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MLK 2026: From the “demonic suction tube” of war to the fight against tech-capitalism

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In 2025, activists in Memphis, Tennessee, protest the construction of Elon Musk's xAI data center in a historically Black community (top). Below, Martin Luther King Jr. and other Civil Rights leaders march with striking sanitation workers in Memphis on March 28, 1968.

In 2026, there are three lessons from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. – and the Civil Rights struggle he played a major role in – that will aid us in our continuing fight to destroy the racist, sexist, homophobic, capitalist system.

Dr. King said that, “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.” This quote is far from an admittance of defeat, or a praise of strength to the capitalist enemy. This quote is a call to action – a wake up call to reject the disempowering blinders of capitalist ideology so we can fight back.

Dr. King understood that corporate politicians and their backers in the banks and military-industrial complex would continue to squeeze everything they can out of people. They would continue to look for ways to strip communities, and displace them to make way for profits.

During the ‘60s, it was the construction of highways and the government’s commitment to “Urban Renewal” (or as James Baldwin coined it , Negro Removal) which led to the razing of Black communities all across the country to make way for the expansion of private investment and military spending. Today, the government is continuing its process of Negro Removal through the expansion of gentrification in cities, the gutting of work and education opportunities and, most notably, the construction of AI data centers in predominantly Black and working-class areas, which pollute the water, land and air, turning them into unlivable wastelands.

The second lesson from Dr. King is the importance of exposing and educating people on the intersections of U.S. imperialist foreign policy and its oppression of people within its borders.

Here is a longer quote by Dr. King that clearly states this exact lesson:

“There is a very obvious and almost facile connection between the war in Vietnam and the struggle I and others have been waging in America. ... 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.”

In the '60s and '70s the United States found itself spending today's equivalent of nearly 2 trillion dollars to carry out a brutal genocide and occupation of Vietnam all to protect the financial interests of Washington. The U.S. killed over 1 million Vietnamese people, mainly women and children, and subjected those that survived the calamity with long term irreparable health defects from the use of chemical weapons.

While this was going on across the globe, back in the United States, Black communities were getting erased and Black bodies were thrown into the meat grinder of a draft, also in the name of profits and military expansion for those in Washington.

Today, the U.S. continues its occupation and genocide of the Global South for the same bankers and war profiteers. The government spends nearly 900 billion dollars annually on maintaining its chokehold over the working people of the world.

While the U.S. spends that much money overseas, communities within the country go without adequate housing, access to a stable supply of food, proper and well-rounded health care, education and employment. These communities instead see the influx of around 300 billion dollars spent on expanding and maintaining the police departments in their communities across the country.

The capitalist class will do whatever it takes to defend its stranglehold on the world and maintain the status quo. A status quo that not only prioritizes profits over people, but one that is emphasized by the brutality and depravity in which it goes

about holding onto and increasing profits.

Lastly, Dr. King knew that it was the younger generations, the youth that will be the key to continuing and making strides in the struggle to overturn these oppressive systems.

“They are a new seed of radicalism. ... They carry out a serious rebellion against old values but have not yet concretely formulated the new values.”

Nothing can continue without the buy-in of younger generations and the system knows this.

Whether in the '60s or now in 2026, the war on Black youth is precisely to keep the younger generations from learning how to formulate the new values Dr. King was talking about. The capitalists have created this boogeyman in the “juvenile” which they can use to justify any and all tactics it uses to imprison or kill any young Black child or teen that chooses not to submit to the racist systems of the United States.

The word “juvenile,” which replaced “thug,” which replaced “super predator,” which replaced “brute and savage,” is only the newest of terms used to dehumanize Black existence. However, we see that the youth – especially Black youth – continue to resist police occupation and are not conforming to the fascist system.

As the system increases its oppression and raises the level of brutality against Black youth, it is only natural that Black youth rise to meet and overcome these new horrors and challenges.

May Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s teachings continue to mold and shape the struggle ahead. The working and oppressed people of the world must continue to struggle and fight the U.S. empire. Dr. King said that “the price that America must pay for the continued oppression of the Negro and other minority groups is the price of its own destruction.” This destruction will be the smashing of the capitalist system and

in its place will be a socialist system that ultimately puts people's needs and lives over profit.

Rest in Power Dr. King and Happy Birthday!

