

V.F. CONVOCATIONS

KING, MARTIN LUTHER, JR.  
JAN 19, 1968

# King discusses civil rights in final public collegiate speech

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*Editor's note: The K-State Collegian published the following story when Martin Luther King came to speak at the university on Jan. 19, 1968, just a few months before he was shot in April 1968. This piece is the first in a weekly series of archival stories published in previous Collegians. We ask readers to enjoy this taste of history.*

Martin Luther King Jr. today stressed the "long, long way to go" in the struggle for civil rights in a speech today at Ahearn Field house.

King attempted to answer the "desperate question, whether there has been any real progress in the Negro revolution." He spoke about the history of the struggle and the future solutions to the more than 7,200 persons in attendance at Ahearn.

"I try to present a realistic position," King said. "There have been significant strides for racial justice - but we have a long, long way to go."

He mentioned the "new Negro - ready to sacrifice to

be free." There were two turning points in the revolution - legal and psychological. But even with all the progress, he said, "we can't end here."

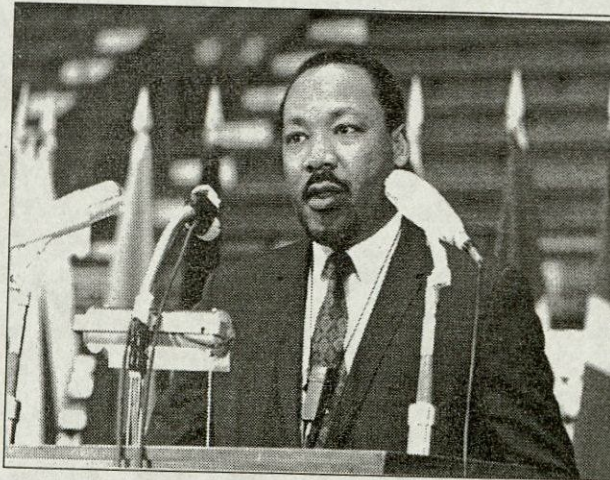
"No area of our country can boast a clean hand in the realm of brotherhood," King said. He spoke of racial prejudice in the legal system in Mississippi, of the "burn the church of your choice" attitudes of some in the South and the underemployment of Negroes everywhere.

King also explained the psychological sense of murder - how blacks work every day long and hard, but they make so little they can't function in mainstream economic life.

"The Negro often sees life as a corridor without exits," he said. He presented the "facts of Negro history - but to stop here with these developments is to wrap our progress in a package of superficiality."

King mentioned the civil rights bill of 1964, voting rights of 1965 and various student movements across the country - all part of the civil rights process.

"When the students sit down, they are standing up,



for the best American dream," he said.

The intrinsic worth of the Negro is something even the Negro did not realize for many years, King said.

"When Negroes first appeared in the United States in 1619, they were a thing to be used - not persons to be respected," he said.

The legal turning point came in 1954, when the Supreme Court pronounced the segregation laws constitutionally dead.

King said though he believes nonviolent methods of exposing moral defenses are most effective in fighting segregation, he could not con-

demn violence without also recognizing the intolerable conditions that create it.

"America has failed to hear the plight of the Negro, and he is calling for attention," he said. "As long as justice is postponed, we will be on the verge of social disruption."

At first, King said, some supporters were doing the right thing for the wrong reason, or because of hate rather than equal rights.

The Johnson administration, he said, is concentrating on winning an unjust, ill-conceived war in Vietnam instead of one on poverty.



PHOTOS COURTESY UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

Left: Martin Luther King Jr. speaks at Ahearn Field house on Jan. 19, 1968.  
Above: Martin Luther King Jr. Speaks with James A. McCain, K-State's university president 1950-1975.

- Compiled by Christina Hansen