

Remembering MLK's visit to Albion College

Description

Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Portrait

This month's blog article was written by Salaina Catalano, '14. She is a History and Political Science double major and works in the archives.

On January 24, 2011 Albion College had its annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Convocation in Goodrich Chapel. Because I have a passion for history, I was very excited to attend an event designed to commemorate such an influential and legendary man. Dr. Wesley Dick, the Chairman of the History Department, and Mr. Robert Wall, retired history teacher at Albion High School, both spoke at the convocation. I learned that Professor Dick marched with Dr. King and is currently the Vice President of the Albion chapter of the NAACP. I started to cry a little when I learned that Dr. King visited Albion College in 1963. I was awe-inspired when I thought about MLK speaking in the very Chapel I was sitting in and meeting students and faculty in the very building I eat in every day. As children we grow up hearing history lessons and memories of Martin Luther King, but it was surreal to know that I have walked where he has and that I have heard about the cause he peacefully fought for in the very place he once spoke about it.

Because not very much was mentioned at the convocation about Dr. King's visit to Albion, I decided to utilize the resources of the College Archives, where I work. The front-page headline of the *Pleiad* dated March 8, 1963 is "King to Speak on 'American Dream'". The article includes a biography of Dr. King and information concerning his lecture, which was scheduled for Wednesday, March 13, 1963. In the *Pleiad* dated March 15, 1963 there is a follow-up story entitled, "'America Divides Personality' Says Martin Luther King, Jr." The article includes notable portions of his speech. According to the article, Dr. King spoke to over 1,400 in Goodrich Chapel about the problems with segregation. King said that three things needed to happen before the American Dream could be possible for all people: "We must make [the world] a brotherhood", the idea of superior and inferior races must end, and a non-violent action program must be started "to break down the barriers of discrimination and segregation." Dr. King mentioned two myths about civil rights: that time will solve all problems and the idea of "educational determinism" or believing that education, alone, will solve racial problems. When speaking about the situation of race in the United States, Dr. King summed up by saying, "America has been a schizophrenic personality tragically divided against herself. Racial segregation and the national philosophy that 'all men are created equal' are a strange paradox."

In the College History Files there is a folder dedicated to the celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day starting in 1963 with his visit. The first item in the folder is a newspaper article titled "Northern Segregation May Be More Serious". Dr. King apparently concluded by further discussing regional segregation: "The South is largely segregated. The North is desegregated legally, but integration is absent in both. The North may develop more tragic segregation, for it is in the North that many Negroes suffer deeper frustration." The most controversial part of the evening was when President Louis W. Norris announced at the end of the lecture that Dr. King would now answer "discriminating questions": the article asks if it "was a slip of the tongue or a subtle play on words".

After the program there was a reception in the Mary Sykes room of Baldwin Hall where over 100 people had the chance to meet and speak with Martin Luther King. The next document in the College History Files folder was a copy of a letter from Keith J. Fennimore, Associate Professor of English, to Dr. Martin Luther King, dated January 24, 1964. The letter congratulates Dr. King on recently being named "Man of the Year" by *Time* and informs him that his "presence here is still felt among us". Dr. Fennimore said that the Albion community is "slowly working toward 'The American Dream' about which [Dr. King] spoke so movingly".

I think that Dr. King's legacy is embedded in the Albion community and throughout the rest of the country. Perhaps his visit here changed the intolerant opinions of some, strengthened the honorable beliefs of others, and united the people of Albion College in a mission to end inequality. In Dr. King's words, we must believe in "an understanding, redemptive good will toward men, a willingness to go to any limits to restore community."

Bibliography:

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