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Press Release: The King Legacy - Thoughts From the Ursinus College Community

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News



The King Legacy: Thoughts from the UC Community

January 18, 2015

How the life and words of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. resonate on campus:

When Rev. Charles Rice was nine years old, he met Martin Luther King Jr. Years later, he met him again, through a book. It changed his life.

Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. came to Cornerstone Baptist Church in Brooklyn in 1966 to dedicate an education building. An excited nine-year-old Charles Rice and his mother went to the 3 p.m. service, and found seats in the packed church about 30 yards from the pulpit in an auxiliary section, with the hum of the crowd indicating great anticipation. The young Rice took some 12 photos with a borrowed Brownie camera, but the film did not advance. King arrived more than an hour late – it turns out he was delayed at a Meet the Press interview in Washington, D.C. But the speech was stirring, Rice recalled. “I felt fortunate, but I am not sure I understood how important it was until I was older. On April 4, 1968, when Rice was 11, he learned at a Boy Scout meeting that King had been assassinated.

Years later, 35,000 feet over the Atlantic ocean, Rev. Rice met Dr. King a second time. He was flying in a CFA fighter plane from Germany to Dover, Del., reading the book *Let The Trumpet Sound* by Stephen Oates, who wrote a book series about great leaders. That book, he said, “so profoundly affected me that I knew then and there that I had to make a contribution, to tackle the desperation and despair in my neighborhood and others.”

Rev. Rice applied to and was accepted to law school, but his Congresswoman, the esteemed Shirley Chisholm, advised him to take the pastoral path, and he entered a seminary. Upon ordination, he entered the field of higher education (at Colgate University), “where one can build a cadre of young people to made a difference. If you want to change the debate, you have to join it,” he said.

The book, he said, had given him insight into the particulars of King’s thinking, “a sense something could be done, a purpose. It made me recognize I had to lend my voice. It forced me to recognize that I had to help others develop their senses – in three distinct areas – a sense what it is to be human, a sense of history, and, finally, a sense of hope, imagination, and love.”

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Rev. Rice calls upon us to stand up for truth, justice, love and peace. "We should become as he became, a living embodiment," he said, and offers this passage from Dr. King:

"I still believe that freedom is the bonus you receive for telling the truth. Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. And I do not see how we will ever solve the turbulent problem of race confronting our nation until there is an honest confrontation with it and a willing search for the truth and a willingness to admit the truth when we discover it. And so I want to use as a title for my lecture tonight, "The Other America." And I use this title because there are literally two Americas. Every city in our country has this kind of dualism, this schizophrenia, split at so many parts, and so every city ends up being two cities rather than one. There are two Americas. One America is beautiful for situation. In this America, millions of people have the milk of prosperity and the honey of equality flowing before them. This America is the habitat of millions of people who have food and material necessities for their bodies, culture and education for their minds, freedom and human dignity for their spirits. In this America children grow up in the sunlight of opportunity. But there is another America. This other America has a daily ugliness about it that transforms the buoyancy of hope into the fatigue of despair.

In this other America, thousands and thousands of people, men in particular, walk the streets in search for jobs that do not exist. In this other America, millions of people are forced to live in vermin-filled, distressing housing conditions where they do not have the privilege of having wall-to-wall carpeting, but all too often, they end up with wall-to-wall rats and roaches. Almost forty percent of the Negro families of America live in sub-standard housing conditions. In this other America, thousands of young people are deprived of an opportunity to get an adequate education. Every year thousands finish high school reading at a seventh, eighth and sometimes ninth grade level. Not because they're dumb, not because they don't have the native intelligence, but because the schools are so inadequate, so over-crowded, so devoid of quality, so segregated if you will, that the best in these minds can never come out. Probably the most critical problem in the other America is the economic problem. There are so many other people in the other America who can never make ends meet because their incomes are far too low if they have incomes, and their jobs are so devoid of quality. And so in this other America, unemployment is a reality and under-employment is a reality. – *The Other America*, March 14, 1968.

Rev. Charles Rice is the Campus Chaplain and Visiting Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Religion.

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