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Museum Musings
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Remembering King Speak at K-State: Conclusion

“The nation has a debt that it must pay,” Martin Luther King Jr. told an audience of 7,000 students in Manhattan, Kansas, in January 1968. “The longer it refuses to pay that debt, the more problems there will be — the more we will see the crises in our cities, developing and developing.”

In his last address at a public university, King spoke about “The Future of Integration,” in which he uttered his famous line, “A riot is the language of the unheard.”

This article concludes with part 5 of his speech.

"I submit to you today that we spend \$500,000 for every Viet Cong we end up killing in Vietnam, and yet we spend only \$53 a year for every person characterized as poverty stricken in the so-called war against poverty. I am afraid that the national administration is more concerned about winning a what I consider an unjust, ill-considered war in Vietnam than it is about winning the war against poverty right here at home.

I raise my voice against that war because I have seen the damage that it has done to our nation. I see values being corroded and destroyed every day as a result of the war in Vietnam. It has diverted attention from civil rights. It has strengthened the military-industrial complex. It has destroyed the Geneva Accords. It is a war that places our nation in a position of really being against the self-determination of the Vietnamese people. It has placed us in a position of being what Mr. Fulbright has called 'arrogant,' of being victimized with the arrogance of power. This war has played havoc with our domestic destiny. For all of these reasons I have to take a stand against it.

"Somebody said to me not too long ago: 'Dr. King, don't you feel that you will have to talk more in line with the administration's policy from now on, because many people who once respected you will lose respect for you and this will hurt the budget of your organization. Don't you think you are going to have to change and stop talking about the war?' And I had to look at that person and say: 'I am sorry, sir, but you do not know me. I am not a consensus leader. I do not determine what is right and wrong by looking at the budget of my organization or by taking a Gallup poll of majority opinion. Ultimately, a genuine leader is not a searcher for consensus but a molder of consensus.'

"On some positions, cowards ask the question: 'Is it safe?' Expediency asks the question: 'Is it politic?' Vanity asks the question: 'Is it popular?' But conscience asks the question: 'Is it right?' There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular. He must take it because conscience tells him that he is right. And that is where I stand today. Suffice it to say the economic problem is real. If we are to go this additional distance, we must work passionately.

“There are certain technical words in every academic discipline that soon become stereotypes and cliches. Every academic discipline has a word that is probably used more than any other word in psychology. It is the word 'maladjusted.' ... Certainly we all want to avoid a maladjusted life....But there are some things in our society and in our world to which I am proud to be

maladjusted — to which I call upon all men of good will to be maladjusted until the good society is realized.

"I never intend to become adjusted to segregation and discrimination. I never intend to adjust myself to religious bigotry. I never intend to adjust myself to economic conditions that will take necessity from the many to give luxury to the few. I never intend to adjust myself to the madness of militarism or to the self-defeating effects of physical violence in a day when Sputniks, Explorers, and Geminis are dashing through outer space and guided ballistic missiles are carving highways of death through the stratosphere.

"No nation can ultimately win a war. It is no longer a choice between violence and non-violence. It is either non-violence or non-existence. The alternative to disarmament, the alternative to a suspension of nuclear testing, the alternative to strengthening the United Nations and thereby disarming the whole world, may well be a civilization plunged into the abyss of annihilation. And our earthly habitat will be transformed into an inferno that even the mind of Dante could not envision.

"Maybe our world is in dire need of a new organization, the International Association for the Advancement of Creative Maladjustment — an association of men and women who will be as maladjusted as the Prophet Amos who, in the midst of injustices of his day, cried in words that echo across the centuries: 'Let justice run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream;' as maladjusted as Abraham Lincoln who, in the midst of his vacillations, finally came to see that this nation could not survive half-slave and half-free; as maladjusted as Thomas Jefferson who, in the midst of an age amazingly adjusted to slavery, etched across the pages of history words lifted to cosmic proportions: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness;' as maladjusted as Jesus of Nazareth, who could say in the midst of the military machine of the Roman Empire: 'All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.'

"Through such maladjustment, we will be able to emerge from the bleak and desolate midnight of man's inhumanity to man, to the bright and glittering daybreak of freedom and justice.

I must admit that there are times when I get rather discouraged in the midst of set-backs — in the midst of what I see as constant vacillations and ambivalences of American white society. There are times that some of us begin to wonder whether this problem can be solved. But whenever I go out and around the colleges and universities of our country, and talk with many young people, I must honestly say to you that my hope is always renewed in those settings. 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. It is the student generation that is saying to American there must be a revolution of values, and is forcing America to review its values.

"President Johnson in his State of the Union message wondered why there is so much restlessness. He talked about material prosperity. He talked about the highways and the beautiful cars flowing on those highways. He talked about the seventy million television sets. And then he wanted to know why there is so much restlessness. I would like to answer the President by saying that there is restlessness in this society because we have allowed the means by which we live to outdistance the ends for which we live.

Young people are restless because they are tired of killing. They want to make love not war. young people are restless today because they are tired of the processes that are unfolding. Our national purpose and our national priorities are being questioned, and I see the hope within the young people of our generation.

"I conclude by saying our goal is freedom. And I believe we are going to get there. However much America strays away from it, the goal of America is freedom.

"Our destiny somehow is tied up with the destiny of America. Before the Pilgrim fathers landed at Plymouth, we were here. Before Jefferson wrote the beautiful words of the declaration, we were here. Before the words of the Star Spangled Banner were written, we were here. And for more than two centuries our forebears labored here without wages.

"They made cotton kings, and they built the homes of their masters, in the midst of the most humiliating and oppressive conditions. Yet, out of bottomless vitality they continue to grow and develop. If the inexpressible cost of slavery could not stop us, the opposition that we now face — including the white backlash — will surely fail. ...

"With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mounting despair the stone of hope. 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 sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, 'Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty we are free at last!'"

For comments or questions, please contact GearyHistory@gmail.com, or call 785-238-1666. The museum is open to visitors Tuesday through Saturday, 1-4 p.m.