



Tuesday, January 22, 2002

Hundreds participate in MLK Day events

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

African-American Celebration Month at Oakland University began Monday, Jan. 21, with various events honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Hundreds of students, faculty and staff participated throughout the day to honor one of America's great civil rights leaders.

"I think it's good to keep Martin Luther King's dream alive, especially with civil liberties still being violated. We need to keep thinking of what Martin Luther King would have done," said John Torres, a senior political science major who participated in the day's events.

MLK Day began with the Association of Black Students campus march. About 300 students, faculty and staff participated in the march, which began at Vandenberg Hall at 11:30 a.m. The marchers made their way past the Oakland Center, South Foundation Hall and Wilson Hall, finishing at Meadow Brook Theatre.

"Martin Luther King Jr. is such an important figure historically for all people, not just for African-Americans," said Mychal Thom, a march participant and graduate student in biology, whose father, a former Presbyterian minister, spoke with King at various functions in Chicago. "African-American Celebration Month is a great month. Within the messages are things all people can take to heart."

Following the march, the Student Life Lecture Board presented guest speaker Kevin Powell, who delivered his address, "Looking for Martin: Are Dr. King and His Dream Still Relevant?"

Best known for his stint on the inaugural season of the MTV series "**The Real World**," Powell also has written for several prominent magazines and newspapers, authored an anthology of new black literature and co-founded "Get Up On It," a national nonprofit organization designed to foster involvement and volunteerism in the urban community.

Powell's message was that, though we have made some progress as a nation in ending racism, Dr. King would be saddened by the gap between the civil rights generation and the hip hop generation.

"The black middle class has grown considerably since 1968, but I believe Dr. King would be saddened to see that so has the black poor," Powell said. "Hip hop began as a response to the failure of the civil rights movement. If he were here today, I think Dr. King would have asked 'Where do we go from here?' We have seen some progress, but racism, sexism and classism still exist. We need to look at ourselves and do some critical self-examination."

Powell also stressed the importance of understanding King's entire career and suggested reading his speech "Beyond Vietnam" as a supplement to the more widely known "I Have a Dream" speech.

"We like to put people up on pedestals," Powell said. "We have seen a distortion of Dr. King's life journey and image. A lot of people don't understand that he continued to evolve after 1963. Martin Luther King Jr. is one of the most important people in my life. I'm glad I've understood him as a whole and not just in parts."

During the afternoon, Golden Key International Honour Society helped sponsor a canned food drive to benefit the **Oakland County Food Bank**. About 10 bags of non-perishable food items were collected in the Oakland Center Fireside Lounge to help the poor and disadvantaged, said Jean Ann Miller, director of the **Center for Student Activities**.

The day's events concluded with a candlelight vigil honoring Dr. King. During the vigil, which was held in the Oakland Center Gold Rooms, people had the opportunity to talk about their feelings and the events of the day.

"There was an appreciation of one another and commitment to being more other-oriented, which went hand-in-hand with what Powell said earlier in the day," Miller said.

The vigil opened with a performance by the Akanke African Dance Troupe, followed by short addresses from Gloria Sosa, assistant director of the Office of Equity, who spoke about the importance of striving for campus unity, and Omar Brown, former

president of the Association of Black Students, who summarized the day's events in terms of the philosophy of Dr. King and spoke of being mindful of ourselves and others to make the world a better place.

"The whole day was very community oriented," Miller said. "It was great to see some students, faculty and staff bring their children and family members to campus to participate in the events. That made the day very unifying in itself. It's something we hope to build upon for the future."

OU students are encouraged to participate in the fifth annual All Campus Essay Contest in commemoration of Dr. King. Participants must submit an original essay or poem, not to exceed 1,000 words, that addresses the question: "What kind of hero do you envision yourself to be after you graduate from Oakland University?" The cash prizes are \$300 for first place and \$100 each for second and third place. Entry forms can be picked up at the **Center for Student Activities**, 49 Oakland Center, and must be returned by 5 p.m. Monday, Feb. 11.

SUMMARY

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Created by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Tuesday, January 22, 2002

Modified by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Tuesday, January 22, 2002

Article Start Date: Friday, October 3, 2003