

His message lingers

During controversial 1968 speech on integration, King calls on K-State students to promote equality

He came on a mission. He came with a vision.

Martin Luther King Jr., winner of the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize, came to K-State on Jan. 19, 1968, for a Convocation Series Lecture and spoke to 7,000 students and faculty in Ahearn Field House about "The Future of Integration."

"King was well received by many people," said an assistant university archivist Patricia Patton who remembers the day. King spoke to Patton in the press room located in the K-State Student Union. "He was a calm and gracious man."

In his speech, King said people throughout the nation had been asking him if the country had made any real progress in the area of race relations. "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."

King discussed the issue of violence.

"I am still convinced that nonviolence is the most potent weapon available to the oppressed people in their struggle for freedom and human dignity," he said. "I am still convinced that violence creates many more problems than it solves."

He spoke pointedly to K-State students about what he believed for the future and for coming generations.

"I think that you who sit today under the sound of my voice may well have the answer, for it is the student generation that is saying to America that there must be a radical reordering of priorities," King said. "It is the student generation that is saying to America there must be a



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REV. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. VISITS WITH K-STATE PRESIDENT JAMES MCCAIN IN 1968 ON THE DAY KING DELIVERED A CONVOCATION LECTURE ABOUT RACIAL INTEGRATION.

revolution of values. Students are forcing America to review its values."

King expressed his optimism that freedom for all races would be achieved.

"We are going to win our freedom, because both the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of the Almighty God are embodied in our echoing demands," he said. "And so I can sing, 'We Shall Overcome.' We shall overcome because the universe bends

toward justice ... we 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!'"

King's appearance created no small stir for then K-State President James McCain and his administration.

Ken Thomas, McCain's director of university communications, recalls the controversy the president encountered for King's visit.

"Conservative fringes gave McCain some heat," Thomas said.

In McCain's May 1968 commencement address, the president acknowledged that he took criticism for allowing a wide range of ideas to be presented on campus.

McCain read to the class this excerpt from one testy letter.

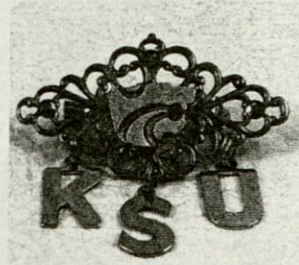
"I read with dismay that you have invited the Communist stooge, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., to use as a platform ... our state university ... I urge that his engagement be cancelled."

McCain defended the appearances of King and other 1968 speakers Democratic presidential candidate Robert Kennedy and New York Gov. Nelson Rockefeller. He said the university's mission in the area of public controversy is "not to make ideas safe for young minds, but to make young minds safe for ideas."

Although King died from an assassin's bullet only two and a half months after speaking at K-State, his visit and message still linger today in campus activities every January around Martin Luther King Jr. Day. His memory is honored through an annual observance week and a keynote lecturer. ▼

Jennifer Newberry

Next in May ...



AS A RESULT OF THE UNIVERSITY'S LOGO LICENSING AND THE POWERCAT'S POPULARITY, COTTAGE INDUSTRIES ARE SPRINGING UP, SUCH AS KGIFTS, WHICH MAKES AND SELLS K-STATE JEWELRY.

W.F. KING, MARTIN LUTHER, JR. CONVOCAATION