

## 1F) Martin Luther King, Jr. Speaks at Hofstra University

sources: *Newsday*, June 14, 1965; *The New York Times*, January 19, 1986. Tape of the 1965 Hofstra University commencement, Hofstra University archives.

On June 13, 1965, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. received an honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity at the Hofstra University graduation ceremony. University President Dr. Clifford Lord praised Dr. King's "courageous leadership in the struggle to uphold the principles of a true democracy of all men -- whatever their race or belief -- and for unflagging devotion to the principles of love and reconciliation." The theme of Dr. King's acceptance speech was, "We have inherited a big house, a great world house, in which we have to live together, black and white, Easterners and Westerners, gentiles and Jews, Protestants and Catholics."

Dr. King's address received a standing ovation from the audience of almost 7,000 parents, students, and faculty members. According to John Rawlinson, a professor of history and director of the university's archives, "it was an inspirational speech." James Drayton of Bethpage, a member of the Hofstra class of 1965, remembers being "awed by the whole thing. He was a very dynamic man." A small group of demonstrators from a group called Long Island Committee to Preserve Our Freedom picketed the ceremony. They accused Dr. King of being un-American and a Communist. One demonstrator disrupted the ceremony and was removed by campus police.

Read the excerpts from the speech by Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and answer the questions that follow.

A) "Racial injustice is still the Negroes' burden and America's shame. While we have made strides in solving this problem, while we have seen progress here and there, we must honestly face the fact that we still have a long long way to go before the problem is solved. No section of our country can boast of clean hands in the area of brotherhood....Every individual of good will must work passionately and unrelentingly to get rid of racial injustice. We must start in our individual lives, we must work through various movements, and we must develop powerful and creative action programs to rid our nation of the last vestiges of segregation and discrimination. For in a real sense, if democracy is to live, segregation must die...."

B) "It is one thing for the white person of good will in the north....to rise up with righteous indignation when a bus is burned with freedom riders in Alabama, or when a church is bombed....., but it is just as important for the white person of good will in the north to rise up with righteous indignation when a Negro cannot live in your neighborhood or when a Negro cannot get a job in your particular firm, or when a Negro cannot join your particular professional or academic society, your fraternity or sorority. If this problem is to be solved, there must be a sort of divine discontent and a determination to work with all of the strength that we can muster until we can remove racial injustice from the body politic, realizing that it is a cancer in the body politic that must be removed before our moral and democratic health can be realized. Segregation is morally wrong and sinful."

### Questions

- 1- According to President Lord, why was Martin Luther King, Jr. honored by Hofstra University?
- 2- In your opinion, should protesters have been allowed at the graduation ceremony? Why?
- 3- Do you agree with the decision to honor Dr. King? Explain your answer.
- 4- What did Dr. King mean when he said, "Racial injustice is still the Negroes' burden and America's shame"? Do you think this statement is still true today? Why?
- 5- How does Dr. King challenge white people in the north?
- 6- Pretend you were graduating from Hofstra University on June 13, 1965. Write a letter to Dr. King. In your letter, explain your reactions to his speech.