

## How Can We Stop the War? (*Beyond Vietnam* by Martin Luther King, Jr.)



*Martin Luther King, Jr., half-length portrait, facing left, speaking at microphones, during anti-war demonstration, New York City / World Journal Tribune photo by Don Rice, 1967. Source: Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/94505369/>*

*Background:* Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968), a prominent Civil Rights leader, gave a speech on April 4, 1967 before 3,000 people at Riverside Church in New York City, as guest of the organization Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam. Dr. King risked his political influence within the Civil Rights Movement and with President Lyndon Johnson when he made this public declaration against the war. During the speech, he presented seven reasons for his opposition: 1) funds that could go towards the poor in the U.S. were spent instead on the war; 2) a disproportionate number of black people were sent to fight and die in Vietnam compared to whites; 3) a firm belief in non-violence; 4) a commitment for full equality for black people, and not just civil rights; 5) dedication to "life and health of America; 6) his religious faith; and 7) vows as a minister of his faith. In this excerpt, Dr. King provided five recommendations for ending the Vietnam War.

*Excerpt:* "If we continue, there will be no doubt in my mind and in the mind of the world that we have no honorable intentions in Vietnam. If we do not stop our war against the people of Vietnam immediately, the world will be left with no other alternative than to see this as some horrible, clumsy, and deadly game we have decided to play. The world now demands a maturity of America that we may not be able to

achieve. It demands that we admit we have been wrong from the beginning of our adventure in Vietnam, that we have been detrimental to the life of the Vietnamese people. The situation is one in which we must be ready to turn sharply from our present ways. In order to atone for our sins and errors in Vietnam, we should take the initiative in bringing a halt to this tragic war.

I would like to suggest five concrete things that our government should do to begin the long and difficult process of extricating ourselves from this nightmarish conflict:

Number one: End all bombing in North and South Vietnam.

Number two: Declare a unilateral cease-fire in the hope that such action will create the atmosphere for negotiation.

Three: Take immediate steps to prevent other battlegrounds in Southeast Asia by curtailing our military buildup in Thailand and our interference in Laos.

Four: Realistically accept the fact that the National Liberation Front has substantial support in South Vietnam and must thereby play a role in any meaningful negotiations and any future Vietnam government.

Five: Set a date that we will remove all foreign troops from Vietnam in accordance with the 1954 Geneva Agreement."

Source: *The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute at Stanford University, [http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc\\_beyond\\_vietnam/](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_beyond_vietnam/). The corresponding audio clip for the text above is from timestamp 33:50 to 37:16.*

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## How Can We Stop the War? (John Kerry Testimony before Congress)

*Background:* On April 22, 1971, Lt. John Kerry, spoke on behalf of Vietnam Veterans of America to the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Kerry later became a U.S. Senator himself, representing Massachusetts and was appointed Secretary of State in 2013. An excerpt of the transcript of his testimony is printed below.

*(Source: Congressional Record (92nd Congress, 1st Session) for Thursday, April 22, 1971, pages 179-210. To see excerpts of his recorded testimony online, visit C-SPAN <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/181065-1>)*

*Excerpt:* "The country doesn't know it yet, but it has created a monster, a monster in the form of millions of men who have been taught to deal and to trade in violence, and who are given the chance to die for the biggest nothing in history; men who have returned with a sense of anger and a sense of betrayal which no one has yet grasped.

As a veteran and one who feels this anger, I would like to talk about it. We are angry because we feel we have been used in the worst fashion by the administration of this country.

...we cannot consider ourselves America's best men when we are ashamed of and hated what we were called on to do in Southeast Asia. In our opinion, and from our experience, there is nothing in South Vietnam, nothing which could happen that realistically threatens the United States of America. And to attempt to justify the loss of one American life in Vietnam, Cambodia, or Laos by linking such loss to the preservation of freedom, which those misfits supposedly abuse, is to us the height of criminal hypocrisy, and it is that kind of hypocrisy which we feel has torn this country apart.

... I want to relate to you the feeling that many of the men who have returned to this country express because we are probably angriest about all that we were told about Vietnam and about the mystical war against communism. We found that not only was it a civil war, an effort by a people who had for years been seeking their liberation from any colonial influence whatsoever....

We found most people didn't even know the difference between communism and democracy. They only wanted to work in rice paddies without helicopters strafing them and bombs with napalm burning their villages and tearing their country apart. They wanted everything to do with the war, particularly with this foreign presence of the United States of America, to leave them alone in peace, and they practiced the art of survival by siding with whichever military force was present at a particular time, be it Vietcong, North Vietnamese, or American."