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Perspectives

Remembering his words

"I have a dream." You can't deny that these words are some of the most powerful ever spoken. They resonate with double meaning. They resonate with the voice of the man who spoke them. They resonate with a certain shared feeling. They still resonate today.

On Monday, we celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Some would say that after 37 years, the message of King and of the Civil Rights Movement has had its day — that the country is a better place. Some would say that we've not gone nearly far enough — that the country still faces the enormously complex issue of racism. Both are true.

What King would say, however, we know for sure. He already said it. So on this weekend — before we get the day off from school — we might take a moment and remember the words he really spoke. And the most famous occasion on which he articulated his ideas, his philosophy, his expectations and his goals was the "I Have a Dream" speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, 1963. Here are some highlights.

"When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," King said in the first few passages of his speech. Today, this issue of inheritance is still with us. All Americans,

whether just off the boat or bred by native-born parents, deserve the rights guaranteed to them by the constitution. Yet every day we see cases where immigrants working in this country — with full citizenship — are labeled "outsiders."

King himself was labeled an outsider at the time, but he resisted such jabs because in the struggle for attaining equal rights and respect, King knew that conflicts would arise. A good leader anticipates hardships and obstacles. Later in the speech, King addressed this issue of keeping a cool head and a warm heart: "In the process of gaining our rightful place we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred." What powerful words — what powerful words. In this, what we call the new century, bitterness and hatred run rampant. People seem angry at life in general: at their economic situation, at the government, at their social status. We need only reflect back on Columbine to see what this anger sows: two young men who did drink from that cup.

In putting forth ideals about what is promised to us and what we should do to cultivate that lustrous birthright we call citizenship, King begins one of the most famous passages in history: "I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise

up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.'" For all the talk today about whether the American Dream is still alive, the answer is that it is still alive in its truest sense, as King explained some 30 years ago. The American Dream is not necessarily that we can all rise above each other, from rags to riches, to make a name for ourselves, but rather it is the notion that we all have the ability, the talent, the worth, the grace and the innate humanity to succeed. The dream is held within ourselves, and it is promised to us merely by our walking on this soil.

In the most powerful proclamation of the whole speech, King finally articulates his most personal wish: "I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." And this is one dream that we are still working on. For every stereotype, for every racist joke, for every deceiving statistic, there is a person in pain. People laugh at the idea of a utopia, of an Acadian place where everyone gets along. As long as people believe that dreams can never become reality, they won't. King's dream won't. Examples of tragic crimes such as the Texas dragging death of a black man, the beating death of Matthew Shepard, the New York City Police Department's murder of an African immigrant with the force of 41 bullets and even the workplace violence that



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has erupted in Seattle and Atlanta over the last six months bring emphatically to our attention that anger exists in all facets of our lives.

On that note, the master of turning the forces of anger into forces of peace ends his speech with a note of hope and joy for what the future can bring. Take the words to heart because they are just as poignant today as they were in the throws of the Civil Rights Movement:

"When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and

every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all 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!'"

On Monday, we are not in school. Sure, you can sleep in. But if you do, be sure to dream.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses may be sent to ode@oregon.uoregon.edu.

Media merger helps friendly people annoy us



Bret Jacobson

A couple of seemingly unrelated happenings conspired recently to show me the future of a connected world, and it isn't pretty.

First, America Online merged with Time Warner, creating a dazzling offer of fast consumer Internet services with tremendous content synergy available in the very near future.

It had some dreaming about a wonderful new opportunity for consumers to enjoy the splendors of a gluttonous society. It had others shaking their fists at the sky admonishing us to be wary of a competition-starved market of behemoth conglomerates ready to squash the little entrepreneur at every opportunity. But while there are extremes on both sides, the general sentiment seems to be a conclusion that we'll all pull through relatively unscathed and that a greater connection to

those around us will improve life for all of us.

Not so! Say I.

A few hours after the merger I sat down at my computer to pretend to do homework. I clicked on my AOL Instant Messenger to distract myself from more pressing tasks. And, as is my punishment from the gods of interconnectivity, I was contacted unsolicited by some well-intentioned pubescent girl seeking to broaden her base of friends.

It will suffice to say for this purpose that I am not huge on weaving a tapestry of small talk with complete strangers and that I would rather venture into a liberal's manifesto than kill that much time with one person with whom I will never share any real bond.

And that interruption indeed is the rub of the interconnected

world the mass media believes is the greatest thing since free high definition television broadcasting rights.

However, even those who believe there are plenty of ways to tailor the Internet to one's own interests must admit there are a lot of ways to be bothered by outside influences, such as advertisers and dubious characters, which are smarter and better equipped than ever before. But they're still not the greatest danger to those like me.

It's the teen-age girl from Tennessee who wants to get to know other people and holds it to be self-evident that all Net users are created equal and want to chat. And so, with a glassy-eyed wonder she will plop down in front of her infernal contraption to meet someone new. She'll find a random screen name, pray for glory and

thrust an invitation and personal information upon some unsuspecting misanthropic young adult too jaded to realize others outside their normal sphere of influence could possibly be worth their investment of time.

I don't want this connection to bog me down with unduly friendly people just because I have a desire to communicate with longtime friends who live across the country. So here's a lesson to the wise: next time a media conglomeration partnership accelerates the rate of interconnectivity, ask yourself what's in it for those who wish to have a little quiet time online.

Chances are, nothing good.

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THE WEEK IN THUMBS



To voting at 2 a.m. in your underwear: The ASUO Elections Board has decided that all voting in the upcoming ASUO elections will be done over Duck Web.

To persistence paying off: In perhaps the funniest "Campaign 2000" of the year, David Letterman tried for weeks to convince First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton to appear on his late-night talk show. She appeared on the program Wednesday night to discuss her run for the New York senate seat and tell some canned jokes.



To letting dictators off the hook: The British government decided Tuesday that former Chilean dictator Gen. Augusto Pinochet is too ill to be tried on human rights charges. About 3,000 people died or disappeared in Chile during Pinochet's 1973-90 rule. Too bad we can't ask those people if he's "fit" to stand trial.

To cruelty to animals: A 3-year-old elephant intended as a gift to the Japanese government was paralyzed on one side during her four-day journey across India. The animal was kept in a truck for two days without being able to move and apparently fell down and could not get up.