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# The University of Dayton

# News Release

March 26, 1993  
Contact: Rosemary Harty

## **CIVIL RIGHTS EXPERT: MLK WOULD HAVE CONTINUED PUSH FOR FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES IN AMERICAN SOCIETY**

DAYTON, Ohio -- Civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. was looking beyond civil rights and turning a critical eye to how American institutions fostered racism and discrimination at the time an assassin's bullet took his life 25 years ago, a University of Dayton sociologist says.

April 4 will mark the 25th anniversary of King's murder in Memphis. Theo Majka, an associate professor of sociology who teaches courses on minority issues, says it's significant that King was on his way to support a sanitation workers' strike in that city when his life ended.

After the passage of the civil rights act in 1964 and the voting rights act in 1965, King was looking beyond "breaking down laws dealing with discrimination" to deal with "looking at the broader context of American society. He was more critical of U.S. foreign policy, the Vietnam war in particular," Majka said. He was taking on the policies of American corporations and major institutions..

"If he were alive today, I believe his emphasis would be more on economic issues," Majka said. "King was becoming more critical of the operation of mainstream American institutions and realized that true racial justice would take an enormous commitment on the

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part of white Americans that he did not believe our society was ready to make."

Citing school integration efforts as one example, Majka believes that "undeniably civil rights have improved for African-Americans." But in some ways, society has gone backward.

"On the other hand, what we have seen is a growth in poverty. Low-income, inner-city African-Americans are increasingly cut off or isolated from opportunities," he said.

"Given King's overall approach, he would simply ask us, "What kind of a society do you want to leave for future generations -- the kind of hopelessness we see in inner cities today?"

With the lasting images of the L.A. riots, and the potential for more violence as a second trial nears completion, Majka offered a picture of how King would react to today's turmoil. "In his soul, he believed in non-violence, both as a philosophy he derived in part from Mahatma Gandhi and also as a practical matter. That didn't mean he wasn't militant, he wasn't angry," Majka said. "King would use it as an opportunity to push for some substantial concessions to the way things operate."

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For interviews, contact **Theo Majka** at (513) 229-4147 or (513) 278-1979.