Martin Luther King: A dream deferred

In Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?, published one year before his assassination, Martin Luther King Jr. wrote: "When the Constitution was written, a strange formula to determine taxes and representation declared that the Negro was 60 percent of a person. Today another curious formula seems to declare that he is 50 percent of a person. Of the good things in life he has approximately one-half those of Whites; of the bad he has twice those of Whites. Thus, half of all Negroes live in sub-standard housing, and Negroes have half the income of Whites. When we turn to the negative experiences of life, the Negro has a double share. There are twice as many unemployed. The rate of infant mortality (widely accepted as an accurate index of general health) among Negroes is double that of Whites. The equation pursues us even into war. There were twice as many Negroes as Whites in our combat in Vietnam at the beginning of the war and as many as many soldiers died in action. 28.6 percent of Negroes died in proportion to their numbers in the population.

On Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, we are sure to hear regurgitated sounds about the greater equality of blacks and whites that he wrote three words: Now, let's examine this progress. Here are the facts from the publication Statistical Abstracts:

In 1967, the income of black households was 0.59 that of white households, while in 1984 it was 0.56. Over the same period, the unemployment rate of blacks changed from double to two and one-half that of whites. Infant mortality among blacks, which had been 2.1 times that among whites, plummeted, after more than a decade of similar dramatic advances, to a mere 2.0 times the 1984 rate for whites. We are currently between wars, but there is every reason to believe that the battle which may return from Central America will also contain a disproportionate number of African-Americans, since there were 1.5 times as many black service men as in proportion to their numbers in the population. Furthermore, the life expectancy of blacks in 1970 was seven years less than that of whites. Even if he doesn’t go to war, a black man today can expect to live seven years less than a white man. In spite of all the talk, inequality haunts the African-Americans from his birth to his grave. Here, too, at MIT we’ve seen our share of improvements. In 1970, 38 black undergraduates entered MIT; sixteen years later this number had soared to 59. It must be remarked that starting increase is partly accounted for by a larger student body. The number of black faculty members at MIT is half what it once was, and the Black Studies Program has vanished. Such setbacks are not confined to MIT. The low gains achieved through new legislation or court decisions in the sixties have either been reversed or unenforced. Why then is there a popular impression of change? Any changes that do not affect fundamental statistics can only be cosmetic. There is now a very small but very visible black middle class. For example, on newsstands that include dozens of people on the production crew, a

Guest Column/Marie Gilles-Gonzalez and Fred Foreman

opinion

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Here: Chaos or Community?, Guest Column/Marie Gilles-Gonzalez

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Guest Column/Tom Legg

Education reform ignores individuals

Once upon a time there was a school that believed it was on a mission. Its mission was to go out and bring its students along for the ride. The school was, of course, MIT, the mission was to provide an education that produced top-flight engineers and scientists and with a social conscience, and the ride was curricular reform.

MIT found itself in its current jam when enrollment skyrocketed in the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science. Unable to find a politically acceptable way of restricting enrollment, the administration decided to change the admissions process so that more well- rounded students would come to MIT, students who would of course be less interested in majoring in electrical engineering or computer science (only needs did that)

So now the Institute has a lot more diversity ("patchy" is the word the admissions office gave my high school counselor) student body with more diverse interests. The disillusioned, though, feel concerned for the incoming students. They are more diverse, but in general the place and its programs are not.

MIT produces excellent professionals; this cannot be done without an overbearing focus upon the students' fields of study. These fields of study now are right to edit or condense letters. We regret we cannot publish all the letters. The letters submitted for publication must be no more than 400 words.

Letters to the Editor are welcome. They must be typed double spaced and addressed to The Tech, PO Box 29, MIT Branch, Cambridge MA 02139, or by interdepartmental mail to Room W20-443.

Letters and cartoons must bear the authors' signatures, addresses, and phone numbers. Unsigned letters will not be accepted. No letters or cartoons will be printed anonymously without express prior approval of The Tech. The Tech reserves the right to edit or condense letters. We regret we cannot publish all of the letters we receive.