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Speaking for International Brotherhood  
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On April 4, 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of a choice for Americans: a choice to continue to continue the violence of Vietnam or end it. At the time of his speech, "Beyond Vietnam," King found he could no longer stay silent. Although his words were sure to spark a backlash, King spoke out to the American public. His message demonstrated his opinion that the war embodied moral hypocrisy. King spoke to defend the moral vision of the Civil Rights movement. He spoke to uphold the ideals of the United States. And he spoke to insist on the imperative of his Christian faith. His speech drew criticism for its call that Civil Rights shouldn't end at the American border. However, "Beyond Vietnam" was an illustration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s moral vision and his need to speak for what he believed, no matter the reaction that would follow.

King was troubled by the Vietnam War and its impact on the Civil Rights movement in America. At the time of his speech, King was leading movements both for Civil Rights and for the reduction of poverty. The Vietnam War conflicted with both of these goals, and to not speak out against it would have undermined King's own words. In his speech, King says he saw the promise of helping the poor destroyed by the war as resources were directed away to other causes. In his eyes, there could be no way to fix the domestic problem of poverty unless this foreign conflict was resolved. King also saw that a peaceful fight for Civil Rights could not be justified with the continuation of the war. The war directed efforts for guaranteeing freedom and liberty far across the ocean, rather than creating freedom and equality within the United States. In addition, the brutal mentality of the war worked against the idea of peaceful protest for Civil Rights. King said, "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.” The war justified the use of violence to bring about change, opposing King’s approach to Civil Rights. King realized he had to speak out against the war or see his message subverted.

King further opposed the Vietnam War as an instance of moral hypocrisy by the United States. In his speech, King gives an extensive history of how the United States arrived at conflict with Vietnam. Vietnam declared its independence from French and Japanese occupation, and although this overthrow was reminiscent of the American declaration of freedom and quoted the American Declaration of Independence, the United States government refused to recognize it. Rather than allowing self-determination for the Vietnamese, King illustrated that the United States supported reoccupation by the French and a dictatorship under Premier Diem. While promising democracy and peace to the people, King said the United States, “increased our troop commitments in support of governments which were singularly corrupt, inept, and without popular support.” King spoke up against the war to demonstrate the corrupt ideals of American society. The United States justified horrendous actions across the world with the vision of protecting democracy from communism. While American leaders spoke in eloquent words of American values, they undermined freedom and democracy in Venezuela, Guatemala, Cambodia, and Peru, among others. King spoke up against a government that would espouse morality then act in opposition to its words on another side of the world.

Most troubling to King was the devastation caused by the war, especially as it related to his faith. King saw all humans as children of God, and believed such a global understanding must come before distinctions of nation or ethnicity. As King stated, “no document from human

hands can make these humans any less our brothers.” With this conviction that all humans are deserving of love and understanding and none of the destruction and suffering of war, King asserted his faith demanded he speak out against the war. King was especially concerned by the impact of the war beyond the battleground: its impacts on communities, domestic and foreign. In the United States, King felt obligated to speak for the families destroyed by the price of lives lost in war. In Vietnam, King spoke for the communities laid to waste and the culture kicked aside by the United States government. King saw the conflict in Vietnam was no more than “some horrible, clumsy, and deadly game.” He could not rationalize silence with his faith and conviction in human brotherhood.

King’s opposition to the conflict in Vietnam angered many who supported him in his other endeavors. The primary point of opposition to King’s speech came from the connection he drew between the Civil Rights movement and the Vietnam War. In “Beyond Vietnam,” King describes his belief that the Civil Rights movement could not accomplish its purpose if Civil Rights continued to be denied on another front, across the ocean. However, many others believed the Civil Rights movement should not be coupled to the anti-war movement. In an April 7, 1967, editorial, *The New York Times* argued that movements for racial equality were becoming increasingly complex and, “The Negroes on these fronts need all the leadership, dedication, and moral inspiration that they can summon; and under these circumstances to divert the energies of the Civil Rights movement to the Vietnam issue is both wasteful and self-defeating.” The Civil Rights movement had its own set of complex challenges and formidable opposition to overcome. For it to be successful, in the eyes of those who opposed King’s framing of the Vietnam conflict,

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there had to be strong leadership for the movement. King's speech was perceived as broadening the movement to include too many distinct causes, and undermining all through doing so.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is one of the most influential figures of the 20th century. Although he is celebrated as a hero today, King was a figure of controversy throughout his lifetime, in Civil Rights and in the anti-war movement. The Vietnam War and "Beyond Vietnam" was one manifestation of the controversy that surrounded King and his words, even amongst his longtime supporters. However, King spoke out: for the Civil Rights movement, for his movement against poverty, for the ideals of the United States, and for his faith in humans as children of God. His words still resonate today, as an example for global cooperation, love, and faith in humanity.