

## Discussion centers around King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail"



**James Shields**, director of community learning, explains the social importance of Dr. King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" to a group of Guilford community members gathered for a Jan. 19 discussion in King Hall.

PHOTO BY  
JUSTINE BUBAR

By Theo Kogod  
STAFF WRITER

"I am in Birmingham because injustice is here," wrote Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., on April 16, 1963, in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail." Forty-six years later, two states away, and in a world still not yet equal, students, faculty, and alumni sat down to discuss the effect of King's letter on the American consciousness as part of Guilford's celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

"There's a reason why we have this day, and it's not just to have another day off," said James Shields, director of community learning, in explaining the reason for discussing Dr. King's letter.

Shields admitted pride in having lived during the life of Dr. King, and when speaking

on the letter, said, "I really rank this document up with the Declaration of Independence when looking at how we're going to be as a country."

Vernie Davis, director of the peace and conflict studies program, said the letter might even surpass the Declaration of Independence in its importance and value, as the letter speaks on behalf of all Americans as a unified "we."

"Throughout this (letter) we see the 'we,' the 'we' as a nation, and it reaches out to connect people," said Davis, pointing out how King "really helped people shift social reality."

One point raised was how much King's image has transformed over the years. Shields observed that in 1968, the year of his death, King was still just a man in the public consciousness. Since, he has become an

icon.

A part of the historical legacy of the American people and of peace, King, invokes In his letter, he invokes other historical figures such as Paul of Tarsus, Thomas Aquinas, Socrates, Martin Luther, and Abraham Lincoln as activists for peace and change that came before him.

Even a school like Guilford has changed in part because of King's influence. Shields said that it was only in 1968 that Guilford became desegregated and enrolled twenty-seven African American students.

Part of the discussions included simple observances of how much has changed, and how much has been forgotten or mythologized through the lens of hindsight.

Senior Eric Campbell said that he was awe-struck to learn that Guilford had for-

merly been segregated at one point.

Jorge Zeballos, Latino community coordinator and international student adviser, said that while issues are still present, most people have been trained to turn a blind eye, or believe there is nothing that could be done to change these problems.

Holly Wilson, director of multicultural education, said that when speaking on matters of race, she has been accused of perpetuating the issues with race.

Her response was direct and encompassed the equality for which King himself strove.

"What's important to my life is what really resonates with me," she said, "but I want to hear all your opinions, all thoughts and points of view, because that is diversity and variety of opinions."

## MLK documentary allows students better historical understanding

By Eric Campbell  
STAFF WRITER

"Nonviolence is a powerful and just weapon, which cuts without wounding and ennobles the man who wields it. It is a sword that heals," said Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on the eve of the bloody protests in Selma, Ala.

On Jan. 20, students had a chance to see how Dr. King's words were reflected in his life's actions. Hall Directors Dennis Scott and Torry Reynolds held a screening of the documentary "Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: A Historical Perspective" in Milner lounge.

Reynolds opened the event, explaining how, with each passing January, the details of Dr. King's life become more shrouded. Without concrete knowledge of his deeds, Dr. King becomes an uplifting but vapid historical presence.

"We grow up celebrating Martin Luther

King's birthday, but not delving into his history," said Reynolds.

The film began with King's brisk seminary education and arrival in Montgomery, Ala. Once there, he became a key figure in the Montgomery bus boycott, beginning his struggle for civil rights. He praised the sit-ins in Greensboro, where students protested segregated restaurants by refusing to leave their seats and aided the Freedom Riders in desegregating interstate buses.

Dr. King met opposition from within the black community, particularly from black nationalists who disagreed with his non-violent protest methods. Malcolm X criticized these methods stringently.

In 1965, King began to speak out against the Vietnam War, though this stance damaged his reputation among Americans in general.

The film demonstrated that civil rights for African-Americans were only one facet

of King's quest to unite the "brotherhood of humanity."

After the screening, Reynolds and Scott invited students to share what they had learned from the film. Sophomores Anne Rappe said she was surprised by how much King's protest methods connected to Quaker doctrines of non-violence.

"Showing (this movie) in Milner Lounge was a unique opportunity," said Reynolds. "It's the students' own living space and ... more (students) came to watch (as the film went on)."

"It was really interesting to hear the details of (King's) life," said first-year Emma Lovejoy. "We should have more of these events in a community gathering space, more of these movies with a purpose."

The documentary upheld a true, unsanitized version of MLK day as it documented the life of the man behind the messiah.

## "Just war": can Christians declare a holy war?

By Victor Lopez  
STAFF WRITER

This past Tuesday, students held a provocative forum at the Hut. The Hut was warm and cozy, the couches extremely inviting; an environment that welcomed questioning Christians and non-Christians alike.

Kevin Matthews, chaplain of St. Mary's House asked these questions: "Should Christians be pacifists? What does just war theory say and where did it come from? Can Christians declare a holy war?"

The United States' involvement in World War II was discussed.

The group questioned the ethics of the church and compared them with those of the Bible in an attempt to define what a just war is.

The Episcopal church defines just war as, "a theory that some wars are just, or at least justifiable, and that justifiable wars merit full Christian support and participation."

According to the Episcopal church, reason shows that war is evil, but also that sometimes self-defense is required.

Matthews presented the questions, asking for suggestions that affirmed or contradicted the idea that there could ever be a just war. Most of the students who participated were there to learn and present their points of view, while two students participated in these conversations as an alternative to conventional confirmation classes.

"We welcome our fellow students to join this conversation regardless of their faith," said senior Peter Gott. "Our goal does not include converting students to any faith; rather it is to gain awareness of the theories and ideology of the church. Keep in mind, for millennia the Catholic Church defined our culture, and in many ways our foundation was shaped by the ideas we are discussing. Defining just war and its inconsistencies are planting seeds of knowledge."

Those who attended the meeting did not profess to have the answers. They said that some of the theories are sound and that they considered the Bible as a point of reference, and that other examples of war did not fit the definition of a just war.

When conversation turned to a world with nuclear warheads, the group wrestled with the idea that a just war could ever exist by their church's doctrine.

"The Cold War may have been the only justified war," said first-year Taylor Seitz.

Next week they plan to discuss the issue in more depth.

"I'm not sure that my peers at Guilford know what 'just war' means," said Gott, "In fact, I'm just learning its definition and use, which is why we are all here participating in the ongoing discussion."

Gott said that he would like to see more Guilford student involvement with these weekly conversations coordinated by St. Mary's House Episcopal Campus Ministry, which serves Greensboro colleges.

The group welcomes people of every sexual orientation, gender and race, and encourages the participation of individuals of all political parties and positions in life.

These conversions take place every Tuesday night from 8 to 9 p.m. at the Hut. Everyone is welcome