



BEYOND VIETNAM

Political Education Session

**THE WAR ECONOMY
+ MILITARISM**

ARE IMMORAL



Introduction

This speech was given on April 4, 1967 - Exactly one year before Rev. Dr. King's assassination. It was MLK's major public announcement of his opposition to the Vietnam War. After the speech, Rev. Dr. King lost many friends and "allies" who thought that the Civil Rights movement didn't have anything to do with the war. Rev. Dr. King saw the two as deeply connected: Both showed how wrong the nation's priorities and values were, and the need for a "revolution of values" to set them right.

Key questions to consider as we study “Beyond Vietnam”


1. Why did Rev. Dr. King choose to speak out against the war in Vietnam?
 2. Why, for King, did the poor have to be at the forefront of a movement to end the triple evils of racism, poverty, and militarism?
 3. What is the role of nonviolence in the context of building a revolutionary movement committed to international solidarity?
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Primary Resources


 [Beyond Vietnam Speech](#), Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



Secondary Resources

 [Episode 10](#) “The Promised Land” from Eyes on the Prize II

 [“When Silence is Not an Option”](#) Rev. Dr. William J. Barber, II

 Branch, Taylor. *At Canaan’s Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-1968*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2006. (Chapter 34 focuses on the Riverside Speech)

 Thich Nhat Hanh Foundation - [“Humbly We Move Forward: Reflections for Black History Month”](#)

 [Fifty Years since “Beyond Vietnam”](#) by Colleen Wessel-McCoy

Cultural Resources

“Stop the War on the Poor”, song, Charon Hribar

Will the Circle Be Unbroken*



[“Soldier’s Heart”](#), music album, Jacob George



[Remembering Jacob George](#), a reflection on the life of Jacob George by Charon Hribar



[“Rebel”](#), voice recording, Peace Poets



[“The Silence of the Night”](#) - A Poem for MLK, Carla Christopher

Sample Agenda for Political Education Session

"BEYOND VIETNAM" QUOTE which inspired the song - “Stop the War on the Poor”

“A few years ago there was 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. There were experiments, hopes, new beginnings. Then came the buildup in Vietnam, and I watched this program broken and eviscerated, as if it were some idle political plaything of 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 adventures like Vietnam continued to draw men and skills and money like some demonic destructive suction tube. So, I was increasingly compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor and to attack it as such.”

OPENING SONG - “Stop the War on the Poor”

INTRODUCTION TO BEYOND VIETNAM

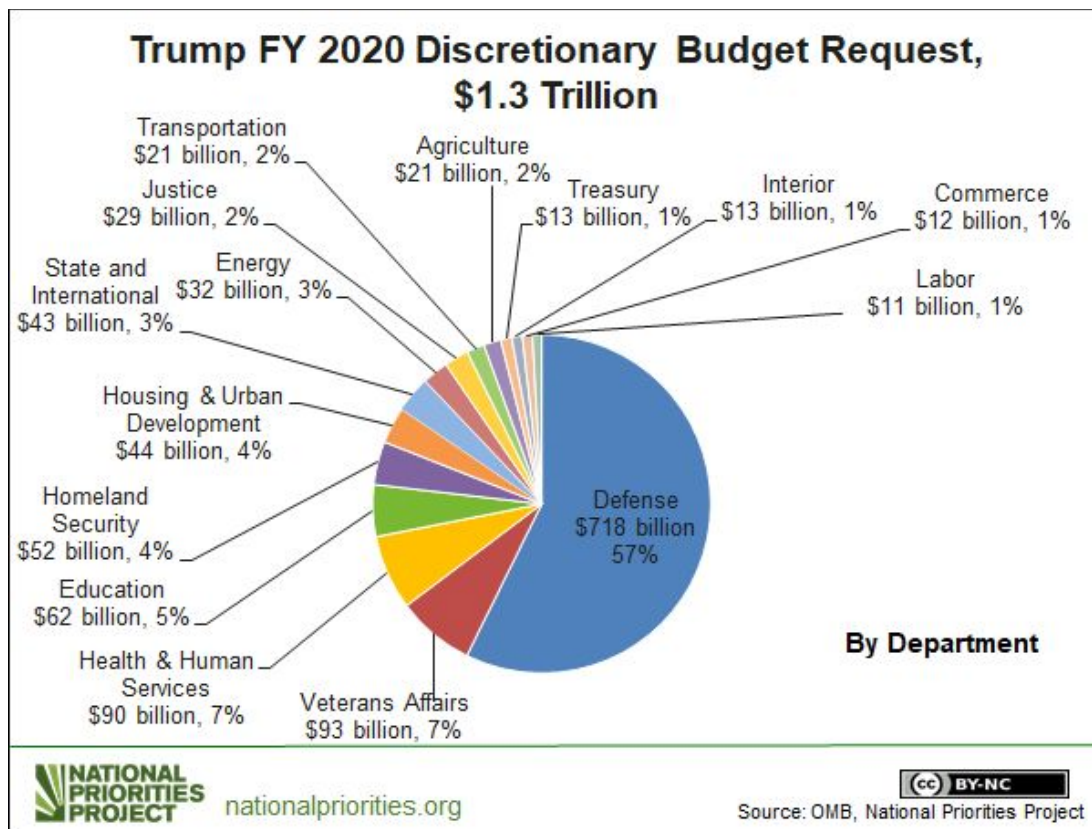
This speech was given on April 4, 1967 - Exactly one year before Rev. Dr. King's assassination. It was MLK's major public announcement of his opposition to the Vietnam War. After the speech, Rev. Dr. King lost many friends and "allies" who thought that the Civil Rights movement didn't have anything to do with the war. Rev. Dr. King saw the two as deeply connected: Both showed how wrong the nation's priorities and values were, and the need for a "revolution of values" to set them right.

 Watch Video Clip - [Episode 10](#), "The Promised Land" from *Eyes on the Prize II*. (Up to 9:45).

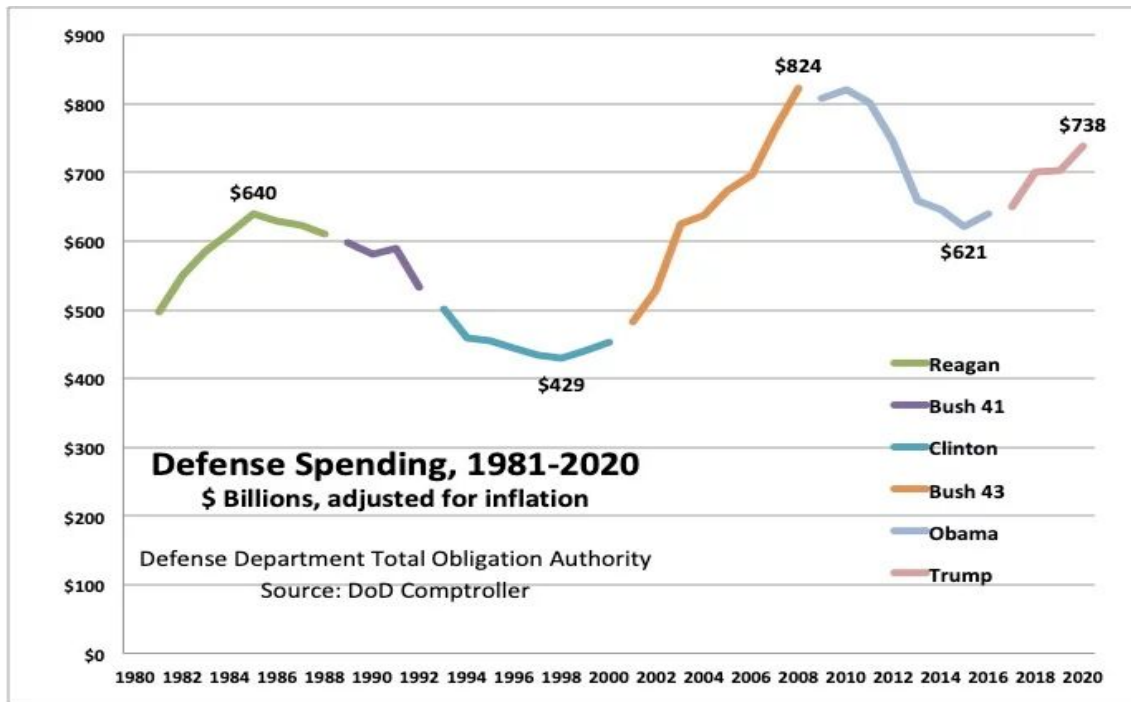
WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Why examine King's "Beyond Vietnam" speech today?

King said, "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death." Today, we spend 53 cents of every fed discretionary dollar on the military and 15 cents on poverty.



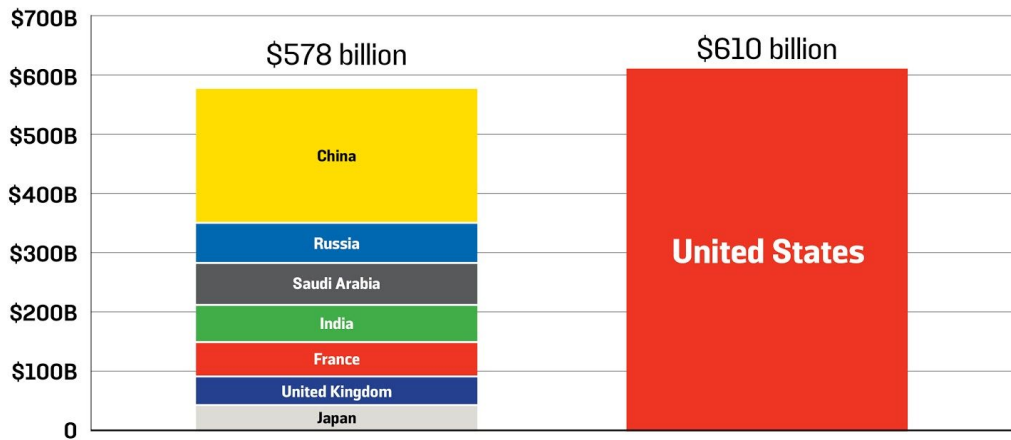
Military spending has continued to climb since the Vietnam War.



The U.S. spends more money on military defense than the next seven countries combined.

Take 2: Defense Spending Is Too High

The United States spends more than the next seven countries combined.



SOURCE: STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE, SIPRI MILITARY EXPENDITURE DATABASE, MAY 2018. DATA FROM 2017. COMPILED BY PETER G. PETERSON FOUNDATION. (FIGURES CONVERTED TO U.S. DOLLARS)

Link to National Priorities Fact Sheet for the Militarism Gathering (Shailly was sending this)

GROUP DISCUSSION / BREAK OUT GROUPS

Have participants engage questions. Included below the questions are ideas and quotes to help guide the discussion.

Why did Rev. Dr. King choose to speak out against the war in Vietnam?

For 7 reasons:

1. Vietnam spending eviscerated of the Poverty Program
2. We were sending young Black men 8,000 miles away to die for freedoms they don't have at home.
3. Violence of the US government - How can we criticize violence abroad when our own government is the world's greatest purveyor of violence.
4. Racism, militarism, and poverty are linked in time to Jim Crow and slavery. The Revolution of Values is linked to ending slavery.
5. King won the Nobel Peace Prize, which makes him feel like he should work even harder and raise his voice louder.
6. King has a commitment to Jesus Christ and his teachings.
7. God requires a vocation of sonship and brotherhood. We are called to speak for the weak, the voiceless, the victims, and the enemy. They are human beings like us.

Why, for King, did the poor have to be at the forefront of a movement to end the triple evils of racism, poverty, and militarism?

War as the cruel manipulation of the poor:

“And so we have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools. And so we watch them in brutal solidarity burning the huts of a poor village, but we realize that they would hardly live on the same block in Chicago. I could not be silent in the face of such cruel manipulation of the poor.”

Whose interests are pushed forward by the war? The interests of the rich, at the expense of the poor.

“We are adding cynicism to the process of death, for they must know after a short period there that none of the things we claim to be fighting for are really involved. Before long they must know that their government has sent them into a struggle among Vietnamese, and the more sophisticated surely realize that we are on the side of the wealthy, and the secure, while we create a hell for the poor.”

What values does this war, and others, reveal?

“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 investments. 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...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, extreme materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered.”

This is not only a question of greed, but systemic, structural violence - violence of war, violence of systemic racism, violence of poverty.

“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 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 South 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 hand on the world order and say of war, “This way of settling differences is not just.” This business of burning human beings with napalm, of filling our nation’s homes with orphans and widows, of injecting poisonous drugs of hate into the veins of peoples 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.”

What is the role of nonviolence in the context of building a revolutionary movement committed to international solidarity?

Begin by asking participants what nonviolence means to them? Then review and discuss the following quotes:

“Somehow this madness must cease. We must stop now. I speak as a child of God and brother to the suffering poor of Vietnam. I speak for those whose land is being laid waste, whose homes are being destroyed, whose culture is being subverted. I speak of the — for the poor of America who are paying the double price of smashed hopes at home, and death and corruption in Vietnam. I speak as a citizen of the world, for the world as it stands aghast at the path we have taken. I speak as one who loves America, to the leaders of our own nation: The great initiative in this war is ours; the initiative to stop it must be ours.

This is the message of the great Buddhist leaders of Vietnam. Recently one of them wrote these words, and I quote:

“Each day the war goes on the hatred increases in the heart of the Vietnamese and in the hearts of those of humanitarian instinct. The Americans are forcing even their friends into becoming their enemies. It is curious that the Americans, who calculate so carefully on the possibilities of military victory, do not realize that in the process they are incurring deep psychological and political defeat. The image of America will never again be the image of revolution, freedom, and democracy, but the image of violence and militarism (unquote).”

“These are revolutionary times. 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 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.”

“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 — embracing and unconditional love for all mankind.”

WRAP UP QUESTIONS

- 1. Do we still need a “radical revolution of values” today? What does that mean to you? What are the values that should be at the center of our society?***
- 2. What will it take to make the shift from a society that values “machines and computers, profit motives and property rights” to one that values people?***

CLOSING SONG/POEM (chose from culture resources)

*Will the Circle Be Unbroken (Alternative Lyrics by Charon Hribar)

As we work to, build this movement,
There's a sound you can't control
It's a cry for love and justice
That when you hear it, makes you whole

Chorus

Will the circle be unbroken
By and by, oh, by and by
There's a better way a-waiting
If we try, lord, if we try

If we listen for the Spirit
From this past to pave our way
We'll be guided by a vision
And we won't be led astray

Chorus

In these times, when we're hurting
Give us strength to know you're near
Help us speak the truth to power
And denounce use of fear

Chorus

Now we sing the songs of freedom
Hymns of faith that make us strong
They're the one's our mothers taught us
Hear the angels sing along