



Civil rights leaders, including Martin Luther King, Jr., surrounded by crowds carrying signs during a 1963 march for economic and voting rights. Photo by Buyenlarge/Getty Images

## Class Struggle and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

**The US claims to honor his memory, even as it defiles his dreams.**

by Richard Eskow, [www.commondreams.org](http://www.commondreams.org)

On this, the national holiday named for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Ajamu Baraka tweeted:

*The U.S. should drop its' commemoration of Dr. King's birthday because there is no relationship between (the) Dr. King the Black freedom movement created (and the) violent, warmongering U.S.*

“The King birthday is a colonialist expropriation that should be rejected,” Baraka added. That is a discussion and a decision for Black people, not me, but I will say this: It’s hard to deny that the forces Dr. King condemned are trying to colonize his legacy and exploit for their own selfish ends. But try as they may, they must never succeed. His memory is a country of the mind that must always remain free.

Over a decade ago, when there were fewer Left voices on the internet, I used my perch at the Huffington Post to honor Dr. King’s truly radical voice in my own small way. The celebrities I mentioned are forgotten and the economic numbers have shifted, but Dr. King’s words ring even truer now than they did in 2011. Wiser voices than mine, with more visibility and more right to the King legacy, are available to us now. (It did occur to me in 2018 that Dr. King would have knelt with Colin Kaepernick.)

I would commend the following quote to those political opportunists who accuse leftists of being race-blind in order to deny the economic strangulation of the working class:

*“The unemployed, poverty-stricken white man must be made to realize that he is in the very same boat with the Negro. Together, they could exert massive pressure on the government to get jobs for all. Together they could form a grand alliance. Together, they could merge all people for the good of all.”*

That form of organizing was once known as ‘class struggle.’

Then there’s this: “A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth.” Wealth inequality soared after bank criminals crashed the economy in 2008, but the grotesquely unequal United States of 2011 looks like a socialist paradise compared to today’s world of accelerated class theft.

And this: “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.”

Those triplets have grown up to Horsemen of the Apocalypse. “Machines and computers” manipulate our society, our politics, and our economy to further enrich the billionaire class. Drones and missiles continue to endanger our planet. The “property rights” of the few – from rental properties to pharmaceutical patents – kill thousands of people daily.

Dr. King also said, “Congress appropriates military funds with alacrity and generosity. It appropriates poverty funds with miserliness and grudging reluctance.” Never were those words truer. When members of both party add tens of billions to the Pentagon’s already-bloated budget request, words like “alacrity” and “generosity” are genteel descriptions. They throw lavish gifts at the feet of the generals like courtiers pursuing the monarch’s favor. It’s like watching a gang boss reward an underling with a sack of cash for a murder well done. “Here, get yerself somethin’ nice ...”

“Of all the forms of inequality,” Dr. King said in 1966, “injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane.” What would he say of today’s corporate-driven healthcare, where hedge funds buy up medical practices, private insurers profit from public illness, pandemic victims go untreated, and Wall Street erodes Medicare with a program that is an “Advantage” only to investors?

A few more quotes to ponder before the holiday comes to a close:

*“The evils of capitalism are as real as the evils of militarism and evils of racism.”*

*“[W]e are saying that something is wrong ... with capitalism.... There must be better distribution of wealth and maybe America must move toward a democratic socialism.”*

*“I imagine you already know that I am much more socialistic in my economic theory than capitalistic... ”*

*“In a sense, you could say we’re involved in the class struggle.”*

The government, along with most of the nation, claims to honor his memory while defiling his dreams. They have turned a living soul into an idol. It may be shaped like a human being, but it makes a sound like desert wind blowing through the hollow body of a golden calf.

BIO: Richard (RJ) Eskow is a freelance writer. Much of his work can be found on [eskow.substack.com](http://eskow.substack.com). His weekly program, *The Zero Hour*, can be found on cable television, radio, Spotify, and podcast media. He is a senior advisor with Social Security Works.