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Dec. 7, 2000

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**Roger Wilkins, Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist,
Lawyer, Scholar to Address 11th Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Gospel
Festival at IWU**

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--A journalist who was part of the Washington Post's Pulitzer Prize-winning team that unmasked the Watergate scandal will headline the 11th annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., National Holiday Gospel Festival at Illinois Wesleyan University next month.

Roger Wilkins--newsman, author, scholar, and public servant--will deliver the gospel festival's keynote address on Jan. 14 (Sunday) at 5 p.m. in Westbrook Auditorium, Presser Hall (IWU's School of Music), 303 E. University, Bloomington. The speech is entitled, "The Civil Rights Movement in the 21st Century." Admission to Wilkins' speech is open to the public, free-of-charge.

Wilkins' speech will be followed by a 6:30 p.m. dinner in the Main Lounge of IWU's Memorial Student Center, 104 E. University St., Bloomington. Dinner tickets are \$10 a piece for adults, \$5 each for children, age 12 or younger. Tickets may be purchased at the Main Desk, IWU Memorial Student Center or by calling Corine Sims at 309/828-4602.

Prior to Wilkins' address, he will meet at 3 p.m. with IWU students to discuss civil-rights issues. This session will involve Paul Bushnell, professor of history, who teaches many courses involving civil-rights issues. This session will take place in the Davidson Room, IWU Memorial Student Center, 104 E. University St., Bloomington.

IWU will cap the National Holiday marking the birth of slain civil-rights leader and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., with a seven-hour gospel festival, beginning at 2 p.m. on Monday, Jan. 15, in Westbrook Auditorium, Presser Hall. The gospel festival is open to the public, free-of-charge.

Roger Wilkins

Wilkins is the Clarence J. Robinson Professor of History and American Culture at Virginia's George Mason University and a network commentator for National Public Radio.

In 1998 Wilkins was named board chairman of the NAACP's journal, *Crisis*, which his uncle, Roy Wilkins (1910-81), edited in the 1930s and 1940s before being

named NAACP acting secretary and then executive secretary, a post he held from 1955-77. Roger Wilkins' aunt, Marvel Cooke, was an assistant to W.E.B. DuBois at *Crisis* from 1928-30. DuBois (1868-1963), an NAACP founder, was editor of *Crisis*, the organization's monthly magazine, from 1910-34. The NAACP was founded in 1909 by black and white citizens committed to social justice. The Baltimore-based NAACP is the nation's largest civil-rights organization with 500,000 members.

"Roger Wilkins' appointment as chair of Crisis is a proud day for civil rights that links the past with the present and signals an exciting future for the Crisis journal," said Kweisi Mfume, NAACP president and chief executive officer, when Wilkins' appointment was announced on April 20, 1998.

Wilkins began his career as a welfare lawyer for local government in Cleveland. Subsequently, he moved to New York City, where he joined a law firm and specialized in commercial litigation. Five years later, he joined the federal government in Washington, D.C., where he remained for seven years. During this period, he served in the State, Justice, and Commerce departments. Wilkins eventually was named assistant attorney general, a post he held from 1966-69 in President Lyndon B. Johnson's administration.

After leaving the federal government, Wilkins was involved in philanthropic work for three years at the Ford Foundation. Subsequently, he launched a new career as a journalist, writing for the New York Times, Washington Post, and Washington Star.

"Roger Wilkins is perhaps best known," according to a biography, "for his role in exposing Watergate in the '70s--a feat that earned him the Pulitzer Prize along with Bob Woodward, Carl Bernstein" and the cartoonist, Herblock (Herbert Block) of the Washington Post.

After a short time as a member of the editorial-page staff of the Washington Post, he returned to New York City from 1974-79, where he was a member of the editorial board of the New York Times.

Wilkins returned to the nation's capital in 1980 to assume the role of associate editor of the Washington Star. Later, he moved to CBS News, where he became a network radio commentator. Wilkins joined National Public Radio a decade ago as a commentator.

Wilkins, the author of two books and at least 60 book reviews and op-ed articles, received a bachelor's degree and law degree from the University of Michigan.

The Gospel Festival

Corine Sims of Bloomington launched the gospel festival in 1991 as a way to perpetuate Martin Luther King, Jr.'s legacy. 2001 marks the 11th time Illinois Wesleyan has cosponsored the event.

The gospel festival is expected to attract numerous choirs, as well as soloists, singers, and dancers. Area elementary and junior high school students will receive awards for outstanding work in art, speech, and essay writing on themes associated with Martin Luther King, Jr.

Martin Luther King, Jr. and IWU

When Martin Luther King, Jr., visited Illinois Wesleyan in 1961, he addressed an audience of more than 500 at the annual Religious Emphasis Banquet. He also met with students in their classes and more informally as part of meal functions.

King returned to IWU in 1966 as a national leader of the civil-rights movement and the recipient of the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize; he donated the honor, valued at \$54,600, to the civil-rights movement. He addressed an audience of more than 3,000 at the Fred Young Fieldhouse, declaring: "We must build a greater America. It cannot be built on bombs. It cannot be built on riots. We must work to change the climate that makes for bitterness that causes individuals to turn to these types of self-destruction."

Three of King's children--Yolanda, Martin III, and Bernice--have brought their father's message of non-violent social change, social justice, and brotherhood to IWU. Vernon King, the slain civil-rights leader's nephew, twice addressed the Gospel Festival.

King and the Civil-Rights Movement

King first caught the nation's attention in 1956, when at the age of 27 he organized a boycott of the public transportation system in Montgomery, Ala., as a protest against racial discrimination.

King--the long-time champion of civil rights, school desegregation, and non-violent social change--is perhaps best remembered for the Aug. 28, 1963, Freedom March on Washington, D.C., which brought about 250,000 participants and much of the civil-rights movement's leadership to the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. King in his now-famous "I have a dream" speech, said, "I have a dream that one day, on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood . . .

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character . . . "

King was assassinated at age 39 by a sniper in Memphis, Tenn., on April 4, 1968, sparking civil unrest in many cities. He was in Memphis to support a sanitation workers' strike. His April 9 funeral in Atlanta was attended by an estimated 75,000 people. One week after he was gunned down, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into federal law the 1968 Civil Rights Act.

On March 10, 1969, James Earl Ray was convicted of assassinating King and sentenced to 99 years in prison.

President Ronald Reagan signed legislation Nov. 2, 1983, establishing a federal holiday on the third Monday of January to honor the assassinated civil-rights leader. King was the first person honored with a federal holiday since George Washington's birthday was so designated.

About IWU

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls more than 2,000 students in a College of Liberal Arts, and individual schools of Music, Theatre Arts, Art, and Nursing. Since 1994, these facilities have been added to the IWU campus: a \$15 million athletics and recreation center, a \$25 million science center, a \$6.8 million residence hall, a \$5.1 million Center for Liberal Arts, and a \$1.65 million baseball stadium. A \$26 million library and a \$6 million student center are under construction.

