

King's death ignited riots, celebration

STEPHANIE FUQUA

Collegian

Sunday was the 25th anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s death. This is the second in a four-part series discussing King's visit to K-State and racism in Manhattan, then and now.

Martin Luther King Jr. never got to see his promised land.

On April 4, 1968, King was standing on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tenn. He was shot in the neck by an unknown assailant and died less than an hour later.

A tribute to King was held on the next day at K-State at All Faiths Chapel. Students, faculty and Manhattan residents gathered to mourn and pay tribute to King.

William Tremmel, director of religious activity at K-State, spoke, along with several priests.

"He was my man," Tremmel said. "When he died, I wept."

Some Manhattan citizens said they felt shock. Others cheered. Paul Kjorlic, a K-State student, wrote a letter to the Collegian expressing his indignation to the campus.

"What is wrong with the American people?" he wrote. "Tonight Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated ... My fellow residents of Marlatt Hall (second floor, west wing, to be particular) greeted the news of the assassination with cheers that echoed down the hallways. In an air of great joy and happiness, the informed student spread the word to the uninformed, who also joined in the 'celebration.'"

Mrs. Warren Longren wrote to the Manhattan Mercury, expressing her disgust at the applause that greeted the announcement in the Veteran of Foreign Wars meeting.

The Mercury polled several people for their reactions the day after King died. Most didn't seem to understand what King meant to some people.

"I was surprised," Mrs. Jerry Roberts, Manhattan, said. "Everybody said he was for peace. I don't believe this. He started his talks peacefully, but they always ended leading to violence. I can't say I'm sorry, though I'm sorry he died this way."

Thomas Taylor, also of Manhattan, offered an opposing viewpoint.

"I was quite stunned at the loss of a person who will go down in history as a truly great man

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Violence erupts after King assassination

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and a truly great American, one who seemed to put humanity above himself or even his nation," Taylor said.

On Sunday, April 7, 2,000 people met in City Park and marched to the Pilgrim Baptist Church at the intersection of Ninth and Yuma streets, picking up 100 people along the way for the memorial service.

Across the nation and at home, the assassination was the last straw for many black people, and some let their anger take over.

Memphis exploded into six hours of riots, looting, arson and shooting. Black-power advocate Stokely Carmichael urged black people to arm themselves with guns and take to the streets in retaliation for the shooting.

Some of them took his advice. In the days following the shooting, violence erupted in the form of fires, shooting and looting in Washington, D.C., New York, Memphis and Baltimore.

On the campus of Mississippi Valley State College, two black students were wounded when highway patrolmen fired at 300 student marchers. At Florida A&M University at Tallahassee, snipers shot bows and arrows and guns at police.

On April 6, 5,000 federal troops were sent to Chicago. Three days after the death of King, the death toll stood at 18, half of the victims being from Chicago. More than 200 people had been injured, and nausea gas was used to try to quell the rioting. Maryland Gov. Spiro

Agnew declared a state of emergency.

On April 8, thousands of black people, Coretta Scott King and her children included, marched silently through Memphis in memory of King.

Thousands of people in Kansas and Missouri also took part in memorial marches. About 10,000 people assembled at the Liberty Memorial Mall in Kansas City. In Wichita, 3,000 people attended a three-hour rally for King.

On the day of King's funeral, the violence struck home in Kansas City, as 1,000 black people marched on City Hall but were dispersed with tear gas and National Guard troops. Rioting followed for several days.

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