King's speech

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Q: I Googled for the title and content of Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech at K-State just three months before he was assassinated, but found nothing. What did King say in that speech? And why wasn't someone of his stature included as a Landon Lecture?

A: What? You mean Google didn't solve all the world's problems? Zounds! Sorry for the sarcasm. Let's address your second question first.

The Landon Lecture series, as you imply, clearly now offers the most prominent podium on campus — if not the entire state. It brought in President Bush and Donald Rumsfeld last year, for instance. On Friday, incidentally, the next Landon brings former Saudi ambassador Prince Turk al-Faisal to town to speak at McCain Auditorium.

But in January of 1968, that wasn't clear, according to Pat Patton of the university archives. The Landon Lecture series had begun with one speech — by Gov. Alfred M. Landon, the series namesake. There were three in 1967: Ralph McGill, then-California Gov. Ronald Reagan and Gov. George Romney.

"It was in its infancy," she said of the Landon series.

King was invited here for Jan. 19, 1968, as part of the "All-University Convocation Lecture Series" which was a bigger deal at the time, Patton said. Previous speakers in that series included Supreme Court Justice Byron "Whizzer" White, Sen. J. William Fulbright, and columnist Art Buchwald. Other speakers in the series included Dr. Benjamin Spock, author Arthur C. Clarke (speaking in 1969 on "Life in the Year 2001"!), and basketball great Bill Russell.

That lecture series has morphed into the "distinguished lecturers" series, which tends to focus on academics. The Landons have sort of taken over the higher-profile political stuff.

In other words, "I don't think it was intended as a slight," Patton said.