

## Document A: Martin Luther King, Jr.

I come to this platform tonight to make a passionate plea to my beloved nation. There is at the outset a very obvious . . . connection between the war in Vietnam and the struggle I and others have been waging in America. A few years ago . . . it seemed as if there was a real promise of hope for the poor, both black and white, through the poverty program. There were experiments, hopes, new beginnings. Then came the buildup in Vietnam, and I watched this program broken and eviscerated [gutted] . . . . And I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continued to draw men and skills and money like some demonic, destructive suction tube. So I was increasingly compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor and to attack it as such.

Perhaps a more tragic recognition of reality took place when it became clear to me that the war was doing far more than devastating the hopes of the poor at home. . . . We were taking the black young men who had been crippled by our society and sending them eight thousand miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in southwest Georgia and East Harlem. So we have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools. . . .

As I have walked among the desperate, rejected, and angry young men, I have told them that Molotov cocktails and rifles would not solve their problems. . . . But they asked, and rightly so, "What about Vietnam?" . . . Their questions hit home, and 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 [supplier] of violence in the world today: my own government. For the sake of those boys, for the sake of this government, for the sake of the hundreds of thousands trembling under our violence, I cannot be silent.

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 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 [power to take charge] in this war is ours; the initiative to stop it must be ours.

Source: Martin Luther King's speech, "Beyond Vietnam," delivered April 4, 1967, at a meeting of Clergy and Laity Concerned at Riverside Church in New York City.

Source: John Kerry, testimony to the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, April 23, 1971. John Kerry was a veteran who returned from Vietnam in April 1969, having won early transfer out of the conflict because of his three Purple Hearts. He joined a group called Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

We wish that a merciful God could wipe away our own memories of that service as easily as this administration has wiped away their memories of us. But all that they have done . . . is to make more clear than ever our own determination to undertake one last mission -- to search out and destroy . . . the hate and fear that have driven this country these last ten years and more.

We are here to ask, and we are here to ask vehemently, where are the leaders of our country? Where is the leadership? We're here to ask where are McNamara, Rostow, Bundy, Gilpatrick, and so many others? Where are they now that we, the men they sent off to war, have returned? These are the commanders who have deserted their troops. And there is no more serious crime in the laws of war. We are asking Americans to think about that because how do you ask a man to be the last man to die in Vietnam? How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake? . . .

Each day . . . someone has to give up his life so that the United States doesn't have to admit something that the entire world already knows, so that we can't say that we have made a mistake. Someone has to die so that President Nixon won't be, and these are his words, "the first President to lose a war."

We rationalized destroying villages in order to save them. . . . We learned the meaning of free fire zones, shooting anything that moves, and we watched while America placed a cheapness on the lives of orientals. . . .

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 [repeatedly attacking] them and bombs with napalm burning their villages and tearing their country apart. . . .

In our opinion and from our experience, there is nothing in South Vietnam 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. . . is to us the height of criminal hypocrisy, and it is that kind of hypocrisy which we feel has torn this country apart. . . .

I would like to talk on behalf of all those veterans. . . .

## Document B: John Kerry

Americans were deeply divided over U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. In a letter written as he was about to leave for Vietnam, where he later died, Joseph E. Sintoni justified the war to his fiancée.

**D**This is by far the most difficult letter I shall ever write. What makes it so difficult is that you'll be reading it in the unhappy event of my death. You've already learned of my death: I hope the news was broken to you gently. God, Angie, I didn't want to die. I had so much to live for. You were my main reason for living. You're a jewel, a treasure. . . .

Please don't hate the war because it has taken me. I'm glad and proud that America has found me equal to the task of defending it.

Vietnam isn't a far-off country in a remote corner of the world. It is Sagamore, Brooklyn, Honolulu, or any other part of the world where there are Americans. Vietnam is a test of the American spirit. I hope I have helped in a little way to pass the test.

The press, the television screen, the magazines are filled with the images of young men burning their draft cards to demonstrate their courage. Their rejection is of the ancient law that a male fights to protect his own people and his own land. Does it take courage to flout the authorities and burn a draft card? Ask the men at Dak To, Con Tien, or Hill 875: they'll tell you how much courage it takes.

Most people never think of their freedom. They never think much about breathing, either, or blood circulating, except when these functions are checked by a doctor. Freedom, like breathing and circulating blood, is part of our being. Why must people take their freedom for granted? Why can't they support the men who are trying to protect their lifeblood, freedom? Patriotism is more than fighting or dying for one's country. It is participating

in its development, its progress, and its governmental processes. It is sharing the never fully paid price of the freedom which was bequeathed to us who enjoy it today. Not to squander, not to exploit, but to preserve and enhance for those who will follow after us.

Just as a man will stand by his family be it right or wrong, so will the patriot stand where Stephen Decatur stood when he offered the toast, "Our country, in her intercourse with foreign nations, may she always be in the right, but our country, right or wrong."

We must do the job God set down for us. It's up to every American to fight for the freedom we hold so dear. We must instruct the young in the ways of these great United States. We mustn't let them take these freedoms for granted.

I want you to go on to live a full, rich, productive life. I want you to share your love with someone. You may meet another man and bring up a family. Please bring up your children to be proud Americans. Don't worry about me, honey. God must have a special place for soldiers.

I've died as I've always hoped, protecting what I hold so dear to my heart. We will meet again in the future. We will. I'll be waiting for that day.

I'll be watching over you, Angie, and if it's possible to help you in some way, I will.

Feel some relief with the knowledge that you filled my short life with more happiness than most men know in a lifetime. The inevitable, well, the last one: I love you with all my heart, and my love for you will survive into eternity.

Your Joey