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MARJORIE HOLYOAK  
DIRECTOR, AUDIENCE SERVICES  
CBS/BROADCAST GROUP

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RATHER (Voice over): "I have a dream." Could it have been more than 18 years ago, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and one of the largest crowds ever assembled in Washington? Today, on what would have been Dr. King's 53rd birthday, some 8,000 people relived that historic event on the Washington Mall. And Bill Moyers in his commentary tonight, also remembers.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.: I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up, live out the true meaning of its creed. We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal.

BILL MOYERS: It didn't seem so radical a speech. But the next day, a top official of the FBI called it demagogic, and said Martin Luther King, Jr. would be—quote—"The most dangerous Negro of the future."

KING: Free at last, free at last, thank God almighty, we are free at last.

(People chanting song about freedom)

MOYERS: He would be dangerous, all right, but not as the FBI reckoned. He would be dangerous because he would use America's own ideals to change reality.

KING: I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.

MOYERS: I was in the crowd that day and heard him say that freedom is everyone's cause. Only later would you realize the heresy this inspired. For in a society dependent upon a servant class, it is dangerous to demand not only respect for equality, but action to achieve it. Lincoln had done so a century earlier and been martyred. Now King would push the moral logic of America's revolution to its ultimate implication and be martyred too.

The fateful step came when he denounced the war in Vietnam. Near the end of his life, he saw the issue to be not just black and white, but rich and poor, war and peace. "The war must stop," he said, "it is stealing from America's social needs. We cannot fight the war in Vietnam," he said, "and win the war against poverty at home."

KING: 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. And then came the buildup in Vietnam, and I watched this program broken and eviscerated as if it were some idle, political plaything of a society gone mad on war. And I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continue to draw men and skills and money, like some demonic destructive suction tube.

MOYERS: He was now, more than ever, the outsider. White segregationists he had already challenged. Now even liberals criticized him. He had attacked the idea of an imperial state. He had linked inequality to militarism. He had moved beyond civil rights to human rights. Moral equality, he said, requires economic justice. The preacher had become the prophet, and on the mountaintop, he had discovered a very old truth: that without justice, there is for the poor only disruption and suffering. He was indeed dangerous.

We cannot know what course Martin Luther King might have taken if he had lived. But for sure, he would have been appalled by the growing inequality between rich and poor. He would have been angry at reports from Washington that military spending may cost another \$750-billion over the one-and-a-half-trillion dollars already planned for the next five years. And he would have been filled with both sorrow and rage at the sight this week of thousands of poor people lined up for hours in the January cold of the nation's capital to wait for a few pounds of surplus government cheese. His murder cost us more than his life. It cost us his voice, and his conscience.

(ANNOUNCEMENTS)