

Veterans For Peace Martin Luther King High School Essay Contest

Martin Luther King Day & Militarism

In some respects, January's Martin Luther King Day has become a day for rather "safe" and non-controversial events and speeches. Rarely these days is anything ever said about Dr. King's thoughts and teaching on one of the "the giant triplets" threatening the human race: militarism.

In 1967, when Dr. King gave his famous speech, "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence," he observed how unpopular speaking against militarism was. He said that people asked him, "Why are you speaking about the war, Dr. King? Why are you joining the voices of dissent? Peace and civil rights don't mix..." How true his observation remains today, in that to speak out against military solutions is once again called unpatriotic and "not supporting our brave troops."

One concept Dr. King used to love was "creative tension." As he said in his "Letter from the Birmingham Jail,"

"...I must confess that I am not afraid of the word 'tension.'... There is a type of constructive nonviolent tension that is necessary for growth.... We must see the need of having nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men to rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood."

Accordingly, Veterans For Peace Chapter 93 would like to spread some "creative tension" by sponsoring an essay contest on "Martin Luther King and Militarism" open to high school students in Washtenaw, Livingston, Hillsdale, Lenawee, and Jackson counties. There are three cash prizes, which VFP Chapter members hope will encourage the winning students to start their own college funds. The deadline is December 15th.

MLK Essay Contest Guidelines

The Essay Question

In 1967, Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered two speeches directly addressing the Peace Movement and Militarism (see below). Focusing on these two speeches, write a 500- to 1000-word essay in response to this question: Explain which of MLK's arguments against war and militarism you consider the strongest or most relevant for today's world, and why. You may include information from sources other than MLK's two speeches.

Eligibility

Those entering the essay contest must be enrolled in a high school in the Veterans For Peace Chapter 93 area (Washtenaw, Livingston, Hillsdale, Lenawee, or Jackson counties) at the time of the December 15th deadline.

Deadline

Essays must be submitted by email or postmarked by December 15, 2016.

E-Mail & Mailing Address

Essays should be emailed to wolverbob@gmail.com or sent by mail to Bill Shea, 803 John A Woods Drive, Ann Arbor, MI 48105. Entries must include an email address, mailing address and telephone number.

Essay Awards

There will be three cash prizes awarded of \$350, \$250, and \$150. Essay contest winners will be announced by January 5th, 2017.

Resources

"The Casualties of the War in Vietnam," February 25, 1967 - <http://investigatinghistory.ashp.cuny.edu/m11e.html>

"It's A Dark Day In Our Nation," April 30, 1967 - <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article16183.htm>

"Beyond Vietnam--A Time to Break Silence," April 4, 1967: http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/doc_beyond_vietnam

Audio version of "Beyond Vietnam":
<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkatimetobreaksilence.htm>

Negative reaction to the "Beyond Vietnam" speech: Time magazine called the speech "demagogic slander that sounded like a script for Radio Hanoi," and the Washington Post declared that King had "diminished his usefulness to his cause, his country, his people.". For more on the negative reaction here is a link to a National Public Radio story on this subject... <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=125355148>

MLK: A Call To Conscience - Part 1 of 6 segments of a series hosted by Travis Smiley on PBS about the negative reaction to Dr. Kings criticism of war and militarism - <https://youtu.be/72peuBUy5E4> (follow YouTube links to watch the five other segments)

For more information on Veterans For Peace and Martin Luther Kings teachings on war and militarism, visit <http://www.veteransforpeace.org/our-work/dr-kings-legacy-and-peace-movement>

Veterans For Peace Chapter 93 website – www.vfp93.org