

Martin Luther King Jr.

Jan. 15, 1929-April 4, 1968

Every now and then I guess we all think realistically about that day when we will be victimized with what is life's final common denominator -- that something we call death. We all think about it. And every now and then I think about my own death, and I think about my own funeral. And I don't think of it in a morbid sense. Every now and then I ask myself, "What is it that I would want said?" And I leave the word to you this morning.

If any of you are around when I have to meet my day, I don't want a long funeral. And if you get somebody to deliver the eulogy, tell them not to talk too long. Every now and then I wonder what I want them to say. Tell them not to mention that I have a Nobel Peace Prize, that isn't important. Tell them not to mention that I have three or four hundred other awards, that's not important. Tell them not to mention where I went to school.

I'd like somebody to mention that day, that . . . "Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to give his life serving others." I'd like for somebody to say that day . . . "Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to love somebody." I want you to say that day, that . . . "I tried to be right on the war question." I want you to be able to say that day, that . . . "I did try to feed the hungry." And I want you to be able to say that day, that . . . "I did try, in my life, to clothe those who were naked." I want you to say, on that day, that . . . "I did try, in my life, to visit those who were in prison." I want you to say that . . . "I tried to love and serve humanity."

Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice; say that I was a drum major for peace; I was a drum major for righteousness. And all of the other shallow things will not matter. I won't have any money to leave behind. I won't have the fine and luxurious things of life to leave behind. But I just want to leave a committed life behind.

And that's all I want to say . . . if I can help somebody as I pass along, if I can cheer somebody with a word or song, if I can show somebody he's traveling wrong, then my living will not be in vain. If I can do my duty as a Christian ought, if I can bring salvation to a world once wrought, if I can spread the message as the master taught, then my living will not be in vain.

Excerpt from the sermon of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., preached at Ebenezer Baptist Church on Feb. 4, 1968 and played at his funeral on April 9, 1968.



John Bruce/ Daily Nebraskan

Professors say progress made, but equality not yet achieved

By Victoria Ayotte
Senior Editor

Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement made great progress in erasing discriminatory laws, but two University of Nebraska-Lincoln professors say King's dream has yet to be fulfilled.

Although minorities no longer face blatant discrimination, they still face the barriers of economic oppression, said John Gruhl, associate professor of political science.

America's black lower class is possibly worse off than it was in the 1960s, Gruhl said. The poverty problem is a more subtle form of discrimination, he said, and will be the civil rights challenge of the future.

Gruhl said the civil rights successes of the 1960s took care of the "easiest part of the problem" -- putting issues on the public

agenda and eliminating discriminatory laws. But the public hasn't been interested in civil rights problems recently, he said, because of actions taken by the Reagan administration.

The administration has argued against affirmative action, Gruhl said, and sent a signal that it is "not necessary to comply."

Michael Combs, associate professor of political science, said the movement led by King was successful in legal and constitutional terms.

Combs said civil rights success has not been "as steady or as great" in political or economic terms.

Economic barriers are as great as before the Civil Rights Movement, Combs said. The gap between black income and white income has not narrowed and the unemployment rate is still greater for minorities, he said.

Gruhl and Combs agree, however, that the

strife of American blacks would be much greater without the work of King.

Gruhl said King is a hero to him because of his accomplishments and the hope he gave to people.

"I think he was very important in helping to get the Civil Rights Movement off the ground and giving it some real moral power," Gruhl said.

Combs said he also thinks King was a great man who made a difference.

"I would compare (King) to any man involved in public life in the last 2,000 years," Combs said. "He had the ability to state the problem and speak to the white community."

Combs said he personally has seen some civil rights successes because he has not faced the discrimination his father encountered.

Gruhl said it is important to celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day, because King was a

symbol of the Civil Rights Movement.

Combs said he also thinks it's important to remember King.

"He's done as much for white America as he has done for black America," Combs said.

Paul Miles, special assistant for minority affairs to Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs James Griesen, said there has been great progress in civil rights, but "that's not to say it's a satisfactory level of progress."

"We've come a long way, but we still have a long way to go," Miles said.

Miles said there is "no doubt" that King made an impact on society.

Miles said it is important to celebrate King's holiday, so his efforts are not forgotten.

If his efforts are forgotten, the whole civil rights message has been "wasted," he said.

"We have to not let the efforts he died for rest," Miles said.

Activities to honor King holiday

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln celebrates Martin Luther King Jr. Day today with a series of events in the Nebraska Union and the Culture Center.

"Eye on the Prize," a video chronicling the Civil Rights Movement, will be shown from 10 a.m. to noon and from 1 to 4 p.m. in the Nebraska Union.

At noon, the "I Have a Dream" address will be played following a welcoming address. King's last speech will be shown in the union after the "I Have a Dream" speech.

Tonight's events at the Culture Center begin at 6 p.m. with a welcoming address, followed by the film "Montgomery to Memphis" and a speech by Paul Alexander, a civil rights leader and counselor for Omaha Public Schools.

Paul Miles, special assistant for minority affairs to Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs James Griesen, said Alexander will speak on the past and present Civil Rights Movement.

At 7:30 p.m., participants in the day's activities will hold a candlelight vigil. They will march from the Culture Center to the state Capitol.

The events are sponsored by Griesen, black faculty and staff and the Afrikan People's Union, Miles said.

Bennett Martin Public Library, 14th and N streets, will show three films continuously from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. today. They include "Martin Luther King Jr. Commemorative Collection," "Montgomery to Memphis" and "Martin Luther King Jr. Day."

"I have a dream today."

...I have a dream that one day "every valley shall be exalted and every hill and mountain shall be made low. The rough places will be made plain and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together."

This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with. With this faith we shall be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day. And this will be the day. This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with new meaning, "My country 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride, from every mountain side, let freedom ring." And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true.

So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire; let freedom ring from the

mighty mountains of New York; let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania; let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado; let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California. But not only that. Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia; let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee; let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi. From every mountainside, let freedom ring.

And when this happens, and when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all God's children, 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."

Excerpt from "I have a dream" Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. August 28, 1963 Lincoln Memorial, Washington, D.C.