MIT holds celebration to honor King

By John B. Sears

MIT last week held its fourth annual symposium "to provide to the MIT community [with] a more in-depth understanding of the civil rights issues as they were embodied in the philosophy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the words of Clarence Williams, special assistant to the president.

Williams opened the 11th annual celebration to honor King's birth at the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at noon on Jan. 18 to 10:30.

The three speakers addressed the symposium's theme: "The Unfinished Agenda of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Within the Context of the 1980s.

Julius L. Chambers, director and counsel of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., spoke on legal and judicial perspectives of the civil rights movements for the 1980s.

Chambers defended King's goals for the liberation of mankind and the elimination of unjust laws. Changes in the legal and judicial support to minority Americans may be part of the progress of King's mission, Chambers said.

"The day had been cast; unanimous decisions of the Supreme Court were no longer characteristic of that court's opinion in school desegregation decisions," Chambers said.

"Educational inequities built into the school systems cannot be adequately attacked through the judicial process," Chambers said, responding to the "limited reach" of the Supreme Court's decision in Brown v. Board of Education, forbidding segregation.

Schools "which are integrated on the surface have segregation in classrooms based on tracking, testing, and new developments in 'sugar schools' where children of middle-class white families are in the front of the programs, and minority children are frequently scored away," Chambers said.

Michael Winston, vice president of academic affairs at Howard University, spoke on race and equity in higher education in the 1980s. He defined higher education as "a particularly sensitive barometer of social equity in modern industrialized societies." Higher education selects and benefits those in higher socio-economic brackets. Quality of education is critical to the selection of society's leaders, he said.

Although institutions can do little to help the background preparation of their students, they can maintain policies to mitigate disadvantages in back- ground, he said.

Despite enrollments increases in all but a few graduate and professional fields, the percentage of black college students has never risen above two percent, Winston said. When black students are advanced degrees, "they tend to be clustered in law and medical fields," according to Winston.

"One lesson we learned from King and his colleagues is that change is not for blacks alone," Winston said.

MIT Professor of English Leo Marx spoke about America's folk- heroes in long deferred list of promises to minorities within the past three decades. "But then we quickly relaxed" to the present period of complicity and iner- tia, Marx added.

King insisted it was the agenda of democracy that he wanted to change, not for blacks alone, Marx said. "The agenda on de- mocracy... was unfinished," he added.

King taught a new style of protest which sparked black college- age youth of the time, Marx said. "I think white America often forgets that the hopeful spirit of the 1960s... that change was possible without violent revolu- tion, possible right now," he said.

"One lesson we learned from King and his colleagues is that the situation of black people, of the poor and powerless in Amer- ica is a particularly sensitive barometer of the condition of the society as a whole," Marx said.

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