



## Module 3, Unit 1, Lesson 2

### Addressing the Triple Evils through Nonviolence365®

#### Directions:

Have students read the Lesson Content Overview either alone or in small groups of two or three. When completed, students should answer the following questions:

1. What is a guaranteed income and what was Dr. King's view on a guaranteed income?
2. Dr. King believed two groups in our society already received a guaranteed income- who are the two groups?
3. Do you agree with Dr. King's position on addressing poverty, racism and war? If so why, and if not why?
4. What are the psychological advantages of addressing poverty and are they still relevant today?
5. Have you experienced racism or seen a racist act committed? If so, how did you respond in the past, and how would you react now?
6. As you reflect on Dr. King's position regarding America 's involvement in the war in Vietnam, do you believe his response would apply today? If so, how and if not, explain why?

## Lesson Content Overview

### Poverty

More than one in ten people in America do not have jobs. Youth have even higher rates of unemployment. Increasing taxes is an issue. Every time you buy new clothes, music, or books, you pay sales tax, and you should care. The National Alliance to End Homelessness reports that 580,466 people as of 2022 were homeless in the United States – 70% are individuals and 30% are families with children.<sup>1</sup> According to the source, 408,891 are chronically homeless with the rate of unsheltered homeless on the rise between 2006 and 2022. A missed paycheck, a health crisis, or an unpaid bill can quickly push many families over the edge of homelessness. The US economic system does not adequately support those at the lowest skill levels, even if they are willing to work - leading to unemployment and millions of "working poor." You are responsible for responding and participating in creative ways to help provide or secure job training, education, and other means to serve your fellow man.

The following excerpt gives us a view of Dr. King's position on poverty and how it should be addressed. It is an excerpt from the chapter entitled "Where We Are Going" in *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos of Community?*

#### Where We Are Going?

In the treatment of poverty nationally, one fact stands out: There are twice as many white poor as Negro poor in the United States. Therefore I will not dwell on the experiences of poverty that derive from racial discrimination, but will discuss the poverty that affects white and Negro alike.

Up to recently we have proceeded from a premise that poverty is a consequence of multiple evils: lack of education restricting job opportunities; poor housing which stultified home life and suppressed initiative; fragile family relationships which distorted personality development. The logic of this approach suggested that each of these causes be attacked one by one. Hence a housing program to transform living conditions, improved educational facilities to furnish tools for better job opportunities, and family counseling to create better personal adjustments were designed. In combination these measures were intended to remove the causes of poverty. While none of these remedies in itself is unsound, all have a fatal disadvantage. The programs have never proceeded on a coordinated basis or at a similar rate of development. Housing measures have fluctuated at the whims of legislative bodies. They have been piecemeal and pygmy. Educational reforms have been even more sluggish and entangled in bureaucratic stalling and economy dominated decisions. Family assistance stagnated in neglect and then suddenly was discovered to be the central issue on the basis of hasty and superficial studies. At no time has a total, coordinated and fully adequate program been conceived. As a consequence, fragmentary and spasmodic reforms have failed to reach down to the profoundest needs of the poor. In addition to the absence of coordination and sufficiency, the programs of the past all have another common failing -- they are

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<sup>1</sup> National Alliance to End Homelessness. "State of Homelessness: 2022 Edition." 2022. Retrieved from <https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/homelessness-statistics/state-of-homelessness/>

indirect. Each seeks to solve poverty by first solving something else. I am now convinced that the simplest approach will prove to be the most effective-- the solution to poverty is to abolish it directly by a now widely discussed measure: the guaranteed income. Earlier in this century this proposal would have been greeted with ridicule and denunciation as destructive of initiative and responsibility . At that time economic status was considered the measure of the individual's abilities and talents. In the simplistic thinking of that day the absence of worldly goods indicated a want of industrious habits and moral fiber.

We have come a long way in our understanding of human motivation and of the blind operation of our economic system . Now we realize that dislocations in the market operation of our economy and the prevalence of discrimination thrust people into idleness and bind them in constant or frequent unemployment against their will. The poor are less often dismissed from our conscience today by being branded as inferior and incompetent. We also know that no matter how dynamically the economy develops and expands it does not eliminate all poverty.

We have come to the point where we must make the non-producer a consumer or we will find ourselves drowning in a sea of consumer goods. We have so energetically mastered production that we now must give attention to distribution. Though there have been increases in purchasing power, they have lagged behind increases in production . Those at the lowest economic level, the poor white and Negro, the aged and chronically ill, are traditionally unorganized and therefore have little ability to force the necessary growth in their income. They stagnate or become even poorer in relation to the larger society.

The problem indicates that our emphasis must be two-fold. We must create full employment or we must create incomes. People must be made consumers by one method or the other. Once they are placed in this position , we need to be concerned that the potential of the individual is not wasted. New forms of work that enhance the social good will have to be devised for those for whom traditional jobs are not available.

We are likely to find that the problems of housing and education, instead of preceding the elimination of poverty , will themselves be affected if poverty is first abolished . The poor transformed into purchasers will do a great deal on their own to alter housing decay. Negroes, who have a double disability, will have a greater effect on discrimination when they have the additional weapon of cash to use in their struggle.

Beyond these advantages, a host of positive psychological changes inevitably will result from widespread economic security . The dignity of the individual will flourish when the decisions concerning his life are in his own hands, when he has the assurance that his income is stable and certain, and when he knows that he has the means to seek self-improvement . Personal conflicts between husband, wife and children will diminish when the unjust measurement of human worth on a scale of dollars is eliminated.

Two conditions are indispensable if we are to ensure that the guaranteed income operates as a consistently progressive measure. First, it must be pegged to the median income of society, not the lowest levels of income. To guarantee an income at the floor would simply perpetuate welfare standards and freeze into the society's poverty conditions. Second, the guaranteed income must be dynamic; it must automatically increase as the total social income grows. Were it permitted to remain static under growth conditions, the recipients would suffer a relative decline. If periodic reviews disclose that the whole national income has risen, then the guaranteed income would have to be adjusted upward by the same percentage. Without these safeguards a creeping retrogression would occur, nullifying the gains of security and stability.

This proposal is not a "civil rights" program, in the sense that that term is currently used. The program would benefit all the poor, including the two-thirds of them who are white. I hope that both Negro and white will act in coalition to effect this change, because their combined strength will be necessary to overcome the fierce opposition we must realistically anticipate.

Our nation's adjustment to a new mode of thinking will be facilitated if we realize that for nearly forty years two groups in our society have already been enjoying a guaranteed income. Indeed, it is a symptom of our confused social values that these two groups turn out to be the richest and the poorest. The wealthy who own securities have always had an assured income; and their polar opposite, the relief client, has been guaranteed an income, however miniscule, through welfare benefits. The contemporary tendency in our society is to base our distribution on scarcity, which has vanished, and to compress our abundance into the overfed mouths of the middle and upper classes until they gag with superfluity. If democracy is to have breadth of meaning, it is necessary to adjust this inequity. It is not only moral, but it is also intelligent. We are wasting and degrading human life by clinging to archaic thinking. The curse of poverty has no justification in our age. It is socially as cruel and blind as the practice of cannibalism at the dawn of civilization, when men ate each other because they had not yet learned to take food from the soil or to consume the abundant life around them. The time has come for us to civilize ourselves by the total, direct and immediate abolition of poverty.

## **Racism**

Many people experience the effects of both institutional and individual racism daily. In many instances, African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans have faced inequities in law and administration of justice.

Dr. King taught us to align our actions and response to prejudice and discrimination with our ethical and moral beliefs. We are challenged daily with opportunities to respond with courage or cowardice when prejudice and bigotry confront us. Making the right choice when the masses tug at you to go along with the crowd and respond to situations with violence will be a constant challenge to your nonviolent stance. Dr. King states, "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

You, using Nonviolence365®, can address racism in your school by working with the students, teachers and administrators to establish clear anti-racism policies and by encouraging the development of a race-relations office. Only by openly discussing these issues can we ever hope to have them resolved. Issues can be discussed by implementing a campus awareness program, developing orientation sessions and mini-workshops to address racism in your school.

## **War**

Youth today must be concerned about war because of its direct impact on their generation. The vast majority of individuals in the military are young people under the age of twenty-one. Using words applicable today, Dr. King stated, "A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death." In 2022, the United States government set aside over \$1.64 trillion in spending for Defense, and only \$637.7 billion was spent on the US Department of Education. These statistics provide even more reason for young people to become involved.<sup>2</sup>

"Have we not come to such an impasse in the modern world that we must love our enemies - or else? The chain reaction of evil - hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars - must be broken, or else we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation." Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

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<sup>2</sup> USASpending.gov. "Department of Education, Spending Profile" 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.usaspending.gov/agency/department-of-education?fy=2022>; USASpending.gov. "Department of Defense (DOD)." September 29, 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.usaspending.gov/agency/department-of-defense?fy=2022>.