

Paying Attention to the Real Voice of Martin Luther King

“Now that He Is Safely Dead”

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Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#)

“Now That He Is Safely Dead”

By Carl Wendell Hines

*Now that he is safely dead let us praise him,
build monuments to his glory,
sing hosannas to his name.*

*Dead men make such convenient heroes.
They cannot rise to challenge the images
we would fashion from their lives.*

*And besides,
it is easier to build monuments
than to make a better world.*

“Now That He Is Safely Dead” is the short but poignant poem that was written by black poet/musician Carl Wendell Hines soon after Malcolm X’s assassination in 1965. The poem has also been appropriately associated with the death of Dr Martin Luther King and his legacy of nonviolent struggle for black liberation, freedom, equality, economic justice and the pursuit of happiness for all.

Instead of adhering to Dr King’s powerful, albeit inconvenient, truths about gospel nonviolence, America – and it-’s Christian churches have instead posthumously awarded him a national holiday with a tip of the hat to the still-unachieved civil rights efforts. As has been usual for northern Minnesota, the celebration again occurred on one of the coldest weekends of the year. And, as has also been usual, officialdom – both secular and sectarian – again “honors” Dr King’s legacy by giving their annual speeches, attends the marches and eats the free breakfasts, but ignores the message of gospel nonviolence. (Take to heart some of King’s quotes below.)

Most peace and justice-seekers who have read the Hines poem above, know that that short poem applies equally well to the legacy of other great champions of the down-trodden, including Gulf War I opponent (who was also calling for an independent investigation of 9/11/01), US Senator from Minnesota Paul Wellstone who was permanently silenced under very suspicious circumstances – and is also now “safely dead”.

No one with an open mind knows that both deaths have all the earmarks of political

assassinations.

In addition to the strange deaths of Dr King and Wellstone, there are also many other examples of martyred voices who spoke out against senseless, orchestrated wars and other examples of organized mass killings. Two such progressive leaders whose voices have been silenced or co-opted after their assassinations included John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Robert Kennedy.

Of course, the template for radical peace-making and inconvenient truth-telling was set 2000 years ago by Jesus of Nazareth, whose clear message and example of how to live a life of non-violent love of friend and enemy was totally changed by those in positions of power who gradually usurped his message after the assassination.

Martin Luther King, Jr was just one of the most recent of many other examples of pacifist followers of Jesus has been followed by many other non-violent Christian martyrs who were simply following his radical peace and justice teachings and practicing active, nonviolent, resistance to evil in the struggle for the relief of the human suffering by caring for the “least of these”. Those radical religious teachings only thrived for a couple of centuries after Jesus’ death, and today, there are only a few remaining remnants of the original form of Christianity, mainly the historic peace churches.

So over time there was a rapid reversal of the teachings of the early church, which had been nicely summarized in the Sermon on the Mount (a passage that only gets read from average pulpits every few years. Jesus’ radical peace message was gradually silenced by the doctrines of St. Augustine and many other war-compatible “Church Fathers”, most of whom had themselves been easily co-opted by the Roman Emperor Constantine the Great, who was a worshipper of the sun. And so orthodox Christianity became another justified war church, just like all the other Great Religions, thus allowing latter-day Christians to treat fellow Christians and non-Christians in decidedly un-Christ-like ways – including torturing and killing them on the battleground while simultaneously worshipping and adoring the nonviolent Jesus.

Dr King was one of the few who heard the original voice of Jesus and acted upon what he heard.

Sadly, King was silenced just as Jesus and Oscar Romero and Mohandas Gandhi were silenced. None of those three died of accidental deaths. They were assassinated.

The powers-that-be (including money-lenders, the obscenely wealthy, the investor class, multi-national corporations that ruthlessly exploit the earth’s resources, the war-mongers, etc) that think they have something to lose when some whistle-blower acquires a following (or a pulpit) know trouble when they see it, and they usually don’t waste much time developing and then implementing a plan for “the silencing”.

“All (unwelcome) truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self-evident.”–
Arthur Schopenhauer

That famous saying usually doesn’t hold true in these troubled times. Usually whistle-blowers such as Jesus, Gandhi, King, Oscar Romero and Wellstone are indeed first ignored, then they are indeed threatened and violently opposed and then they are killed. But the

third part of Schopenhauer's quote usually doesn't hold when there exists so many ways to silence unwelcome truths from being told.

Speaking Truth to Power is a "Vocation of Agony"

Some of the varieties of modern ways to silence whistle-blowers includes rumors, isolation of the victim, threats to the victim's family, forming an opposing political action committee to spread disinformation, threatening being fired or being harassed on the job, drugging with legal prescription psychiatric drugs, imprisoning in an Ecuadorean embassy, a Deep State/CIA prison or in Guantanamo, then arranging a murder that look like an accident or a suicide, etc.

And so it goes. Being a prophet – speaking truth to power – is hazardous duty. Dr King called it "a vocation of agony". Achieving liberation, confronting tyranny and exposing tyrants can be hazardous to one's health. But somebody needs to do it.



Whistle-blowers such as Dr King know very well that they are going to pay a heavy price for their refusal to bow down to authority or to be silent when they see that the status quo is harming people. They know that they will have to endure cowardly character assassinations, and they know that they are at risk of being killed if they don't shut up.

Earlier this week, justice-seeking non-white minorities (especially those that have been made poor and disadvantaged) plus groups of theological and political progressives of all skin colors, celebrated the birthday anniversary of King, who was born on January 15, 1929.

The "I Have a Dream" Speech was Martin Luther King LITE

Dr King, since his assassination, is mainly known for his "I Have a Dream" speech and his courageous civil rights activism on behalf of poor African-Americans. The powers-that-be are OK with that, as long as the truth about Dr King's commitment to Christian nonviolence remains unacknowledged and unheard.

However, it is important to realize that Dr King's strong commitment to his mission came out of his understanding of the life, mission and gospel ethics of his mentor, Jesus of Nazareth.

Dr King's belief in the practicality of nonviolent societal transformation mirrored the politics and theology of Jesus (and Gandhi), and it was the teachings of those two heroes of his that shaped both the civil rights movement as well as his antiwar activism.

The success of Dr King's tactics is illustrated by the simple fact that his cowardly enemies (operating in the darkness) had to resort to killing him in order to silence his efforts to push forward the movement's civil rights and human rights agendas.

But it was Dr King's willingness to come out against the war that unleashed the assassination plot in order to permanently silence him – with a single bullet to the head on April 4, 1968 by some unknown person or group other than the framed James Earl Ray.

✖ The event that sealed Dr King's fate was his famous and powerful "Beyond Vietnam" speech, delivered at the Riverside Church in New York City on April 4, 1967. Speaking out against the profitable war in Vietnam was the last straw for the war profiteers, the Pentagon, the CIA, the prowar political operatives in both political parties. There was still a lot of money to be made in the Vietnam War. Dr King had to go.

Dr King had struggled with the ethical imperative of speaking out against the war, and eventually he realized that he had no choice but to do follow his conscience.

Dr King said:

"As I have walked among the desperate, rejected and angry young men, I have told them that Molotov cocktails and rifles would not solve their problems. I have tried to offer them my deepest compassion while maintaining my conviction that social change comes most meaningfully through nonviolent action. But, they asked, what about Vietnam? They asked if our own nation wasn't using massive doses of violence to solve its problems, to bring about the changes it wanted. Their questions hit home, and I knew that I 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."

Dr King had finally seen the connections between 1) the financial and psychological costs of participation in the human slaughter that was going on in Vietnam and 2) the racial and economic violence that was preventing poor blacks from attaining justice in America.

America Can't Afford Both Guns and Butter

Dr King knew that a nation can't simultaneously fund both "guns and butter" (the notion that a nation can pay for illegal wars overseas and, at the same time, provide adequately for its people's basic human needs at home). American politicians had already made the choice of which one to spend scarce dollars on. The choice, as it always seems to be, is to pay for guns but not butter. A liberation movement for blacks and other minorities was deemed unaffordable,

It is a historical fact that the reason America lost President Johnson's "war on poverty" was because it's military and political leaders decided to fight his and President Nixon's wars in Vietnam instead. Understanding the connections between those realities is important.

The "guns and butter" myth (as opposed to the "guns or butter" reality) has historically been

proved to be impossible to achieve in cultures of greed that are ruled by selfish, over-privileged, wealthy elites and their conscienceless corporations. Guns and butter are mutually exclusive realities when an economic system that thrives on ruthlessness is in charge of a nation's foreign and domestic policy agendas. Dr King knew that the war in Vietnam meant that freedom for the oppressed at home was going to be delayed – perhaps forever, if the white racists had anything to say about it. And, as Dr King often said: *“justice delayed is justice denied.”*

Many credible historians believe that Dr King's “Beyond Vietnam” speech was equivalent to his signing his own death warrant.

The war profiteers, pro-war politicians and assorted militarists in positions of power at the time absolutely could not tolerate his antiwar activism. King was working for justice for all, which necessarily meant the defenseless Vietnamese women and children who were being indiscriminately starved, maimed, murdered, bombed and napalmed; and the soil, water and unborn children of Vietnam were being permanently poisoned by Agent Orange and other military toxins. Dr King had no choice but to object on the basis of his conscience.

Dr King received, on a daily basis, during the years leading up to that fateful day in Memphis, dozens of anonymous death threats from the racist, right wing reactionaries that were afraid of black equality and the possible granting of voting rights for African-Americans.

Oppressors naturally fear what long-overdue reprisals will occur when their enslaved victims gain their freedom. They may fear retaliation, but they usually don't fear for their souls. Dr King had another warning for them.

In the Riverside Church speech, he 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.”

Dr King is not only acknowledging that “guns and butter” is a fallacy, but, in addition, he is accusing those who waste precious resources on killing operations are risking the moral collapse of the nation as well as of themselves.

Even Harry Truman understood that reality when he said,

“All through history it has been the nations that have given the most to generals and the least to the people that have been the first to fall.”

As mentioned above, there is the tendency for Martin Luther King Day to focus mostly on the white racism and on the realities of the Poor People's Campaign. Those issues were (and still are), of course, vitally important, but something is missing. It is the elephant in the room. – and it is America's permanent war footing that drives the US economy. It is the willingness to kill our enemies rather than to solve the problems that create the enmity.

America is the Gun-Runner to the World

It is violence that Dr King spoke out against, and it is excessive military spending that is a

major reason that justice is still being denied. Reversing poverty and racism will be impossible as long as America continues to spend a trillion dollars every year on militarism, interest on the debt from past wars, over-generous retirement benefits for the retired military officer class and other military projects. Every program of social uplift is made unaffordable when military/police state spending is any nation's top priority.

The spirit of Martin Luther King is not dead, no matter how much effort has been exerted to suppress his teachings. But his voice can only be heard if those who believe in his dream by repeating his calls for justice and against military and domestic violence.

Dr King and Jesus have been trying to tell the Christian churches:

“Put away the sword, for those who live by the sword will surely perish by the sword.”

If there is any hope for a solvent America, the nation will have to stop wasting so much borrowed money on lethal weapons and being the “Gun-Runner to the World”. If there is any hope for economic relief, sustainable jobs, comfortable retirements for its future retirees, affordable schooling for its students and an end to domestic violence and racism, America's \$21,000,000,000,000 (21 trillion dollar) national debt cannot keep getting progressively larger as it has been doing under the current administration (because of the dramatically lowered taxes for the excessively wealthy and the increased Pentagon spending).

Guns and Butter can't co-exist.

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