

## University takes a day off for wrong reasons

**■ OUR OPINION:** King's birthday has become an act of political correctness instead of action

Thousands of students will take the day off Monday without giving much thought to why.

Of course, everyone knows it is Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, but few stop to examine why a university that refuses to close for Columbus Day, Veterans' Day or Presidents' Day would decide to shut its doors.

The answer is surprisingly simple. The University will be closed because it is the politically correct thing to do.

Without question, King deserves a national holiday. His vision and leadership helped spirit a national movement that guided this country to a new level of racial understanding. To date, he is the only African-American to be recognized on a caliber with the usual cadre of white guys. Even now, his message continues to resonate in an America where inequality seems to be enlarging rather than diminishing.

That said, however, it cannot be ignored that the University felt compelled to give students the day off because electing not to do so would have brought charges of racism against this institution.

In addition, it raises an interesting paradox. If we intend to celebrate the life of King, the last place we should be is at home watching *Ricki Lake*. We should be in school.

Unlike King, civil rights is not a dead issue. Each year

we are told to take a moment of "quiet reflection" and watch the same "I have a dream" sound bite on every network and cable channel until we can recite it by rote. We are reminded of how African-Americans began the modern struggle toward equality.

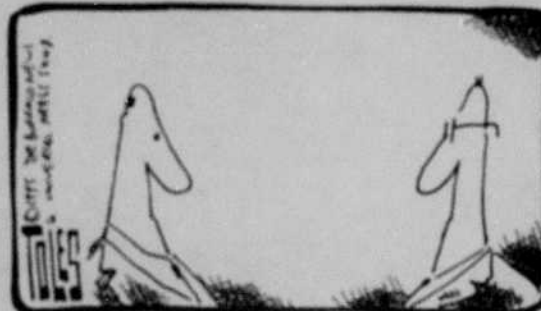
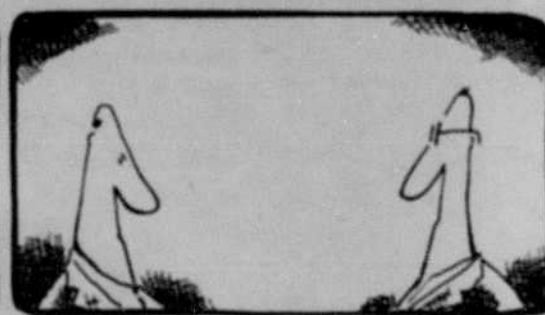
All of this valuable. But King's legacy (and the legacy of the hundreds of other black leaders who seem to get overshadowed by this holiday) deserves more. We deserve more.

The discussion of civil rights rarely takes place outside the context of a few history, ethnic studies and law courses. Yet, it is one of the few subjects that relates to almost every field of study at the University.

Rather than dismissing students, each department should use this day to link some aspect of civil rights with the curricula.

What role does equal opportunity play in economics on both a micro and macro level? What are the psychological aspects of oppression? How did the media report on the movement? What were the international effects of the movement? What role does geography play in racial division? The possibilities are almost limitless.

Yet we choose to remain silent. Some of us will attend the event at the Hult Center, but for the majority of us, the day will pass without notice. Not only is this inconsistent with the lessons of King's life, it is antithetical to the purpose of a liberal arts education. Let Veterans' Day get the "quiet reflection." Let's learn something instead.



## Stone's 'Nixon' rewrites history and fails

Oliver Stone's most recent cinematic extravaganza, *Nixon*, was released during our winter break. Although there has been a great deal of discussion about the film's value, the truth is that the movie does not stand up cinematically or politically.

To see why, *Nixon* should be analyzed in two separate parts: first, simply as a film; then, as a political statement.

The strongest cinematic element of the film is the supporting cast. Joan Allen has been rightfully lauded for her rigid yet sympathetic Pat Nixon, a role that should earn her an Oscar nod. Also, aside from the horrid James Woods, the group that plays the president's men is spectacular.

As for Anthony Hopkins, who plays President Nixon, there is little positive to say. It seems that to portray the man, Hopkins went to the Diogenes school of acting; he simply placed a handful of pebbles in his cheeks, then got in front of the camera and started speaking.

This results in an odd delivery that sounds nothing like the former president. For example: the line "Mrs. Nixon's finished," is delivered as, "Mushush Nukchun's funushed."

The cinematography, by Robert Richardson is wonderful ... for a horror film. The living area of the White House is lit so darkly and is so oddly exposed that it looks more like Dracula's castle than the residence of America's chief executive.

Adding to this mood is the score by John Williams. His music, which seems to be composed exclusively of minor and diminished chords, sounds more appropriate for a slasher film like *Friday the 13th* than for a historical drama.

The script contains a few interesting scenes, but those worth watching could have been condensed into an hour-long television special. However, the film runs more than three hours, a length that had me checking my watch every 10 minutes.

All in all, for \$43 million, a sum that would make a person with ethics blush, much is left to be desired.

Politically, *Nixon* is also a failure. In its portrayal of Nixon the man, he is shown as an awkward drunk who can barely put a sentence together, both behind the scenes and in front of the public.

If he really was as bumbling and clumsy as he was in the film, Richard Nixon would never have been elected president of an elementary school student body, let alone twice to the highest office in the world.

As for the alleged drinking problem, John Ehrlichman, who unlike Stone, actually knew and worked with the real Nixon, has written: "In the five years I was with President Nixon, I never saw him drink in any of his offices, and

only rarely elsewhere." In the film, he is almost constantly clutching a tumbler of scotch, no matter where he is.

More troubling than the personal affronts to the former president however, is a connection that Stone has created between Nixon, the assassination attempt on Fidel Castro, and the death of President John Kennedy.

In the film, when Hunt is discovered as one of the Watergate burglars, the Nixon character states that he knows of him as a former CIA operative who worked on the plot to assassinate Castro — a plot that he had approved of when he was Dwight Eisenhower's vice president. This plot was then supposedly turned on Kennedy by the same CIA group.

Even if Nixon had approved of the CIA action against Castro, to say that this somehow led to the Kennedy assassination and that this troubled Nixon through his life, as it does in the film, is ludicrous.

In reality, Nixon did not even know of the original CIA plot. Richard Bissel, who actually planned the assassination, told *Newsweek* before his death that Nixon had no role in the attempt on Castro's life and that he was not briefed on the subject.

Ehrlichman, in the same essay mentioned earlier, wrote, "In my 15 years of ever-closer association with the real Nixon, I never heard a hint that he might have been involved in such a Castro plot — or that he was guiltily obsessed with JFK's murder."

It is unfortunate that Oliver Stone thinks of himself as so powerful, and so exempt from judgment, that it is acceptable for him to rewrite history in a manner that is not attuned with the facts, but with his liberal sensibilities.

He has taken liberties not with fictional characters, but with real people who have real families that will see their lives and the lives of their friends trivialized and bastardized on the silver screen.

Richard Nixon was guilty of his crimes, and he deserved to be impeached for them. But, for Stone to spit on his grave in order to make a few bucks and brainwash the public is not only a waste of a talented director's time, it is immoral.

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### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

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