

✓CF UCSC rP 1/12/88
1980-1989

Yolanda King keeps the faith

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Yolanda King, the eldest daughter of Martin Luther King Jr., gave a rousing speech at UC-Santa Cruz yesterday at the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Convocation.

Yolanda King has participated in numerous civil and human rights demonstrations throughout her life and is on the board of directors of the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolence. She is an actress, producer and director.

In her UCSC speech, King spoke against racism, sexism, excessive defense spending and materialism.

With much of her father's oratory fire, King said, "We have not yet reached the promised land. We are still bumping around in the wilderness."

"My father's utterance rings persistently: Either we will live together as brothers and sisters or we will perish together as fools."

King lauded the decision to make her father's birthday a national holiday, which will be observed next Monday.

"We have thousands of monuments to men of war," she said. "At last we have a day to celebrate a man of peace."

She called President Ronald Reagan's signing of the law which created the national holiday "the greatest irony of all."



Chip Scheuer

Yolanda King at yesterday's convocation to honor her father, Martin Luther King Jr., at UCSC.

"He didn't want to do it, you know," she said. "Don't let anyone fool you on that one. It was a modern-day miracle."

King said the civil rights movement that her father led reached more than just black Americans.

"Groups all over this country began to organize because they saw through the black experience that if they joined together — though there may be trials and struggles before them — they could achieve advancement," she said.

Because of that, she said, the 1960s saw the blossoming

of the activism on the part of women, native Americans and Hispanics.

But still, she said, racism and a host of other problems still exist.

"While Jim Crow may be dead," she said, "his first-born and slightly more sophisticated son, James Crow, Esq., is still alive and kicking."

She cited recent incidents such as the racially inspired violence at Howard Beach in New York and the Ku Klux Klan demonstration in Forsyth County, Georgia.

The freedom that blacks

now have to eat, sleep and live anywhere they please "means nothing if you don't have the money to do it," she said.

Six percent of the American population owns 70 percent of the means of production, King said.

"It's not even a question of getting a piece of the American pie, because the pie is all gone by the time the plate comes around — except for a few crumbs," she said.

Her father had even grander visions of freedom toward the end of his life, when he founded the Poor People's Movement, King said.

"In 1968, he was dreaming of marching on Washington again," she said.

He planned to stop the government non-violently, to bring an end to the war in Vietnam and attempt to give everyone the right to work for a decent wage, she said.

"That was his last dream," she said. "He spent the last six months of his life organizing American Indians, Hispanic people and people who had never been organized before. Once you understand that, perhaps you'll realize why the bullet came and even where it came from."

King concluded, "I choose to continue dreaming. I choose to dream and act on my dreams."

To keep on dreaming may be foolish, she said, "but to live without it would be a nightmare."