King’s deeds and dreams remembered

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Across the nation, people celebrated what would have been the sixtieth birthday of civil rights activist Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

University students, faculty, and administrators gathered yesterday afternoon in Eisenhower Auditorium to hear John Jacob, president and chief executive of the National Urban League Inc., speak on the past, present, and future of black America.

Jacob devoted much of his speech to the economic problems that face Americans, both black and white.

"The issue of economic parity continues to be a tremendous challenge that confronts the nation and is an extension of where King was going with his dream," he said.

"The whole movement has shifted from one of social justice to one of economic justice," Jacob said.

The days of fighting for specific civil rights for blacks are over, Jacob said, recalling the battles to desegregate public schools, buildings, and buses that turned from peaceful demonstrations to violent situations.

While King concentrated on "social and economic issues of black poverty and employment," Jacob said, he was concerned with the issue of national poverty as well.

"Today there is still "much to be done," he said, adding later, that people must recognize the existence of racism to achieve the society of King’s dream. "We are not a colorblind society," Jacob said.

King’s dream can be completed if University students educate themselves to become strong leaders, he said.

Students must be open to people of all colors and kinds and analyze the conditions under which they live, then challenge the differences they may discover, he said.

Quoting King, he said this would lead to "a nation where people are not judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."

Some University classes were cancelled yesterday so students could attend the convocation.

"We made steps from segregation, but there is still a long struggle to go," said Susan Heyward, (sophomore-education).

Jacob spoke not only about black issues but about equality and justice as well, said Andy Hadden (sophomore-psychology).

Jacob also reflected on how the National Urban League called on President elect Bush to work at eliminating racial inequality and building economic parity between black and white America by the year 2000.

Jacob said there is a need "to radically improve education, training, hiring, health, and housing."

Some elements of society are satisfied with current racial inequalities while others are ready for a change, he said.

Quoting his predecessor at the National Urban League Jacob said, "I do have faith in America. I believe. America today can be persuaded to act creatively and imaginatively to make democracy work" adding his own thoughts he said, "This is my hope. This is my dream. This is my faith."