



Tuesday, January 20, 2004

## OU community honors Martin Luther King Jr.

By **Jeff Samoray**, *OU Web Writer*

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led an assemblage of more than 200,000 marchers to the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., in 1963 to deliver his "I Have a Dream" speech. Hundreds of Oakland University students, faculty and staff paid homage to King and took part in several activities, including a march, on Jan. 19 to mark the national celebration of his birthday and the beginning of OU's **African-American Celebration 2004**. Classes were suspended to allow students to participate in the day's activities.

"Martin Luther King Day is a free day for students, but you have to ask yourself how to best spend your time on this day," said senior communications major and OUSC President Jonathan Parks. "This is a day for reflection, and it's something I'm passionate about every year. It's a small way to show your gratitude toward one of America's great civil rights activists. After I graduate, I plan on returning to Oakland every year to participate in the campus events."

MLK Jr. Celebration Day events began at 11:30 a.m. at Vandenberg Hall with the annual Association of Black Students (ABS) March, replicating King's march on Washington, which led to the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. Marchers endured single-digit temperatures while walking silently past the Oakland Center and South Foundation Hall before finishing at Meadow Brook Theatre.

"If we didn't hold this march, then the life of Martin Luther King would go in vain," said senior communications major and ABS President Stefen Welch. "I have a lot of respect for Dr. King. Whether you agree with his tactics or not, you have to stand up for what he did and believed in. This day is not just for Martin Luther King but for everyone who stands up for human rights."

The Student Life Lecture Board followed the march by presenting guest speaker **Sister Souljah**, who delivered her address, "The Role of African-American Students on Campus," at Meadow Brook Theatre.

Souljah is best known for her controversial rap album "360 Degrees of Power" and for being the force behind the efforts of hip-hop stars in giving back to their communities. The Rutgers graduate helped organize, finance and develop the African Youth Survival Camp for children of homeless families and is executive director for Daddy's House Social Programs Inc., a nonprofit corporation for urban youth financed in part by hip-hop impresario Sean "Puffy" Combs. At Daddy's House, Souljah educates and prepares African-American youth to take control of their academic, cultural and financial lives. She also is the author of "No Disrespect" and the novel "The Coldest Winter Ever."

Souljah addressed the audience in her emphatic, sometimes humorous, manner on ways in which students should conduct their lives and live up to the standards set by Martin Luther King Jr.

"We honor Martin Luther King because he is different from all of us," Souljah said. "We honor him because of what we are not and what he is, in some kind of perverse way.

"Martin Luther King was humble. Humility is a trait you hardly ever see anymore. Most of us are arrogant and bold in our ignorance. We're not humble enough to sit still, listen and learn. King was a follower of Jesus and God. How many of us consider ourselves religious but know nothing of the Bible? King studied the actions of Ghandi, Jesus and others and was humble enough to learn from them before he led."

Souljah also emphasized King's self-love, fearlessness, self-assurance, intellect and devotion to a spiritual purpose.

"Martin Luther King burned the midnight oil, and by that I mean he was committed to his studies. He had to sacrifice his family life to march and be thrown in jail for his beliefs. He was committed to a philosophy and well-thought plan for his life. And he put in the hours it took to become excellent," Souljah said. "Humble and dedicate yourselves to a belief and to the service of your people and fight back even if it seems impossible to win. Please be more concerned about your studies than a TV show or other little desires. Leave the university as not just a person with a piece of paper but as someone who can make contributions to the community."

The day's events concluded with the ABS Dinner and Candlelight Vigil in honor of King. During the event, which was held in the

Oakland Center Banquet Room, students, faculty and staff enjoyed a pasta dinner and were entertained by the Gospel Choir at Oakland University, Akanke African Drum and Dance group, tap dance performances and poetry readings. A video containing excerpts from Martin Luther King Jr.'s speeches also was shown, and Associate Professor of Rhetoric Rose Cooper delivered a motivational speech in closing.

OU students are encouraged to participate in the seventh All-Campus Essay Contest in commemoration of Dr. King. Participants must submit an original essay or poem that addresses the topic: "Uniting OU Students through Campus Life." The cash prizes are \$300 for first place and \$100 each for second and third place. Rules and entry forms are available at the **Center for Multicultural Initiatives**, 121 North Foundation Hall; **Center for Student Activities**, 49 Oakland Center; **Dean of Students Office**, 144 Oakland Center; and at the Hamlin and Vandenberg Hall reception desks. Contest winners will be announced at the African-American Celebration Month Closing Ceremony on Tuesday, Feb. 17, at noon in the Oakland Center Fireside Lounge. Entries are due by 5 p.m. on Friday, Feb. 13, at the CSA office.

See the **African-American Celebration Month schedule** listed on the campus calendar for a complete list of the month's activities. For more information, contact the **Center for Student Activities** at (248) 370-2400 or [csa@oakland.edu](mailto:csa@oakland.edu).

#### **SUMMARY**

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