

# King brings message of solidarity to K-State

The following is excerpted from a speech by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. during a Jan. 19, 1968, All-University Convocation in Ahearn Field House. The speech is courtesy of University Archives.

There seems to be a desperate, poignant question on the lips of thousands and millions of people all over our nation and all over the world. They are asking whether we have made any real progress in the area of race relations.

In seeking to answer this question I always seek to avoid, on the one hand, a superficial optimism and, on the other hand, a deadening pessimism. I always try to answer it by giving what I consider a realistic position. It seems to me that the realistic position is that we have made significant strides in the struggle for racial justice, but that we have a long, long way to go before the problem is solved. And so, as I think about the future of integration, I would like to use this realistic position as the basis for our thinking together.

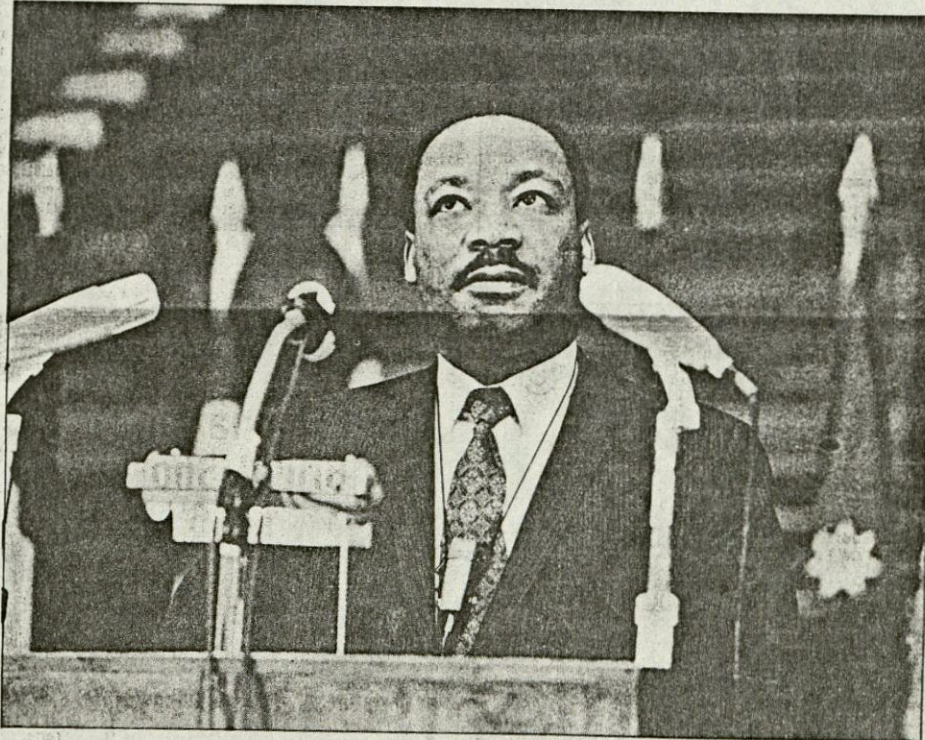
We have come a long, long way but we still have a long, long way to go before we have a truly integrated and just society. Now there is no disagreement that we have come a long, long way. And I would like to point out that the Negro, himself, has come a long, long way in re-evaluating his own intrinsic worth...

Now let me say that if we are to go the additional distance to make justice a reality, and truly integrated society a reality, we are going to have to do something about it. And may I remind you that the struggle now is much more difficult. Over the last 10 or 12 years, we were struggling to end segregation and the syndrome of deprivation surrounding that system. Many people supported us in that struggle. They were honestly outraged when they saw the brutality that we faced from a Jim Clark in Selma, or a Bull Connor in Birmingham. So out of a sense of decency they rose up and supported that struggle.

Some of the people that have supported that struggle are not supporting it so well today. It really boils down to the fact that they were doing the right thing for the wrong reason. T. S. Eliot says somewhere that there is no greater heresy than to do the right thing for the wrong reason. A lot of people supported us in Selma and Birmingham because they were against Bull Connor and they were against Jim Clark — and not because they were for genuine equality for the black man. And the new era of the struggle is now a struggle for genuine equality...

If we are going this additional distance, we are in dire need of a massive action program all over our country to get rid of the last vestiges of racism and its external effects. In short, the problem will not work itself out. We must continue to work at it with zeal and with determination.

...We must get rid of two or three myths that are still being disseminated around our society. One is what I refer to as the "myth of time." It is the notion that only time can solve the problem. And I know there are those sincere people who say to civil rights leaders and persons working for civil rights, "You are pushing things too fast; you must slow up for a while." And then they have a way of saying: "Now just be nice and be patient and continue to pray, and in a hundred or two hundred years the problem will work itself out, because only time can solve the



The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. delivers a speech Jan. 19, 1968, in Ahearn Field House. Despite his personal dedication to non-violence, King was shot April 4, 1968, in Memphis, Tenn., by James Earl Ray. Today is the first observance of a national holiday in his memory.

myth. And it is that time is neutral. Time can either be used constructively or destructively. And I am sad to say that I am absolutely convinced that the forces of ill will in our nation, the people on the wrong side in our nation — the extreme rightists of our nation, have often used time much more effectively than the people of good will. And it may well be that we may have to repent in this generation, not merely for the vitriolic words and violent action of the bad people, but for the appalling silence and indifference of the good people who sit around and say "wait on time."

...And there is another myth that is disseminated a great deal. It is the notion that legislation has no role to play in establishing justice and in moving toward an integrated society. The argument here is that you must change the heart of man and you cannot change the heart through legislation. You cannot change morals. I would be the first one to say that hearts must be changed.

...I realize that, if we are to have a truly integrated society, white people are going to have to treat Negro people right — not just because the law says it, but because it is natural, and because it is right, and because the Negro is the white man's brother. I would be the first to say that we will never have a

obedient to the unenforceable.

But after saying that, I must point out the other side. It may be true that morality cannot be legislated. But behavior can be regulated. It may be true that the law cannot change the heart. But it can restrain the heartless. It may be true that the law cannot make a man love me. But it can restrain him from lynching me, and I think that is pretty important, also. And so while the law may not change the hearts of men, the law can change the habits of men if it is vigorously enforced...

Another myth surrounding us is what I call an exaggerated use of the "boot-strap" philosophy. People say to the Negroes: "You must lift yourself by your own boot straps."

It does not help the Negro for unfeeling, insensitive whites to say to him that ethnic groups that voluntarily came to this country 150 years ago have now risen beyond the Negro, who has been here more than 244 years but was brought here in chains involuntarily. The people who project this argument never seem to realize that no other ethnic groups have been slaves on American soil. They do not stop to realize that America made the Negro's color a stigma...

...I guess this is all right to say to a man that he should lift himself up by his own boot straps, but it is cruel jest to say to a bootless

The nation has a debt that it must pay. The longer it refuses to pay that debt, the more problems there will be — the more we will see the crisis in our cities, developing and developing. There should be a massive program, a kind of Bill of Rights for the disadvantaged, that will really grapple with the slums, the economic problem generally, and all the things that I have tried to outline. We have the resources as a nation to do that. The question is whether America has the will. I am afraid that we have such mixed-up priorities nationally that without hard work we will not respond to this crisis.

I submit to you today that we spend \$500,000 for every Viet Cong we end up killing in Vietnam, and yet we spend only \$53 a year for every person characterized as poverty stricken in the so-called war against poverty. I am afraid that the national administration is more concerned about winning what I consider an unjust, ill-considered war in Vietnam than it is about winning the war against poverty right here at home...

Somebody said to me not too long ago: "Dr. King, don't you feel that you will have to talk more in line with the administration's policy from now on, because many people who once respected you will lose respect for you and this will hurt the budget of your organization? Don't you think you are going

And I had to look at that person and say: "I am sorry, sir, but you do not know me. I am not a consensus leader. I do not determine what is right and wrong by looking at the budget of my organization or by taking a Gallup poll of majority opinion. Ultimately, a genuine leader is not a searcher for consensus but a molder of consensus."

On some positions, cowards ask the question: "Is it safe?" Expediency asks the question: "Is it politic?" Vanity asks the question: "Is it popular?" But conscience asks the question: "Is it right?" There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular. He must take it because conscience tells him that he is right. And that is where I stand today. Suffice it to say the economic problem is real. If we are to go this additional distance, we must work passionately...

Maybe our world is in dire need of a new organization, the International Association for the Advancement of Creative Maladjustment — an association of men and women who will be a maladjusted as the Prophet Amos who, in the midst of injustices of his day, cried in words that echo across the centuries: "Let justice run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream;" as maladjusted as Abraham Lincoln who, in the midst of his vacillations, finally came to see that this nation could not survive half-slave and half-free; as maladjusted as Thomas Jefferson who, in the midst of an age amazingly adjusted to slavery, etched across the pages of history words lifted to cosmic proportions: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness;" as maladjusted as Jesus of Nazareth, who could say in the midst of the military machine of the Roman Empire: "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword."

Through such maladjustment, we will be able to emerge from the bleak and desolate midnight of man's inhumanity to man, to the bright and glittering daybreak of freedom and justice...

Our destiny somehow is tied up with the destiny of America. Before the Pilgrim fathers landed at Plymouth, we were here. Before Jefferson wrote the beautiful words of the declaration, we were here. Before the words of the Star Spangled Banner were written, we were here. And for more than two centuries our forebears labored here without wages. They made cotton kings, and they built the homes of their masters, in the midst of the most humiliating and oppressive conditions. Yet, out of bottomless vitality they continue to grow and develop. If the inexpressible coat of slavery could not stop us, the opposition that we now face — including the white backlash — will surely fail.

With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mounting despair the stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With faith we will be able to speed up the day when all of God's children all over this nation — black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics — will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual. "Free at last! Free at

LAST! THANK God Almighty  
WE ARE FREE at last! !!