OMNI NEWSLETTER ON MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.'S BIRTHDAY 2009, by Dick Bennett for We, the People and a Culture of Peace and Justice, January 19, 2009

From The Morning News editorial to Abigail Van Buren's column, we are reminded again why OMNI is needed on King's birthday. In "King's Dream Still Inspires Americans" (TMN 1-19), the editorial writer, in celebrating King for his greatness in advancing civil rights, focuses upon King's "most memorable and significant speech on Aug. 28, 1963," "I Have a Dream." King "gave his life in pursuit of social and cultural equality for all." Likewise, Ms. Van Buren praises King as "the great American civil rights leader."

All of this is true. But King's greatness far exceeded his success in defeating "Jim Crow," the legal system of discrimination in the South. He was also equally great (though not successful) as an opponent of wars and poverty. In King's April 4, 1967 "A Time to Break Silence" speech delivered at Riverside Church in NYC one year before his death, he spoke out against wars, against militarism, and against US mass killings in Vietnam, and looked toward the Beloved Community. Together, he said, wars and militarism are one of the greatest of evils, along with racism and poverty.

In King's Riverside Church speech, King gave ten moral reasons for his opposition to the Vietnam War. Several of these reasons joined that opposition to his opposition to the unequal US economic system. "Like some demoniacal destructive suction tube," he argued, the war stole the skills and funds needed for the poor. His Poverty Program had offered hope to the poor, but after the war began poverty programs were generally ignored. It was outrageous for the Government to spend $322,000 for each enemy soldier killed, while spending only $53 a year in the war on poverty for each person classified as poor.

The reduction of King's greatness to exclusively his civil rights achievements has had enormous political advantages to all proponents of the US Imperial Security State, for they recognized King's opposition to wars and poverty. The agents of the Corporate-Pentagon-White House-Congress-Mainstream Media Complex knew that advances in social justice were only one part of King's greatness. They knew King opposed not only US militarism and the Vietnam War but also the repeated US aggressions abroad. They knew King opposed US capitalism's impoverishment of millions of people and enrichment of a few (400 billionaires).

Furthermore, President Bush reduced even King's civil rights work to individual activities. Bush "called on the nation's people to honor the slain civil rights leader by helping those in need." Not to change the structures of our nation to ensure support for
the needy, but to be a good neighbor and volunteer. "...just by living a life of kindness and compassion you can make America a better place and fulfill the dream of Martin Luther King," Bush said." Well, yes and no. Yes kindness and volunteering are good, but changing the Jim Crow South required a social revolution--the drastic overhaul of the educational and legal systems--, just as changing the US imperial system and poverty will require a drastic renovation of the economic system.

Cindy Sheehan startlingly connects the three great motives of King's life uniquely to her own, that makes past, present, and future concretely real to us, for her son Casey was killed in Iraq, another atrocious US war, on the same day King was assassinated. "Dr. King and Casey were killed by the same evils: militarism, racism and poverty." Casey was killed by the militarism and racism against the Iraqi people, and by "the poverty of being from a working class family that couldn't afford to send him to university. All of these factors...also killed Dr. King."

At Riverside Church, King said, "I am convinced that if we are to get on the right side of the world revolution, we as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a 'thing-oriented' society to a 'person-oriented' society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered."

In his 1964 Nobel Peace Prize speech, King expressed hope in our evolving beyond "revenge, aggression, and retaliation" to an enhanced capacity for love.

Many speeches of Barack Hussein Obama evoke the last lines of King's Riverside speech: "Now let us begin. Now let us rededicate ourselves to the long and bitter -- but beautiful -- struggle for a new world. ...The choice is ours, and though we might prefer it otherwise we must choose in this crucial moment of human history."

Tomorrow we will have a chance for a renewed effort to achieve that revolution of values King yearned for. President Obama becomes part of King's dream.

Some of OMNI's VALUES THAT WE TRUST REFLECT KING'S: A WORLD FREE OF VIOLENCE, A SOCIETY WITH LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR ALL, A COMMUNITY WHERE EVERY PERSON'S POTENTIAL MAY BE FULFILLED, AN EARTH RESTORED, NONVIOLENCE, WORLD PEACE, DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, SOCIAL and ECONOMIC JUSTICE, ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP PROTECTING SPECIES AND THE EARTH.