

January 26, 2017 10:30AM

Post honors legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

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Christopher Burnett | Staff Writer

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King, an ordained minister, was a leader for nonviolent activism during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. The movement successfully protested racial discrimination in federal and state law. The campaign for a federal holiday in King's honor began soon after his assassination in 1968. President Ronald Reagan signed the holiday into law in 1983, and it was first observed three years later. Some states initially resisted observing the holiday by giving it alternative names, or combining it with other existing holidays. Ultimately, Martin Luther King Jr. Day was officially observed in all 50 states for the first time in 2000. This year, the national holiday was Jan. 16.

Maj. William Branch, a student in the Command and General Staff Officer Course, delivered the keynote address to about 140 people. A Detroit native, he graduated from Western Michigan University and was commissioned as an Armor officer. His previous assignments include serving as the Armor lieutenants' assignment officer, Human Resources Command, at Fort Knox, Ky.; aide de camp to the commanding general, Brigade Modernization Command; and service with the 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry, 2nd Brigade, 1st Armored Division, at Fort Bliss, Tex.

Branch centered his remarks upon the journey that citizen undertake as human beings and countrymen.

"As I reflected on the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., I saw a man grounded in purpose. I saw a humble man who recognized the power of his gifts and abilities to address a great ethical dilemma of the time," Branch said. "Most importantly, I saw a man whose passion and wisdom surpassed his experience to produce one of the greatest examples of moral courage we know today. But like so many others, his story illustrates that we all maintain the capacity to perpetuate positive change in the world."

Branch said so many people within our society pass away the time, living idly, "processing oxygen to carbon dioxide," while so many others are distracted by meaningless endeavors to no end. He emphasized that purpose drives and commits shared interests in a focused direction. And, before people can set off in the right direction as a society or individually, there must be some headway.

"Our true identity is the negotiation of our societal identity and our personal identity. We have to come to understand what each of us brings to our community, respecting and expecting that everyone brings something," Branch said. "For me particularly, growing up in northwest Detroit, Mich., offered a very unique prospective on life."

Branch said that he witnessed what he saw as the denigration of urban neighborhoods in that city and the hopelessness of many people who turned toward destructive behaviors as coping mechanisms.

"We were coping with poverty, with the lack of resources, but most of all with the lack of understanding of our circumstance," Branch said. "Despite this characterization, this environment cultivated a host of other qualities — resourcefulness, creativity, imagination, and resilience."

In closing, Branch quoted words by King that spoke directly to the importance of employing a unity of effort among all people toward constructively addressing issues of mutual benefit and concern.

"We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality," Branch said, in quoting King. "And whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be."



PHOTO/ PRUDENCE SIEBERT, FORT LEAVENWORTH LAMP

Guest speaker Maj. William Branch, student in the Command and General Staff Officer Course, tells those gathered for the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. luncheon how thinking outside the box as a child in Detroit has continued to be a beneficial skill during his remarks Jan. 25 at the Frontier Conference Center. Photo by Prudence Siebert/Fort Leavenworth Lamp