

**Topic: War and US Aggression**

**Title: Dr. King's Lessons Apply to the Iraq War, Too**

**Intro: Read this compelling piece by Emeritus Professor John Marciano on US aggression and the wisdom of Dr. Martin Luther King.**

**Dr. King's lessons apply to the Iraq War, too**

**By John Marciano**

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Millions have been moved by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech at the historic Aug. 28, 1963 March on Washington. But how many have heard King's "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence" remarks at New York's Riverside Church on April 4, 1967, one year before he was assassinated? His powerful insights offer us an historical perspective from which to analyze the present United States invasion and occupation of Iraq.

In his speech King addressed the promise that emerged in the 1960s as the country was moved by the courageous efforts of civil rights activists to confront the racism and poverty afflicting the nation. He talked of "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. Then came the build-up in Vietnam, and I watched the program broken and eviscerated ... (in) 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 Vietnam continued" to take funds away from this domestic struggle. "So I was increasingly compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor and to attack it as such."

King realized the Vietnam War "was doing far more than devastating the hopes of the poor at home. ... We were taking the young black 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. ... I could not be silent in the face of such cruel manipulation of the poor (and) 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."

What Dr. King concluded about U.S. aggression in Vietnam could be said of Iraq: "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.'"

In addition to addressing the horrific destruction the U.S. visited upon Vietnam, King voiced his deep concern about what the war was doing to our troops there as well — a message from the past that resonates with what Iraq war veterans are telling us: “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 our troops must know after a short period there that none of the things we claim to be fighting for are really involved.”

King took a key step in political consciousness when he asserted that the Vietnam War was merely “a symptom of a far deeper malady within the American spirit, and if we ignore this sobering reality ... (we) will be marching and attending rallies without end unless there is a significant and profound change in American life and policy.” He urged us to understand that “when machines and computers, profit and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism and militarism are incapable of being conquered.”

He challenged us “to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies” that starkly laid bare “the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth (as) capitalists of the West (invest) 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 ...” He concluded with a warning that we continue to deny at our peril: “A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.”

Our illegal and immoral invasion and occupation of Iraq is a human catastrophe that has left an estimated one million people dead and driven another four million from their homes. What better way to honor Dr. King than by confronting this heinous violence and struggling with the implications of his powerful and profound assertion: “I never intend to adjust myself to the madness of militarism.”

***John Marciano is a professor emeritus at the State University of New York at Cortland and a former chair of the Tompkins County Human Rights Commission (1991-96). He was Dr. King's co-host and driver when King visited Buffalo on Nov. 9, 1967. Marciano now lives in Santa Monica, Calif.***