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Dr. King's Error
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Dr. King's Error

In recent speeches and statements the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. has linked his personal opposition to the war in Vietnam with the cause of Negro equality in the United States. The war, he argues, should be stopped not only because it is a futile war waged for the wrong ends but also because it is a barrier to social progress in this country and therefore prevents Negroes from achieving their just place in American life.

This is a fusing of two public problems that are distinct and separate. By drawing them together, Dr. King has done a disservice to both. The moral issues in Vietnam are less clear-cut than he suggests; the political strategy of uniting the peace movement and the civil rights movement could very well be disastrous for both causes.

Because American Negroes are a minority and have to overcome unique handicaps of racial antipathy and prolonged deprivation, they have a hard time in gaining their objectives even when their grievances are self-evident and their claims are indisputably just. As Dr. King knows from the Montgomery bus boycott and other civil rights struggles of the past dozen years, it takes almost infinite patience, persistence and courage to achieve the relatively simple aims that ought to be theirs by right.

The movement toward racial equality is now in the more advanced and more difficult stage of fulfilling basic rights by finding more jobs, changing patterns of housing and upgrading education. The battlegrounds in this struggle are Chicago and Harlem and Watts. The Negroes on these fronts need all the leadership, dedication and moral inspiration that they can summon; and under these circumstances to divert the energies of the civil rights movement to the Vietnam issue is both wasteful and self-defeating.

Dr. King makes too facile a connection between the speeding up of the war in Vietnam and the slowing down of the war against poverty. The eradication of poverty is at best the task of a generation. This "war" inevitably meets diverse resistance such as the hostility of local political machines, the skepticism of conservatives in Congress and the intractability of slum mores and habits. The nation could afford to make more funds available to combat poverty even while the war in Vietnam continues, but there is no certainly that the coming of peace would automatically lead to a sharp increase in funds.

Furthermore, Dr. King can only antagonize opinion in this country instead of winning recruits to the peace movement by recklessly comparing American military methods to those of the Nazis testing "new medicine and new tortures in the concentration camps of Europe." The facts are harsh, but they do not justify such slander. Furthermore, it is possible to disagree with many aspects of United States policy in Vietnam without whitewashing Hanoi.

As an individual, Dr. King has the right and even the moral obligation to explore the ethical implications of the war in Vietnam, but as one of the most respected leaders of the civil rights movement he has an equally weighty obligation to direct that movement's efforts in the most constructive and relevant way.

There are no simple or easy answers to the war in Vietnam or to racial injustice in this country. Linking these hard, complex problems will lead not to solutions but to deeper confusion.

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Transcription

"Dr. King's Error," *New York Times*, April 7, 1967, 36.

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Transcriptions

"Letters to the Editor of *The Times*," *New York Times*, April 12, 1967, 46.

Dr. King Backed

To the Editor:

The New York Times has rendered a great disservice to the peace and civil rights movements in this country by making a futile attempt to dissociate the two.

In an April 7 editorial *The Times* severely criticized the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, for "fusing" the peace and civil rights issues into a single concern.

Logically, the welfare of non-white peoples in this nation is inextricably linked with the welfare of nonwhite peoples around the world. American Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Indians and Mexicans all have an exceedingly direct stake in the Administration's posture in Vietnam. They have experienced first hand the Government's disrespect for humanity and dignity at home and are compelled to voice their outrage at the calculated destruction abroad of their Vietnamese brothers.

The American Government seems, in fact, to be embarked upon a program of systematic genocide in Vietnam and it is for this reason, perhaps more than any other, that colored peoples everywhere must speak out and act courageously.

Those Americans opposing the war cannot any longer be guilty of silence while American nonwhites who have been deprived of their full citizenship are sent to their death in President Johnson's illegal, immoral and unjust war.

In order to dramatize the growing opposition to the war, thousands of Americans of all races, creeds, religions and national origins will gather together in San Francisco and in New York City on April 15 for Spring Mobilization protest march and rally.

Before the eyes of the world the Spring Mobilization will launch a sustained, serious movement which will begin to put an end to the senseless slaughter that is taking place in the name of democracy.

[Rev.] JAMES BEVELL
National Director
Spring Mobilization Committee
To End the War in Vietnam
New York, April 8, 1967

War Stand Rejected

To the Editor:

I consider that my support of the Urban League and membership in the N.A.A.C.P., to say nothing of my contributions to various liberal causes, entitle me to consider myself a white person of goodwill as that term was used by Dr. Martin Luther King in *The Times* of April 5.

Far from being willing personally to boycott the Vietnam war, however, or even to have my son claim status as a conscientious objector, I assert that it is necessary to support the war in Vietnam.

Dr. King's simplistic assertion that our Government is the "greatest purveyor of violence in the world today" and his analogy between the use of new weapons by our forces in Vietnam and the use of strange medicines and torture by Hitler's murderers in the concentration camps of Nazi Germany raise grave doubts in my mind as to his ability to think clearly.

Dr. King and his ilk do not speak for me and mine.

JOSEPH LEWIS SIMON
New York, April 5, 1967