

Tribute to Martin Luther King, Jr.

On the 75th Anniversary of His Birth

January 15, 2004



Rockland Coalition
for Peace & Justice

Martin Luther King, Jr., January 15, 1929 - April 4, 1968

Exactly one year before he met his death at the hands of an assassin in Memphis, Tennessee, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., emphatically proclaimed his opposition to the war in Vietnam – and to war in general. Here are some of the things Dr. King said in his *Time to Break the Silence* to those who filled New York's great Riverside Church on April 4, 1967...

...on the duty to speak out

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. ... 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. ... 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.

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.

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.

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.

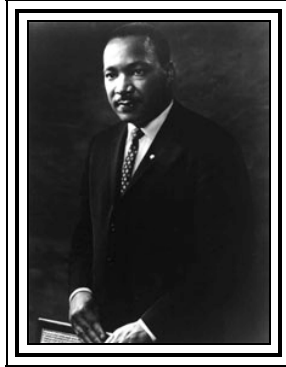
We must speak for them and raise the questions they cannot raise. These too are our brothers.

...on war and the American poor

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 eight thousand miles away... I could not be silent in the face of such cruel manipulation of the poor. ... 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 hundreds of thousands trembling under our violence, I cannot be silent.

On the eve of his assassination, **April 3, 1968**, Dr. King delivered his last public address, *I've Been to the Mountaintop*, in support of striking sanitation workers in Memphis, Tennessee. By that time, King had made some powerful enemies as a result of speaking out against the United States' war in Vietnam. FBI director J. Edgar Hoover's extensive efforts to undermine King's leadership were intensified during 1967, and King's relations with the Lyndon Johnson administration were severely strained.

Let's honor him today by recalling what he had to say then about ...



... war and peace

And another reason that I'm happy to live in this period is that we have been forced to a point where we're going to have to grapple with the problems that men have been trying to grapple with through history... Men, for years now, have been talking about war and peace. But now, no longer can they just talk about it. It is no longer a choice between violence and nonviolence in this world; it's nonviolence or nonexistence.

... the right to protest

All we say to America is, "Be true to what you said on paper." If I lived in China or even Russia, or any totalitarian country, maybe I could understand the denial of certain basic First Amendment privileges, because they hadn't committed themselves to that over there. But somewhere I read of the freedom of assembly. Somewhere I read of the freedom of speech. Somewhere I read of the freedom of the press. Somewhere I read that the greatness of America is the right to protest for right. And so just as I say, we aren't going to let any injunction turn us around. We are going on.

Let us rise up tonight with a greater readiness. Let us stand with a greater determination. And let us move on in these powerful days, these days of challenge to make America what it ought to be. We have an opportunity to make America a better nation. And I want to thank God, once more, for allowing me to be here with you.

... the courage it requires

... I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

Join **Rockland Coalition for Peace and Justice** for weekly peace vigils at Middletown Rd. & Rt. 59 in Nanuet, every **Saturday 1-3 pm**. For info: www.rocklandaction.org or call the Fellowship of Reconciliation at **358-4601**.