

## **Beyond Vietnam:**

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s address delivered to the Clergy and Laymen  
Concerned about Vietnam, at Riverside Church, New York City: April 4, 1967

Arranged for voice and improvising ensemble

Jonathan Matis  
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**Section Text**

**Music**

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*Intro* Even when pressed by the demands of inner truth, men do not easily assume the task of opposing their government's policy, especially in time of war. Some of us who have already begun to break the silence of the night have found that the calling to speak is often a vocation of agony, but we must speak. We must speak with all the humility that is appropriate to our limited vision, but we must speak. And we must rejoice as well. Perhaps a new spirit is rising among us. If it is, let us trace its movement, and pray that our own inner being may be sensitive to its guidance. For we are deeply in need of a new way beyond the darkness that seems so close around us.

Narrator's voice only

*Section 1* Beyond the calling of race or nation or creed is this vocation of sonship and brotherhood. We are called to speak for the weak, for the voiceless, for the victims of our nation, for those it calls "enemy," for no document from human hands can make these humans any less our brothers. Here is the true meaning and value of compassion and nonviolence, when it helps us to see the enemy's point of view, to hear his questions, to know his assessment of ourselves. For from his view we may indeed see the basic weaknesses of our own condition, and if we are mature, we may learn and grow and profit from the wisdom of the brothers who are called the opposition.

**Byard:** Soprano saxophone solo

*Instrumental Transition: "Pending Cosmic Elegy"*

**Byard** continues.

All **bowed strings** enter (con sord. if possible). Use the following pitches, primarily:  
[D, G, A, C]

(continue through Section 2)

*Section 2* 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 for the poor of America who are paying the double price of smashed hopes at home, and dealt 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. 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 that 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.

The war in Vietnam is but a symptom of a far deeper malady within the American spirit, and if we ignore this sobering reality, we will find ourselves organizing "clergy and laymen concerned" committees for the next generation. They will be concerned about Guatemala and Peru. They will be concerned about Thailand and Cambodia. They will be concerned about Mozambique and South Africa. We will be marching for these and a dozen other names and attending rallies without end unless there is a significant and profound change in American life and policy. So such thoughts take us beyond Vietnam, but not beyond our calling as sons of the living God.

**Byard** exits.

“Pending cosmic elegy” continues:

**Bowed strings** continue, gradual crescendo.

**Jesse and Jon:** fade in low, sustained, drone textures

**Charles:** improvise, as needed.

*Section 3* 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.

**bowed strings** exit.

**Charles** exit.

**Bart:** muted trumpet - at each use of the phrase "revolution of values": staccato stream of fast notes - single pitch. Otherwise, improvise freely.

**Stuart:** Long tones, mostly lower register.

**Joe:** pizz. improvise freely.

**Dale:** improvise as needed.

**David G.** (piano): high register octaves, sharp attack, ring out. Add other material as needed.

**Byard:** soprano sax as needed.

During third paragraph: **Cellos:** add special effects / extended technique sounds as needed.

**Bart:** exit

**Dale:** exit

**Cellos:** exit

*Section 4* America, the richest and most powerful nation in the world, can well lead the way in this revolution of values. There is nothing except a tragic death wish to prevent us from reordering our priorities so that the pursuit of peace will take precedence over the pursuit of war. There is nothing to keep us from molding a recalcitrant status quo with bruised hands until we have fashioned it into a brotherhood.

It is a sad fact that because of comfort, complacency, a morbid fear of communism, and our proneness to adjust to injustice, the Western nations that initiated so much of the revolutionary spirit of the modern world have now become the arch antirevolutionaries. Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism.

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 and unconditional love for all mankind.

**Joe:** exit

**Stuart:** exit.

**David G.:** continue

**Evan:** improvise freely

**Pauline:** (accordion) improvise freely

**Electronics:** enter sparsely, gradually increase activity.

during third paragraph: **Jon:** add distorted guitar, low note loops. (then prepare guitar w/ clips for next section)

*Section 5* We can no longer afford to worship the god of hate or bow before the altar of retaliation. The oceans of history are made turbulent by the ever-rising tides of hate. History is cluttered with the wreckage of nations and individuals that pursued this self-defeating path of hate.

We are now faced with the fact, my friends, that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there is such a thing as being too late.

We still have a choice today: nonviolent coexistence or violent coannihilation. We must move past indecision to action. We must find new ways to speak for peace in Vietnam and justice throughout the developing world, a world that borders on our doors. If we do not act, we shall surely be dragged down the long, dark, and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without sight.

**Pauline:** continue

**Electronics:** continue

**Bart:** improvise freely

**Evan:** exit

**David G.:** exit

**Dale:** improvise freely

**Jon and Jesse:** prepared guitars, improvise freely

**Val:** percussion - mostly as punctuation and color effects, less as steady rhythm

*Section 6* Now let us begin. Now let us rededicate ourselves to the long and bitter, but beautiful, struggle for a new world. This is the calling of the sons of God, and our brothers wait eagerly for our response. Shall we say the odds are too great? Shall we tell them the struggle is too hard? Or will there be another message -- of longing, of hope, of solidarity with their yearnings, of commitment to their cause, whatever the cost? The choice is ours, and though we might prefer it otherwise, we must choose in this crucial moment of human history.

And if we will only make the right choice, we will be able to transform this pending cosmic elegy into a creative psalm of peace. If we will make the right choice, we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our world into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. If we will but make the right choice, we will be able to speed up the day, all over America and all over the world, when justice will roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.

*Instrumental coda*

**Bart:** exit

**Dale:** exit

**Jon and Jesse:** exit

**Electronics:** exit

**Pauline:** continue, gradually reduce pitch vocabulary to [D, A, C]

**Bowed Strings** return: now with more restricted pitch vocabulary:

[D, A, C]

(no mutes)

**David G.:** piano: [D, A, C]

**Byard:** as needed

**Charles:** as needed

Pitched instruments sounding [G] only

**Stuart:** low D, long tones

**Byard, Charles:** exit

**Pauline, David G.:** exit

**Bowed strings:** exit

**Monica:** wordless singing