live in them. The war has smothered and nearly extinguished the beginnings of progress toward racial justice. The war has created the bizarre spectacle of armed forces of the United States fighting in ghetto streets of America while they are fighting in jungles in Asia. The war has so increased Negro frustration and despair that urban outbreaks are now an ugly feature of the American Scene. How can the administration with quivering anger denounce the violence of ghetto Negroes when it has given an example of violence in Asia that shocks the world? The users of naval guns, millions of tons of bombs, and revolting napalm cannot speak to Negroes about violence. Only those who are fighting for peace have the moral authority to lecture on non-violence. I do not want to be misunderstood, I am not equating the so-called Negro violence with the war. The acts of Negroes are infinitely less dangerous and immoral than the deliberate acts of escalation of the war. In fact, the Negroes in the ghetto, goaded and infuriated by discrimination and neglect, have for the most part deliberately avoided harming people. They have destroyed property, but

even in the grip of rage the vast majority have vented their anger on inanimate things, not people. If destruction of property is deplorable, what is the word for the use of napalm on people? What would happen to Negroes if they not only set fires but killed people in the vicinity and explained blandly that some known combatants had to die as a matter of course? Negroes would be called savages if we were so callous, but for generals it is military tactics.

The priorities of the administration and Congress are dramatically illustrated in the ease with which 70 billions are appropriated for war while 2 billion can scarcely be wrung from the unwilling hands of Congress for anti-poverty programs. In the past two months unemployment has increased approximately 15%. At this moment tens of thousands of people in anti-poverty programs are being abruptly thrown out of jobs and training programs to search in a diminishing job market for work and survival. The inflation of the war cuts the pay of the employed, the pension check of the retired, and the savings of almost everyone. Inflation has stopped creeping and has begun running. Working people feel the double impact of inflation and unemployment immediately. But Negroes feel its impact with crushing severity because they live on the margin in all respects and have no reserve to cushion shocks.

There is a great deal of debate about the nation's ability to maintain war and commit the billions required to attack poverty—the poverty of tens of millions that will not vanish even in an 800 billion dollar economy.

Theoretically, the United States has resources for both but an iron logic dictates that we shall never voluntarily do both for two reasons:

First, the majority of the present Congress and the Administration, as distinguished from the majority of the people, is singlemindedly devoted to the pursuit of the war. It has been estimated that we spend approximately \$500,000 to kill a single enemy soldier in Vietnam, and yet we spend about \$53.00 for each impoverished American in anti-poverty programs. Congress appropriates military funds with alacrity and generosity. It appropriates poverty funds with miserliness and grudging reluctance. The government is emotionally committed to the war; it is emotionally hostile to the needs of the poor.

Second, the government will resist committing adequate resources for domestic reform because these are reserves indispensable for military adventure. The logic of war requires that a nation deploy its wealth for immediate combat and simultaneously that it maintain substantial reserve. It will resist any diminishing of its military power through draining off of resources for the social good.

This is the inescapable contradiction between war and social progress at home. Military adventures must stultify domestic progress to

insure the certainty of military success. This is the reason the poor and particularly Negroes have a double stake in peace and international harmony.

This is not to say it is useless to fight for domestic reform. On the contrary as people discover in the struggle what is impeding their progress they comprehend the full and real cost of the war to them in their daily lives.

Another tragic consequence of the war domestically is its destructive effect on the young generation. There cannot be enough sympathy for those who are sent into battle. More and more it is revealed how many of our soldiers cannot understand the purpose of their sacrifice. It is harrowing under any circumstances to kill, but it is psychologically devastating to be forced to kill when one doubts that it is right.

Beyond the tragedy at the front, at home the young people are torn with confusions which tend to explain most of the extremes of their conduct. This generation has never known a severe economic crisis but it has known something far worse. It is the first generation in American History to experience four wars in twenty-five years: World War II, The Cold War, The Korean War and the War in Vietnam. It is the generation of wars and it shows the scars in widespread drug consumption, alienation, and the feverish pursuit of sensual pleasures. Yet, we cannot call this generation of the young the lost generation. We are the lost generation, because it is we who fail to give them the peaceful society they were promised as the American Heritage.

Finally, the whole nation is living in a triple-ring of isolation and alienation. The government is isolated from the majority of the people who want either withdrawal, de-escalation or honest negotiations, not what they are now given—steady intensification of the conflict. When a major city, San Francisco, in a referendum votes 37% for immediate withdrawal this is a stunning rebuke to the government. If young people between 18 and 21 could have voted they alone might have been a majority. But even more significantly, if the question had not offered only an extreme choice of immediate withdrawal, but included some of the many alternatives the government has rejected, no one could doubt that a substantial majority would have repudiated Washington's Policy. This is the position stated by the new Mayor of San Francisco. In addition to the isolation of the government from its people there is our national isolation in the world. We are without a single significant international ally. Every major nation has avoided active involvement on our side. We are more alone than we have been since the founding of the Republic. Lastly and more ironically, we are isolated from the very people whom we profess to support, the South Vietnamese. In their elections the pro-war forces received less than one-third of the vote. In the country-

side, most of the area of South Vietnam is in the hand of the Viet-cong and the army of South Vietnam has so reduced its role in the fighting it may shortly become the first pacifist army on a war front. The war that began with a few thousand Americans as advisors has become almost totally an American war without the consent of the American people. This is an historic isolation that cannot be rationalized by self-righteousness or the revival of unproved dangers of imminent aggression from China. China's incredible internal turmoil suggests it presently threatens only itself.

The war domestically has stimulated a profound discussion of the nature of our government. Important members of Congress and distinguished political scientists are questioning the trend toward excessive executive powers. Senator George McGovern has summed up these views in the following words: "Congress must never again surrender its power under our constitutional system by permitting an ill-advised undeclared war of this kind. Our involvement in South Vietnam came about through a series of moves by the executive branch—each one seemingly restrained and yet each one setting the stage for a deeper commitment. The complex of administration moves involving the State Department, the C.I.A., the Pentagon, A.I.D. and various private interests—all of these have played a greater role than has Congress. Congress cannot be proud of its function in the dreary history of this steadily widening war. That function has been one largely of acquiescence in little understood administrative efforts. The surveillance, the debate and the dissent since 1965, while courageous and admirable, came too late in the day to head off the foolish course charted by our policy-makers. For the future," the Senator concludes, "members of Congress and the Administration will do well to heed the admonition of Edmund Burke, a distinguished legislator of an earlier day: 'A conscientious man would be cautious how he dealt in blood.'"

The nature of our government is also under scrutiny by the young generation. I have spoken in recent years before hundreds of thousands of young people in their colleges, in the slums, and in churches and synagogues. Their comments and questions reflect a sharply rising body of opinion that the inability to influence government to adopt urgent reforms is not a consequence of any superficial ignorance, lethargy, or prejudice but is systemic. There is more serious discussion today about basic structural change in our society than I can recall over a decade.

We have thus far avoided a recrudescence of McCarthyism. It is constantly threatening but it has not yet been able to gain a secure foothold. It is not for lack of trying by the ubiquitous congressional committees. They are trying to bring down a blanket of intimidation, but a healthy resistance holds them in check. We must constantly

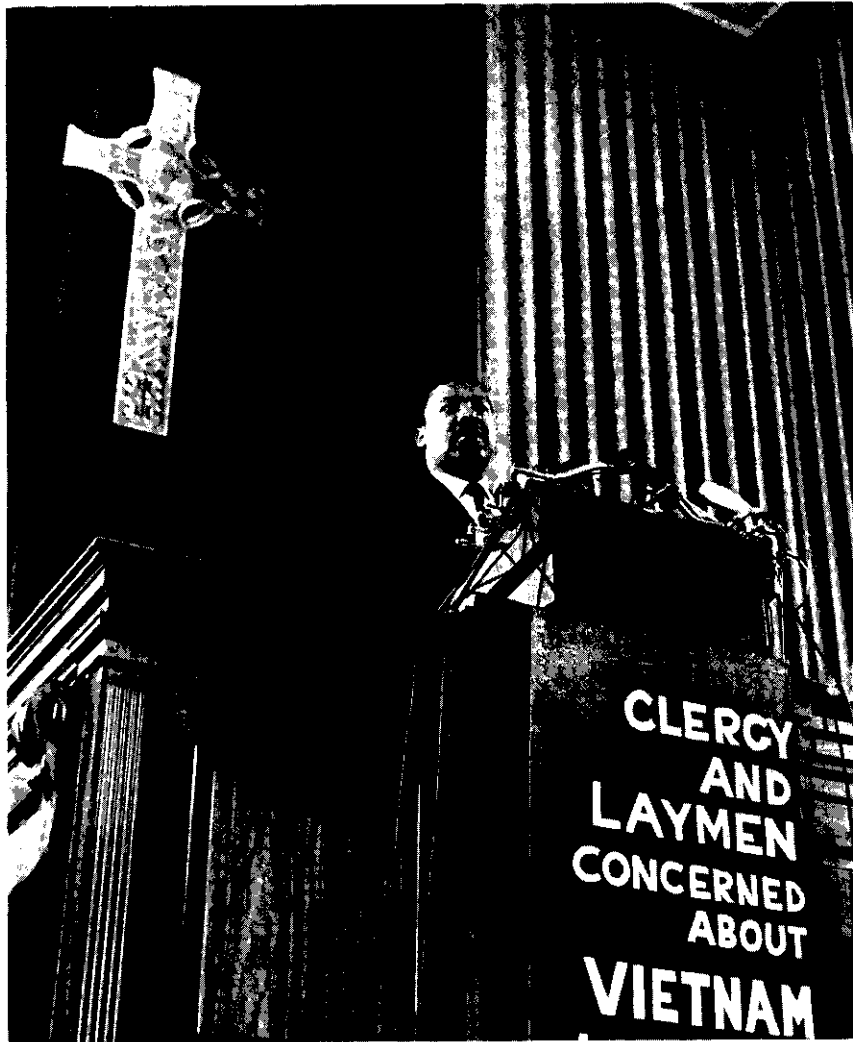
be alert to this danger because if its evil is added to all the others we will have opened the door to other national disasters.

It is worth remembering that there is a strong strain of dissent in the American tradition even in time of war.

During the Mexican War the intellectual elite of the nation, Emerson, Thoreau, and many others were withering critics of National Policy. In the Congress a relatively unknown first term Congressman made a scathing address on the floor denouncing the war. The young Congressman was Abraham Lincoln of Illinois. At the same time a young army Lieutenant almost decided to resign his commission to protest the war. His name was Ulysses Grant.

To close my remarks and to illustrate basic optimism, I would like to repeat these most appropriate words of a great labor leader, Eugene Debs, when he stood before the court to be sentenced for opposing World War I:

"I can see the dawn of a better day for humanity. The people awakening in due course of time, will come to their own. When the mariner sailing over tropic seas, looks for release from his weary watch, he turns his eye towards the Southern Cross bearing luridly above the tempest tossed ocean. As the midnight approaches, the Southern Cross begins to bend, then the whirling worlds choose their places, and with starry fingerpoints, the almighty marks the page of time upon the dial of the universe and though no bell may beat the glad tidings, the lookout knows the midnight is passing—that relief and rest are close at hand. Let the people take heart and hope everywhere for the cross is bending, the midnight is passing and joy cometh with the morning."



Vietnam Is Upon Us

February 6, 1968

Fellow clergymen and laymen concerned about the war in Vietnam, my brothers and sisters, I need not pause to say how delighted I am to be here and how delighted I am to be in the midst of this fellowship of concern. It is a magnificent experience to see so many of you taking time out of what I am sure are busy schedules and coming to Washington to make a witness. I need not remind you that these are difficult days in which we live, and in these days of emotional tension when the problems of the world are gigantic in extent and chaotic in detail, the challenge which faces us more than ever before in the church and the synagogue is to take a stand for justice and for peace. From a scientific and technological point of view there can be no gainsaying of the fact that our nation has brought the whole world to an awe-inspiring threshold of the future. We have built machines that think and instruments that peer into the unfathomable regions of interstellar space. We have built Gargantuan bridges to span the seas and gigantic buildings to kiss the sky. Through our spaceships we have penetrated oceanic depths and through our airplanes we have dwarfed distance and placed time in chains. This is really a dazzling picture of American technological and scientific progress.

But in spite of this, something basic is missing and I just want to say a few words about that this afternoon. In spite of all of our scientific and technological progress we suffer from a kind of poverty of the spirit that stands in glaring contrast to all of our material abundance. This is the dilemma facing our nation and this is the dilemma to which we as clergymen and laymen must address ourselves. Each of us lives in two realms in life—the within and the without. The within of our lives is that realm of spiritual ends expressed in our literature, morals and religion. The without of our lives is that complex of devices, techniques, mechanisms and instrumentalities by means of which we live. The problem we face today is that we have allowed the within of our lives to become absorbed in the without. Henry David Thoreau said once something that still applies. In a very arresting dictum he talked about improved means for an unimproved

end. And this is a tragedy that somewhere along the way as a nation we have allowed the means by which we live to outdistance the ends for which we live, and consequently we suffer from a spiritual and moral lag that must be redeemed if we are going to survive and maintain a moral stance.

Nothing convinces me more that we suffer this moral and spiritual lag than our participation as a nation in the war in Vietnam. Our involvement in this cruel, senseless, unjust war is a tragic expression of the spiritual lag of Americans. This is why we must be concerned about the war and its damaging effects—that we all know. We all know the war in Vietnam has strengthened the military and industrial complex of this nation. We know that the war in Vietnam has strengthened the forces of reaction in our nation. We know that the war in Vietnam has exasperated the tensions between the continents and between the races. And it does not help America nor its so-called image to be the most powerful and the richest nation in the world at war with one of the smallest and poorest nations in the world which happens to be a colored nation. And this is something that must be said over and over again, for a predominantly white nation to be at war with one of the poorest and smallest nations that happens to be a colored nation. This only leads a nation, leads America to a point of losing its own soul if something is not done. But not only that. The war in Vietnam has played havoc with our domestic destiny. We would think about the fact today that our government spends about \$500,000 to kill every Vietcong soldier while we spend at the same time about \$53 a year per person for everybody that is characterized as poverty stricken in the so-called war against poverty that is not even a good skirmish against poverty.

And we can look around and see how we find ourselves with mixed up priorities. President Johnson raised the question the other day, the other night rather, when he gave his State of the Union address. He talked about the 70,000,000 televisions in our country. He talked about all the beautiful new highways and the beautiful new cars,— about eight million a year that are flowing down these highways; he talked about our material abundance. And then he said something that needs an answer when he went on to say that yet, there is a restlessness in the land. He said that there is so much questioning. And I would like to say that there is a restlessness in the land because the land doesn't seem to have a sense of purpose, a proper sense of policy, and a proper sense of priority. This is the basis for this restlessness. The words of Jesus are still applicable, "What does it profit a generation, what does it profit a nation" to own the whole world of means, television, automobiles, electric lights, and in the end lose the soul. And the words of Jesus are still true in another sense. Man cannot live by the bread of color television alone, but by every word, the word of love, the word of justice, the word of truth, every

word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. And the problem is that all too many people in power are trying to get America to live on the wrong things.

This is why we are moving in the wrong direction. And this war is playing havoc with our domestic destiny. For all of these reasons we are fighting two wars today—one is the unjust war in Vietnam. We are not winning that war there because it is clearly an unwinnable war. And certainly we are not winning the other war we are supposed to be fighting, namely, the war against poverty. We are not winning that war because we are attempting to win a war 8,000 miles away from home, and because there are all too many people not willing to grapple with the problems of the poor. There are some wars in which the people ought to be conscientious objectors and if I had to make the decision, I would be a conscientious objector in the war in Vietnam. But there are other wars in which we cannot be conscientious objectors and all too many people are trying to be conscientious objectors in the war against poverty. Everybody ought to be involved in that.

Not only has the war played havoc with our domestic destinies, but it has played havoc with the destiny of the whole world. And somehow, somewhere, we must come to see this. I said sometime ago, and the press jumped on me about it, but I want to say it today one more time and I am very sad to say it: we live in a nation that is the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today. Any nation that spends almost \$80 billion of its annual budget for defense channeled through the Pentagon and hands out a pittance here and there for social uplift is moving toward its own spiritual doom. I say it over and over again, that something must be changed. We have played havoc with the destiny of the world and we have brought the whole world closer to a nuclear confrontation. Somewhere we must make it clear that we are concerned about the survival of the world in the days when sputniks and gemini are dashing through outer space and guided ballistic missiles are causing highways of death through the stratosphere, when no nation can ultimately win a war. It is no longer a choice between violence and non-violence. It is either non-violence or non-existence, and the alternative to disarmament, the alternative to a great suspension of nuclear tests, the alternative to strengthening the United Nations and thereby disarming the whole world will be a civilization plunged into the abyss of annihilation, and our earthly habitat will be transformed into an inferno that even the mind of Dante could not envision. We have to see that and work diligently and passionately for peace. You know that in the freedom movement we have a song that we sing based on the Negro spiritual and I hope that we will continue to sing that song and sing it in the peace movement. Somehow we have got to sing that "I ain't gonna' let nobody

turn me 'round." And we must make it clear to America and make it clear to the Government and to the courts that we as clergymen and laymen support Bill Coffin absolutely and those others who face these blunderbuss conspiracy charges and these indictments. We must make that clear to the nation.

Yes, we aren't going to let anybody or anything turn us around. And in this just cause and this just struggle for peace we are not going to let any indictments turn us around; we are not going to let this attempt to crush dissent turn us around; we are not going to let those who say they are trying to identify dissent with disloyalty, we are not going to let them turn us around. And I have come to the point of saying that we are not going to let jailhouses turn us around if it is necessary. If this war in Vietnam is not ended, we are going to be in the position of a nation having some of its finest young men in this nation in jail. A poll was taken a few weeks ago at Harvard, one of the great universities of the world, where 24% of the students polled said that they would rather go to jail or leave the country before they would serve in the war in Vietnam. Then 96% of those polled said that they opposed the administration's policy in Vietnam and this is happening all over. Young men finding this war objectionable and abominable are rising up and saying that we in good conscience cannot serve in it. And we as clergymen, we as ministers, rabbis and priests must forever stand with these young men in their moments of conscience. We were ordained to do that.

I am still convinced that the struggle for peace and the struggle for civil rights as we call it in America happen to be tied together. These two issues are tied together in many, many ways. It is a wonderful thing to work to integrate lunch counters, public accommodations and schools. But it would be rather absurd to work to get schools and lunch counters integrated and not be concerned with the survival of a world in which to integrate. And I am convinced that these two issues are tied inextricably together and I feel that the people who are working for civil rights are working for peace; I feel that the people working for peace are working for civil rights and justice.

We have a grave problem in our country—that an economic depression is alive right now. It happens to be poor people and therefore it is not called a depression. When poor people and Negroes are way down in a depressing situation economically we call it a social ill but when white people get massively unemployed, we call it a depression. The Negro is facing a depression. The statistics would reveal that the unemployment rate in the Negro community is about 8.4%. What they do not reveal is the fact that their statistics are compiled on the basis of people who go to employment offices to find a job or those who were formerly in the labor market. They do not deal with what we call the discouraged people who have given up, people

who have had so many doors closed in their faces, people who have lost all motivation, and come to feel that life is a long and desolate corridor with no exit signs. So they don't go out to look for a job and so for these people the unemployment rate in the adult black community is probably 16% or 17%. And when you get to the Negro youth the unemployment is probably between 30% and sometimes goes up as high as 40%. Now this is a depression more staggering than the depression of the thirties. Not only is the problem unemployment. There is even a greater problem, underemployment. Most of the people who are poor in this country are working every day and that is not said enough. They are working here in Washington and in all of our cities. Working in our hotels they clean up our rooms when we go to our hotels across the country for our meetings. They work in our hospitals, they work in our homes. Most of them are domestic workers. Most of them are working every day, working sometimes sixty hours a week, working full-time jobs and getting part-time incomes. These are problems that are very real.

We have developed an underclass in this nation and unless this underclass is made a working class we are going to continue to have problems. Now the bitterness is very deep as a result of these problems. We of the Southern Leadership Conference feel that we cannot stand idly by while these problems continue to grow and not take a stand against them. We feel that it is time now to take a Selma-type or Birmingham-type movement to bear on the economic problems confronting the poor people of our nation. When I say poor people I am not only talking about black people. I am aware of the fact that there are poor people on a large scale in the Puerto Rican community. I am talking about the Mexican community, the Indian community; I am talking about the Appalachian white community; I am talking about poor people's power.

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ALL ORDERS MUST BE PREPAID

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