



Virginia Tech prof compares King and Malcolm X

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(The Collegiate Times) (U-WIRE) BLACKSBURG, Va. -- American heroes may not always be what they seem, according to a lecture held last night in Squires Student Center at Virginia Tech.

Christopher Clement, a political science professor, compared and contrasted the images of civil rights leaders Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X in a forum sponsored by Theta Nu Xi, the multicultural sorority.

Clement explained his point of view about why the world regards King as a hero and Malcolm X as a tyrant.

"It takes a whole lot of convoluted history to make Martin Luther King a hero," he said.

Clement explained that King was not the pacifist that some portray him to be today.

"Love, peace and non-violence -- those three tenants guided Martin Luther King," he said.

In schools students get the impression that King wanted blacks to sit passively by while they were discriminated against, Clement said.

"What these folks don't tell you is that these practices of non-violence should bring you out in the streets," he said.

"There is the Martin Luther King that has been stolen -- the one that believed the only way to bring down racism and oppression was to face it in the streets."

Malcolm X, who was a Muslim for much of his life, believed in peace toward others, Clement said. However, unlike King, he encouraged those who were discriminated against to retaliate forcefully if they were physically harmed.

"Malcolm X believed in direct, forceful confrontation -- equal to the force put upon you," he said. "It's a whole lot harder to take someone like that and convert him to a hero."

King's false image of today has perpetuated problems for minorities, Clement said.

"Now more than ever we need a Malcolm X," he said. "The greatest problem is that some people of color have lost a feeling of self defense. People of color should not be afraid to advance their interests."

In recent years though, Malcolm X has resurfaced in pop culture, Clement said. He cited Spike Lee's movie and "X's" on hats and shirts.

"Hip-hop culture had elevated Malcolm X, but that somehow faded," he said.

Clement said the model of the politically active man has been set by the oppressors of society.

"(The model is) non-violent, peaceful and conciliatory," he said. "By creating this model of a passive Martin Luther King, it creates a passive society. He is not a model for getting us out on the streets (today). We need to reclaim Martin Luther King and Malcolm X."

Zohra Atmar, a founder of Tech's Theta Nu Xi chapter and a junior political science major, said sorority members chose Clement to speak because he is a fairly new professor.

"I found out that Martin Luther King was very much proactive," she said. "But Malcolm X -- I discovered him on my own."

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