

# King's speech

Ned Seaton  
Staff Writer

Q: I Googled for the title and content of Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech at K-State just three months before he was assassinated, but found nothing.



What did King say in that speech? And why wasn't someone of his stature included as a Landon Lecture?

A: What? You mean Google didn't solve all the world's problems? Zounds!

Sorry for the sarcasm.

Let's address your second question first.

The Landon Lecture series, as you imply, clearly now offers the most prominent podium on campus — if not the entire state. It brought in President Bush and Donald Rumsfeld last year, for instance. On Friday, incidentally, the next Landon brings former Saudi ambassador Prince Turki al-Faisal to town for a speech at McCain Auditorium.

But in January of 1968, that wasn't clear, according to Pat Patton of the university archives. The Landon Lecture series had begun with one speech — by Gov. Alfred M. Landon, the series namesake. There were three in 1967: Ralph McGill, then-California Gov. Ronald Reagan and Gov. George Romney.

"It was in its infancy," she said of the Landon series.

King was invited here for Jan. 19, 1968, as part of the "All-University Convocation Lecture Series" which was a bigger deal at the time, Patton said. Previous speakers in that series included Supreme Court Justice Byron "Whizzer" White, Sen. J. William Fulbright, and columnist Art Buchwald. Other speakers in the series included Dr. Benjamin Spock, author Arthur C. Clarke (speaking in 1969 on "Life in the Year 2001"(!)), and basketball great Bill Russell.

That lecture series has morphed into the "distinguished lecturers" series, which tends to focus on academics. The Landons have sort of taken over the higher-profile political stuff.

In other words, "I don't think it was intended as a slight," Patton said.

King's lecture drew 7,000 to Ahearn Fieldhouse, which was the biggest venue on campus. That was a very good crowd, Patton said, particularly because it was very cold that day.

King's speech that day has been in the news again because of the dedication of "Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Drive," another name for 17th Street. The dedication took place on the anniversary of the speech, which was King's last on a college campus.

It was called "The Future of Integration."

We were hoping to reprint it in its entirety around the time of the street dedication, but we've received no reply from the King Center in Atlanta, which owns the rights. So we'll just summarize:

King was trying to answer the question of "whether we have made any real progress in the area of race relations." His answer, according to the text of the speech: "...we have made significant strides in the struggle for racial justice, but...we have a long, long way to go before the problem is solved."

He went on to call for social, psychological and legislative change. "There should be a massive program, a king of Bill of Rights for the disadvantaged, that will really grapple with the slums, the economic problems generally, and all the things I have tried to outline," he said. "The question is whether America has the will."

He also criticized the Vietnam War, saying it was diverting money and energy from the "war against poverty right here at home," and from the struggle for civil rights. It also "victimized" the country "with the arrogance of power."

King, ultimately, was optimistic. "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."

His closing, which might have a familiar ring: "With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this 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 sign in the words of the old Negro spiritual, 'Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty! We are free at last!'"

You can submit a question to this column by e-mail to [questions@themercury.com](mailto:questions@themercury.com), or by regular mail to Questions, P.O. Box 787, Manhattan, KS 66505.

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