

Revolution of Values: An Excerpt from Martin Luther King's Beyond Vietnam Speech

I am convinced that we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly 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 cause us to question the fairness and justice of many of our past and present policies. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.

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."

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.

It is a sad fact that because of comfort, complacency [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. 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. Every nation must now develop an overriding loyalty to mankind as a whole in order to preserve the best in their individual societies.

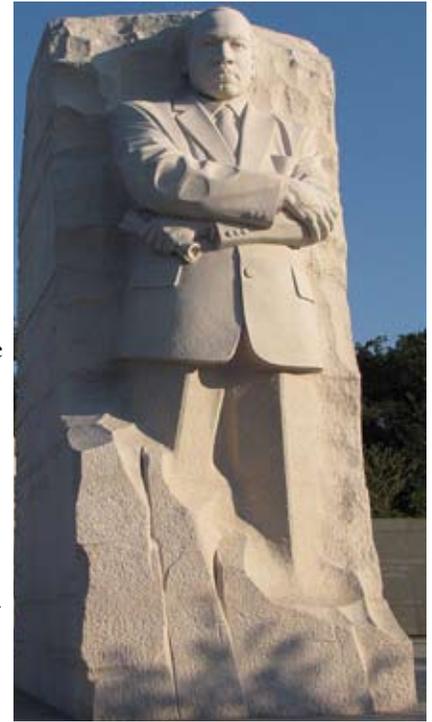
This call for a worldwide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one's tribe, race, class, and nation is in reality a call for an all-embracing, unconditional love for all mankind.

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. And history is cluttered with the wreckage of nations and individuals that pursued this self-defeating path of hate.

We still have a choice today: non-violent coexistence or violent co-annihilation. We must move past indecision to action. We must find new ways to speak for peace... and justice. 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 rededicate ourselves to the long and bitter, but beautiful, struggle for a new world. If we will make the right choice, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our world into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. If we will but make the right choice, we will be able to speed up the day, all over America and all over the world, when "justice will roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream."

This piece was excerpted from a speech by Martin Luther King entitled [Beyond Vietnam -- A Time to Break Silence](#). Delivered on April 4, 1967, at Riverside Church, New York City.



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