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Remarks on the Life and Legacy of Dr. King April 4, 2018

Good evening. It is a pleasure to be with you all tonight as we honor the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. As a senior who will walk across the stage in just thirty-eight days, I have spent a great amount of time reflecting on my experience at Baylor. There are many things that I will remember-- the bears, the buildings, and all of the books I had to read—but one of the most transformative opportunities was a class I took this semester that studied the life and legacy of Dr. King.

We spent weeks learning of Dr. King's incredible efforts in Birmingham, Albany, and many other cities before we moved our study beyond the classroom. For six days over spring break, we walked in the steps of Civil Rights giants as we toured the cities where Dr. King spoke to thousands and strengthened the commitment to peaceful nonviolent resistance. Our trip began where his did in the movement, right there in Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, and it continued through Kelly Ingram Park, traced Edmund Pettus Bridge on Bloody Sunday, and ended at the Lorraine Motel where Dr. King was assassinated. It is one thing to read about history, but it is another to touch the places where history was made.

For those of you who have not been to the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, I encourage you to attend. The Museum details the history and context of the civil rights movement, from the chains that bound captured African slaves, to the signs held in the March on Washington, and to the hotel room that hosted Dr. King in his final days. It allowed for our class to reflect on where we had been in the past week. How we stood in the exact places where resistance was faced, inequality was confronted, and still marchers refused to turn away in fear. And it invited us to immerse ourselves in where we were: the exact location where Dr. King's life was taken from him.

Many consider Dr. King's last speech "I've Been to the Mountaintop" as his eulogy, as it so clearly articulates how he wants to be remembered, but I am even more touched by a speech that he gave a year prior. This Sermon at Ebenezer may be lesser known than his dream or his letter from Birmingham jail, but to me, it captures Dr. King's commitment to his work and his willingness to sacrifice everything he had for it, even his life.

These were his words at Ebenezer: I say to you this morning that if you have never found something so dear and so precious to you that you will die for, then you aren't fit to live...one day some great opportunity stands before you and calls upon you to stand up for



BAYLOR

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some great principle, some great issue, some great cause. And you refuse to do it because you are afraid. You refuse to do it because you want to live longer. You're afraid that you will lose your job, or you are afraid that you will be criticized or that you will lose your popularity or you're afraid that somebody will stab you or shoot at you or bomb your house. So you refuse to take the stand. Well, you may go on and live until you are ninety, but you are just as dead at thirty-eight as you would be at ninety...take a stand for that which is right, and the world may misunderstand you, and criticize you. But you never go alone, for somewhere I read that one with God is a majority. Now I am ready to die myself. Many other committed people are ready to die. If you believe in something firmly, if you believe in it truly, if you believe it in your heart, you are willing to die for it.

Dr. King believed in, and dedicated himself to, the civil rights movement. He was only thirty-nine years old when he died for it. Killed by a bullet in the same way that our President John F. Kennedy had been killed five years prior. We will never know what more Dr. King could have done in his life or why his life was taken so early, but we do know that his was a legacy of peace. Dr. King led our nation at that time as he continues to lead our nation today, even though most of us have never heard or seen him in person. His legacy lives on though his life was cut short. So let us find peace and hope in the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., but let us also resolve to continue the fight against hate and injustice where they still exist in our society. The movement that Dr. King dedicated his life to is not yet complete, but let us look to his leadership as our march towards equality continues on.

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