

DR. KING'S FORGOTTEN SPEECH ON PEACE



by Paul Rockwell

Twenty-three years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered a speech that changed my life. I was a student at Union Theological Seminary in New York City in 1967, during the peak of the Vietnam War. Almost by accident a friend invited me across the street to hear Dr. King deliver a comprehensive anti-war address at Riverside Church.

It was not the drama, the excitement of the occasion, nor King's mellifluous voice passing over the hushed sanctuary as he described the holocaust of Indochina. It was not even the way history later vindicated King's teachings on war — everything he predicted came to pass — that makes his 1967 address so memorable to me. It is the vitality of his teachings for our won lives, especially the immediate relevance to the Mideast crisis, that compels me to recall and reread the Peacemaker's masterpiece once again.

The economic and moral crisis we are all facing today — the rise of violent crime, spread of drugs, the growing poverty of the working poor, the suffocation of millions of decent lives in the ghettos of our cities — all date back to that fateful turn when American leaders, pres-

sured by big corporations, chose war over peace, imperialism over civil rights and social progress.

Dr. King saw our crisis coming. "A few years ago," he began from his well-lit pulpit, speaking in reference to the 1964 Civil Rights Bill, the new anti-poverty programs, when America was moving forward — "A few years ago, there was a shining moment in our 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 the programs broken... I was compelled to see the war as the enemy of the poor."

As Dr. King analyzed the hope-wrecking nature of war, I put down my pen, stopped taking notes, and listened with my heart, as he described, not only the devastation aboard, the injuries and scarred lives of the working class youth returning home, but the spiritual costs of imperialism — the mendacity of our leaders, the disillusionment of youth. "A nation," he said, "that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death." I realized then — and it is a realization that makes

all the difference in how you live your life — that imperialism and democracy cannot survive together.

King reminded his listeners that U.S. lawlessness abroad breeds violence within the United States as well. "As I have walked among the desperate, rejected angry men, I have told them that Molotov cocktails and rifles would not solve their problems... But they ask — and rightly so — what about Vietnam? Wasn't our own nation using massive doses of violence to solve its problems? 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 against the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today — my own government."

A government that treats the sovereignty of nations with contempt cannot expect Americans to treat each other with respect.

Dr. King directed his remarks not only against government policy, but against American corporations which promoted wars on intervention, then shifted the burdens of war onto the poor, and drew — in King's words — "immense profits from overseas investment." Today's slogan, "No Blood For Oil," is a slogan King would have easily understood.

King's speech included severe criticisms of the draft, of the imbalance in military recruitment. American interventions are administered and organized at the expense of the poor, especially at the expense of people of color. In the Korean and Vietnam wars, African-Americans and Chicanos were drafted way out of proportion to their civilian

numbers. Primarily white middle-class college students got a preferential program — "college deferment." It is ironic, an example of American hypocrisy, that many white opponents of affirmative action today are alive and well by virtue of "college deferment." Speaking of people of color, Dr. King confronted the issue: "The war was sending their sons and their brothers and husbands to fight and die in extraordinarily high proportions relative to the rest of the population." King spoke of the "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. I could not be silent in face of such cruel manipulation of the poor."

I left Riverside Church inspired and drenched from the intensity of the event. The following day Dr. King's address caused an outcry, a malicious backlash in the white press. *TIME*, in one typical example, called it "demagogic slander, a

script for Radio Hanoi." The Riverside address was recorded and filmed for posterity, but it is rarely quoted or mentioned in today's jingoistic press. Nevertheless, I can still hear King reciting the words of James Russell Lowell:

Though the cause of evil prosper

Yet 'tis truth alone is strong.

(The full text of King's Riverside address, "A Time to Break Silence," appears in *A Testament of Hope*, James Washington, Ed., Harper & Row, 1986)

LEONA MORRIS TO SPEAK AT CCC BLACK HISTORY PROGRAM

Mrs. Leona "Lee" Morris will be the featured speaker at the 18th annual Black History Program at the Community College of Southern Nevada, Friday, February 15, 1991 — reception at 6:00 p.m. and Program at 7:30 p.m. — Theme: "Color of Success." Free admission, limited seating.

Mrs. Morris is best known for the contributions she has made to civic and cultural organizations. She holds memberships in The Links, Inc. Las Vegas Chapter; Neighbors of Watts, Inc. (California); UNLV Fine Arts Department and Allied Arts Council of Southern Nevada. Morris is also a noted musician



Leona "Lee" Morris

and songwriter and serves as vice-president of GLLIP Production.

She is the wife of Greg Morris, the well-known actor, and the mother of Iona, Philip and Linda who are well-known entertainers in their own rights.

For further information, please call 652-5524.

ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE

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versity. The Holy Quran refutes this (see Quran 3:134, 2:219, 47:38). The carrying out of commitments that one makes such as fulfilling all contracts is another demonstrated example of belief (faith) through righteous deeds. Paying bills; power bills; phone bills; house mortgages, all fall within the frame-work of these righteous deeds: "O you who believe and fulfill all obligations." 5:1

How one responds during pain, trial, adversity, panic are

all indicators of one's belief and character: "And bear with patient constancy whatever happens to thee; for this is firmness of purpose in the conduct of affairs." 31:17 (see 103:3).

In conclusion "Righteousness" is not what we say or what we do, but, is what we say and do. Belief (Faith) and work: "Those who believe and work deeds of righteousness hath Allah promised forgiveness and a great reward." 5:10.

As-salaamo-Alaikum.

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