

THE HIDDEN DR. KING

Jack Uhrich

First of all, I want to note that, so far as I know, this is the only national holiday that our people had to march and petition for. Representative John Conyers first called for a national holiday a week after Dr. King was assassinated in April, 1968, but it took tens of thousands of people marching and petitioning throughout the seventies and into the eighties, led by Mrs. King and many others, to finally convince Congress and President Reagan to set aside Dr. King's birthday, to not only commemorate his work, but the work of the tens of thousands of people in the movement for peace and social justice that he lead up until his death.

Second, I want to quickly address some of the concerns raised since his death that he was not a perfect man. It is alleged that he had sex out of his marriage, and he apparently plagiarized parts of his doctoral thesis. There are those who would defend him by pointing out the tremendous stress he was under, the long periods he was separated from Mrs. King. And, in the case of the charge of plagiarism, some have cited the differences between European culture, where private property is sacrosanct, and African culture, where a person's individual contributions are seen as contributions to a collective community, to be used as part of that community, regardless of the individual source of the contribution. It is true that, at that time, our Black and White communities were so segregated that Dr. King grew up in a much more isolated culture than the Black community is today. In fact, having lived in Black communities around the country over the last forty years, as a White person, I can still sit with a group of Black friends who are "talking Black", and not know what they are saying, their "Black English" is so different from standard English. So, even though most of our basic values are the same, there also clearly were then, and are still today, some important cultural differences between our two races. However, not having done any research in that area, I don't feel that I really know enough to comment intelligently on all that.

But if Dr. King was imperfect, why are we surprised? Have any of our heroes throughout history been perfect? Our UU Association district here in the south is called the Jefferson District, named after one of our greatest presidents, a man who was both a slave-owner as well as the author of one of the greatest documents of freedom in human history. Shall we dismiss the message of the Declaration of Independence because its author was imperfect? I think not, and further believe that, while recognizing these major but human imperfections, our duty is recognize the tremendous positive contributions of these two men and build on that legacy that points towards creating a better world.

In a minute I will talk about the Hidden Dr. King, but let me first also say something about the Hijacked Dr. King. The Rev. James Lowry, who worked with Dr. King in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, has noted a poem that said, "Now that he is safely dead let us praise him, for dead men make such convenient heroes, they can not raise up to challenge the images we fashion for them. Besides, it is easier to build a monument than it is a Movement."

And so today we are treated to the sight of people like President Bush, no friend of the poor, embracing and kissing Mrs. King.

Or Ronald Reagan calling King his great heroes, even though he had originally planned to veto the bill establishing this holiday, only to cave in when it was clear that Congress would override his veto overwhelmingly.

And we Dr. King's youngest daughter using his legacy to attack gays and lesbians, and a woman's right to choose, conveniently forgetting her father's close relationship with Bayard Rustin, the openly gay Black activist and architect of the 1963 March on Washington; or that her father was one of the first recipients of Planned Parenthood's Margaret Sanger Award in 1966.

But I don't want to dwell on those misrepresentations. I've come here today to talk instead about the hidden Dr. King, the Dr. King that was so dangerous to the status quo that they just don't tell you about. For example, if you go to the popular teacher's website, Education World, you will find a timeline on Dr. King's life (http://www.education-world.com/a_lesson/lesson046.shtml). The only trouble is their timeline stops at 1964, when he won the Nobel Peace Prize. For more information, they direct you to another website, where some students in Oregon have composed a timeline with 35 significant dates in the life of Dr. King (<http://www.pps.k12.or.us/schools-c/pages/buckman/timeline/kingframe.html>). But that timeline also makes no mention of Dr. King's Poor Peoples' March in 1968, or his Beyond Vietnam speech in 1967, where he publicly came out against the Vietnam War. So our children are learning, not about Martin Luther King, Jr., the Prophet, but the "warm and fuzzy" Dr. King that everyone knows and loves.

In reality, at the time of his death, although almost everyone knew about Dr. King back then, he was not loved by everyone, or even by most people in this country. In reality, at the time of his death, Dr. King was a thorn in the side of America, and America was reacting in protest. After he publicly opposed the war, when he made his speech, called "Beyond Vietnam". The Johnson Administration, who had supported him in the past, cut off Dr. King. And he was vilified by, among many others - Time magazine, the NY Times, the Washington Post, and by many traditionalists in the Civil Rights movement. The NAACP attacked him. Edward Brooke, the first Black Senator since Reconstruction, attacked him.

No, the road of a prophet is not an easy road, and, if he was nothing else, Dr. King was a prophet. After he retired as Anchor for the CBS News program, newsman Dan Rather said that Dr. King's public stand against the war was the single most courageous act he had seen in all his years of reporting, because Dr. King knew he would probably be killed for taking that stand. And that is what a prophet does: he speaks the unpopular truths, no matter what the consequences.

So today I would like to share with you part of this hidden side of Dr. King, the prophecy, the legacy and the challenge he gave to us in his last years, a challenge we have yet to meet up to this day. Dr. King's speech was delivered to a gathering of anti-war group, Clergy and Laity Concerned, which Dr. King had helped to found in 1965, in New York, on April 4, 1967, exactly one year to the day before he was assassinated, on April 4, 1968.

In his Beyond Vietnam speech, Dr. King was prophetic, not just about Vietnam, but about the direction of American foreign policy over the next 37 years, right up to this day, and including our policy in Iraq. Time does not permit me to read the whole speech, where he first outlined in

detail the true history of Vietnam, a historical account that would be confirmed when the Pentagon Papers - the CIA's own account of that history - were revealed in 1971. But I would like to read to you his challenge to us about Vietnam, and about the future Vietnams to come, and about what this challenge would ultimately meant for America and the world. Though there are some differences today, I think you will also see many parallels with our present situation, not just concerning Iraq, the Middle East and the War on Terrorism, but also as regards our policies of globalization in such places as South America, Mexico and around the world, and the way people in the developing world are responding to our policies, and finally in regard to the destructive environmental consequences that our policies of globalization and war are having on our Mother Earth.

After outlining the history of the Vietnam conflict, and calling on every person of conscience to non-violently oppose the war, Dr. King continued:

[But] 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 the 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. [And didn't many of us do just that over the past 37 years?] 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 ten 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 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 is not haphazard and superficial. 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." 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 order and say of war: "This way of settling differences is not just." This business of burning human beings with napalm [or, in the case of Iraq, the depleted uranium used in our bullets and bombs, and which independent scientists feel is the cause of the tenfold increase in Iraq's cancer rate since 1991], of filling our nation's homes with orphans and widows, of injecting poisonous drugs of hate into veins of people 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 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 [or terrorism. Add the word "terrorism" wherever you see the word "communism" throughout his speech, and add "Iraq" wherever he mentions Vietnam, and see how truly prophetic his words were back then]. War is not the answer. Communism will never be defeated by the use of atomic

bombs or nuclear weapons...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, 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.

The People Are Important

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 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 worldwide 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 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. 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 writ moves on..." 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 rededicate 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.

In conclusion, I just point out some parallels to Dr. King's speech that are readily apparent today. If you go to the website <http://costofwar.com/index.html>, of the National Priorities Project, you will find a counter that constantly updates the cost of the Iraq War since the invasion of Iraq: more than \$234 Billion dollars. Now, this doesn't really tell us the whole cost of the war, the cost in lost lives and limbs and mental health, on both sides. And the war that was

started in 1991 never really ended. It is estimated that since the '91 war, more than half a million Iraqi men, women and children have died, both from the embargo we imposed, the destruction to their infrastructure from our bombing, and from the effects of depleted uranium, which many independent researchers believe is also the cause of the syndrome and the "malignant growths" that have been found in nearly 1/2 of all Gulf War veterans (see, for example, http://www.wagingpeace.org/articles/2004/08/15_bollyn_depleted-uranium-blamed-cancer.htm). Such information causes Dr. King's words about "sending men home from dark and bloody battlefields physically handicapped and psychologically deranged" echoes tragically in our minds. And a further irony is that we now know, as brutal as he was, that Saddam Hussein's government was a secular one, that allowed religious freedom, more rights for women than almost any other country in the middle east, and a higher standard of living, education and health than almost any other country, before the destruction we imposed on them in the 1991 war. And we now know further, that, as a secularist, Saddam was opposed to Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda, supposedly our main enemies in the War on Terrorism.

But what of the present dollar cost of the war since the invasion of 2003? What could our nation have done with \$234 billion had we not gone on our failed crusade to find Weapons of Mass Destruction? According to the National Priorities Project, \$234 billion would have enabled us to:

Provide Head Start programs for 31 million children, *or*

Funded 4 million additional school teachers, *or*

Provide 11 million 4 year college scholarships, *or*

Build 2 million new housing units, *or*

Provide health insurance for 140 children, *or*

End world hunger, feeding every hungry and starving person in the world for the next 7 years, *or*

Fully fund worldwide AIDS programs for the next 23 years, *or*

Provide basic immunity shots to every child in the world for the next 77 years, practically wiping out the most common diseases that kill children today.

And what of the environment? What is the impact of our policies on our Mother Earth? I am sure Dr. King would have a lot to say about that.

The reality is that the so-called "freedom" our government is trying to export, is in fact a system of free markets, in other words, capitalism. But the world cannot continue to sustain human life if every country adopts our economic system. With five percent of the world's population, our economic system and environmentally destructive lifestyle already consumes 30 % of the world's resources. China, whose economy has been growing at 8% a year, and with 1.3 billion people to our 300 million, has already equaled our *total* consumption of the world's resources, with the exception of oil. And by 2030, it is estimated, if they follow our lead, with our consumer throwaway gas-guzzling way of life, they will not only equal us in *per capita* consumption of the world's resources, but will require more oil for its country alone than is presently being produced for all the countries of the world combined! And India, with 1.1 billion, and other rapidly developing consumer-oriented economies are right behind. Our Mother Earth cannot continue to sustain human life, at least as we know it, unless that revolution of values that Dr. King called for comes, and comes quickly.

What will it take to convince, not just our leaders, but also more importantly, our people that such changes need to be made? Another Katrina? Or many Katrinas? Or the submersion of our east coast cities under water due to the global warming that the present administration denies is happening? We can only speculate. But we do know that changes must come, and, if they are to come, it is up to each and every one of us to act to make them happen.

But for now, it is time for me to end. So let me end, as Dr. King ended his speech in 1967, with the words of James Russell Lowell:

Once to every man and nation
Comes the moment to decide,
In the strife of truth and falsehood,
For the good or evil side;
Some great cause, God's new Messiah,
Off'ring each the bloom or blight,
And the choice goes by forever
Twixt that darkness and that light.

Though the cause of evil prosper,
Yet 'tis truth alone is strong;
Though her portion be the scaffold,
And upon the throne be wrong:
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
And behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow
Keeping watch above his own.