

Video: Remembering Reverend Martin Luther King's Trip to the Mountaintop

By [Emanuel Pastreich](#)

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There are times when it is better to quote those wiser than oneself, those more inspired than oneself, rather than trying to articulate something imperfectly in one's own words.

That is why, on this important day, when the systems, the habits and the values that redeemed America in the past are collapsing into dust, into nothingness, I want to quote the speech delivered by the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., on April third, 1968 before the striking sanitation workers of Memphis, Tennessee—not far from Nashville, Tennessee, where I was born.

That speech of Reverend King came at a critical moment in American history. He was shot dead within 24 hours of his closing remarks.

[Remembering Reverend King's Trip to the Mountaintop](#) from [Emanuel Pastreich](#) on [Vimeo](#).

The next day, when he was shot in front of his hotel room, April 4, 1968, happened to be the first anniversary of Reverend King's speech “Beyond Vietnam,” a speech in which he spoke out against the pursuit of profit, and the growing class warfare, that drove that brutal and pointless war thousands of miles away from home.

He violated the unspoken, but explicit, agreement with the FBI, and with the American establishment hanging out at ritzy clubs and shoo fraternities, that civil rights advocacy could be pursued in America as long as it was kept separate from condemnation of the war in Vietnam.

The FBI had made it clear to Reverend Martin Luther King that if he played by these rules, he could live to a grand old age as the king of the civil rights movement. He could be an eminence grise who spoke at Carnegie Foundation seminars and who shook the greasy hands of presidents. He could have taken the sordid deal with the establishment, one embraced by public intellectuals like Yo Yo Ma (whom I knew personally in a previous

lifetime), the deal offered to some “whistle blowers” (whom I also knew) men who have cashed in their chips for specious currency of the system.

If Reverend King was told he could talk about only civil rights or Vietnam, we are told today that we can talk only about the climate crisis or about the COVID 19 fraud. To speak about both is to invite the retributions of the devils within the shell that was once a government.

Let me quote Reverend King, a better writer, and a far better speaker, than I, so as to express the urgency, the danger, and the hope of the current moment in the United States, and around the world.

I do not pretend to be as inspired, as brave, or as challenged as was Reverend King, but I am certain that you, even just listening to my imperfect reading of his words, can find true inspiration:

“Now, it doesn’t matter, now. It really doesn’t matter what happens now. I left Atlanta this morning, and as we got started on the plane, there were six of us.

The pilot said over the public address system, “We are sorry for the delay, but we have Dr. Martin Luther King on the plane. And to be sure that all of the bags were checked, and to be sure that nothing would be wrong with on the plane, we had to check out everything carefully. And we’ve had the plane protected and guarded all night.

And then I got into Memphis. And some began to say the threats, or talk about the threats that were out. What would happen to me from some of our sick white brothers?

Well, I don’t know what will happen now. We’ve got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn’t matter with me now, because I’ve been to the mountaintop. And I don’t mind.

Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I’m not concerned about that now. I just want to do God’s will.

And He’s allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I’ve looked over. And I’ve seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land!

And so I’m happy, tonight. I’m not worried about anything. I’m not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.”

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Emanuel Pastreich served as the president of the Asia Institute, a think tank with offices in Washington DC, Seoul, Tokyo and Hanoi. Pastreich also serves as director general of the Institute for Future Urban Environments. Pastreich declared his candidacy for president of the United States as an independent in February, 2020.

He is a regular contributor to Global Research.

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