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## February Marks 40th Anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Noted Visit to IWU

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# February Marks 40th Anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Noted Visit to IWU

February 2, 2006

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Forty years ago—on Thursday, Feb. 10, 1966—Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. visited Bloomington with his wife Coretta Scott King and spoke at Illinois Wesleyan University. Coretta Scott King died this week, 38 years after her husband's assassination.

The 1966 trip was King's second time on the IWU campus, and during the five years since his earlier visit he had been named Time magazine's "Man of the Year" and become the youngest person ever to receive the Nobel Peace Prize.

A transcript of his 1966 speech shows King delivering a rare joke, speaking of his love for his wife—and giving a passionate case for racial equality in words that reflect King's characteristic cadences. Even rendered on paper, the great orator's presence comes through.

[Read or listen to King's speech](#)

"The basic thing about a man is not his specificity but his fundamentum, not the texture of his hair or the color of his skin, but his eternal dignity and worth," he told the crowd at the Fred Young Fieldhouse. "Were I so tall as to reach the pole or to grasp the ocean at a span, I must be measured by my soul; the mind is the standard of the man."

His speech at Illinois Wesleyan included humor that is now poignant, as he apologized for a tardy arrival and described cautioning his driver to "slow up" on wet pavement: "I followed that up by saying I would rather be Martin Luther King late than the late Martin Luther King."

As he explained what was meant by his nonviolent peace movement's philosophy of loving those who inflict suffering on them, he described the types of love known in the Greek language: Eros, or romantic love; philia, or love between friends; and agape, "an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return." When King spoke of eros, he quoted lines from Shakespeare and added, "You know I can remember that because I used to quote it to my wife when we were courting."

King spoke earnestly about all that remained to be achieved by the Civil Rights Movement, and cautioned against those who believed racial integration and problems of racial injustice would work themselves out in time.

"It may well be that we will have to repent in this generation, not merely for the vitriolic words and the violent actions of bad people who would bomb a church in Birmingham, Alabama, but for the appalling silence and indifference of the good people who sit around and say, 'Wait on time.' Somewhere we must come to see that human progress never rolls in on the wheels of inevitability."

King briefly turned his remarks to issues of international peace: "For in a day when Sputniks and Geminis are dashing through outer space, and guided ballistic missiles are causing highways of death through the stratosphere, no nation can ultimately win a war."

He concluded his speech with his familiar exhortation, "With this faith we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, 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.'"



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke at Illinois Wesleyan University in 1966.