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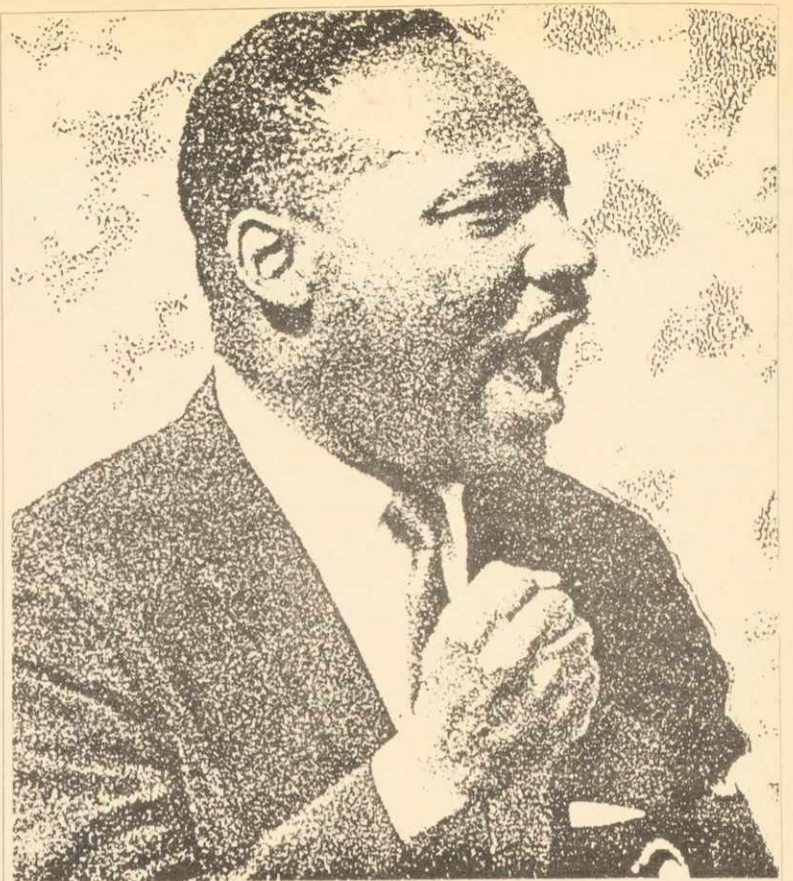
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Martin Luther King Jr.

Is it still a dream?

By **TOBY SANGER**

Nineteen years after Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, his dream still lives on for many members of Halifax's black community.

But with unemployment rates approaching 50 per cent for black youths and slow progress in achieving equality in other areas, his vision is still just that — a dream.

Covert racism in the Nova Scotia justice system, systematic prejudice against blacks by many employers, and little recognition of black heritage in the school system have kept the Halifax black community — the largest per capita urban concentration of blacks in Canada — a disadvantaged and often inward-looking group.

While King's birthday is being celebrated as a national holiday in the United States this Monday, there are no events officially scheduled for Halifax schools to mark the occasion.

Tonight at the North Branch Library, a number of different Halifax black groups are, for the second year, celebrating his birthday with a night of music, poetry, and speeches by people from the black community.

Included on the agenda is a movie about King's life, a talk about Dr. King's place in history and his effect on the civil rights movement in Halifax, and a gospel group from North Preston which will sing some of King's favorite hymns.

Dalhousie student George Elliot Clark will also present a poem and a new song he has composed for the a capella group Four the Moment.

Terry Simons, one of the organizers of the event, says King's birthday is being celebrated in Halifax both to remember his achievements and to draw attention to the concerns he fought for all his life.

"We're hoping not to let Dr. King's dream die."

There is a direct connection between King and the black community in Halifax, says David Woods, coordinator of the Cultural Awareness Youth Group for Nova Scotia.

"Things that Martin Luther King stood up for were things that were going on here in Halifax at the same time. Many human rights programs (in Canada) came about largely because of the sixties civil rights movement," says Woods.

"He was one of the greatest leaders in the twentieth century in terms of motivating people who were basically powerless."

His message is still important today, says David Sparks, a counsellor at the Black United Front. "When you consider the condition of the black community here, economically and socially, and the slow progress we have made since the sixties, his message is applicable; this generation has to hear it."

Woods says his concerns went beyond the black community, beyond the colour of his skin, and beyond national boundaries.

"What he did is significant to not only blacks, but to all mankind."

But Sparks says this doesn't mean blacks and other disadvantaged groups can depend on others to promote equality for them. "When you look at our history and consider how long we've been here, you see that depending on others' moral goodwill doesn't work."

At the same time, says Sparks, the black community shouldn't isolate itself.

"In the black community, there is a turning inward, an attempt to maintain our own separateness. It has been an end in itself, not a means to reach an end... there's too much emphasis (in Nova Scotia) on black culture and not on common culture."

"What's lacking is a message, a philosophy, whereby change can be brought about. For King that message was non-violent direct action."

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