



**Eugene Patterson**

## **MLK: Where The Action Is?**

WASHINGTON — The liberal Washington Post said Thursday that many who have listened to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. with respect in the past "will never again accord him the same confidence. He has diminished his usefulness to his cause, to his country and to his people. And that is a great tragedy." The Atlanta Negro leader deliberately dumped a hod of bricks on his own head when he narrowed his base in the civil rights movement to the confines of the Vietnam "peace movement."

But the civil rights movement as it was practiced non-violently under Dr. King was in trouble anyway. His demonstrations had won their big battles. The antipoverty program he advocated had been hiring the old militant leaders and moving them off the streets and into offices where they were invited to perform instead of protest.

A fringe of "black power" advocates stole the stage. For all their admirable goals of instilling pride of race in the Negro, their technique was a dangerous reverse demagoguery and a ready resort to violence.

The riots that ensued were disastrous for the civil rights movement. After each outburst of lawlessness and vandalism, white support dwindled, anti-Negro enmities hardened, and civil rights leaders struggled to minimize the damage with cooling-off periods that broke the momentum of the movement.

Then as the black power racists began expelling whites, who used to make up a big contingent of the nonviolent demonstrations, the war in Vietnam gave these white youngsters somewhere else to go.

The same university campuses that supplied manpower and money for the civil rights movement are preoccupied almost exclusively now with the peace-in-Vietnam protests. That's where the action is, all of a sudden, for the white kids who have been told by Stokely Carmichael that the Negro doesn't need them any more.

Dr. King must have watched this breaking up of a rational civil rights movement with deep dismay.

Without questioning his obviously deep-felt convictions about Vietnam, one can see that he is now in position to salvage at least some of the dissipated following of the civil rights movement, assuming a drastically narrow base is better than no base at all.

Yet there is disappointment among many who had hoped Dr. King would somehow overcome the obstacles and revitalize a responsible movement within the civil rights arena itself, and not follow the black power hotheads into the emotional tangle of foreign policy. This he failed to do. It is probably right to call it a tragedy. It now seems likely that the less spectacular but harder working old organizations like the NAACP and the Urban League will have to take up the burden of new responsibilities if the civil rights cause is to have continuity hereafter.