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# Introduction

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The Ethics Center has sponsored a presentation on Martin Luther King Jr. day since the beginning of the MLK Day celebration on campus. For the past two years the program has taken place in the Wesley Foundation, which has been a co-sponsor, and the program has been put on by graduate students in the department of philosophy. We are grateful to the Wesley Foundation, and their director, the Reverend Jeff Williams, and office manager and program support leader Susan Daniels, for their co-operation

The subject is Affirmative Action and I am sure everybody is aware that Affirmative Action is one of the most controversial social issues in the United States today, ranking with abortion and assisted suicide as one of the issues that seem to generate quite a lot of debate. I would say that Affirmative Action is of those issues by far the most important not only because it has the potential for affecting a vast number of people but also because there is a real potential for making a significant change in American society. Some people think it has been doing that already, some people think it hasn't, but it certainly has that potential and something like that is the goal. Perhaps this is the reason why it is enormously controversial.

You are probably aware there was a referendum in California a few years back to prohibit Affirmative Actions in state programs such as admissions to the University of California and that proposal was passed by the voters and was then challenged in court and has subsequently gone into effect in California. You also may know that in Texas the Federal Appeals Court has ruled that the Affirmative Action program at the University of Texas regarding admissions and other programs was a violation of the Federal Constitution. You also may know that in the recent election the issue of Affirmative Action was on the ballot in the city of Houston, Texas, and there it was approved by the voters in that city. The US Supreme Court has not really had a decision on Affirmative Action since the late seventies and the decision in that case is regarded as somewhat ambiguous and possibly no longer good law. So both the legal status and the status in terms of public opinion and also I would say the philosophical and moral status is very much open to debate.

The goal of the program today is to present you with the kinds of debate that is going on out there. This is an educational and information program. We want the members of the audience, you, to be able to come away from

here with an enhanced understanding of what is being said and what the issues are and what the points are one way or the other in this discussion so that each of you can be in a better position to make up your own mind. So the panel has been organized in such a way so that all of the main points, we hope, will be presented to you in this panel format. At least that is the goal we are trying to reach today.

You might want to know something about our panelists. They are all philosophy graduate students. Barbra Jotzke is from Des Moines, Iowa and did her undergraduate work at Valparaiso University, in Indiana; she is a second year student and will finish her work at WMU in the spring and receive her MA in June. Eric Wampler, from Holland and Hope College, is also a second year student, who receives his MA in April, and then will complete his Ph.D. in philosophy at the University of Illinois. Patrick Kinuthia comes to us from Kenya. This has been a year of firsts for Patrick. Coming to Kalamazoo is not only his first trip to America but his first trip outside his own country. And this winter he has encountered something he never met in Kenya: cold and snow! Patrick is interested in American culture and political philosophy and ethics. Kimberly Hellmers is

originally from Los Angeles but calls Durango, Colorado home. She did graduate work last year at the University of Montana and as she moves ever-eastward, hopes to eventually reach the east coast.

So these folks represent our very diverse and interesting group of graduate students.

I also want to recall that last year the Philosophy Department, Ethics Center and Wesley Foundation sponsored an MLK Day panel on the subject of civil disobedience. The graduate students who comprised that panel were Barbra Jotzke, then a mere first year student, Rick van Every, Pam Houtteman, and Bev van Reenan. Pam completes her MA this year and meanwhile has been teaching medical ethics for us in Grand Rapids. Rick, who came to us from Drake University in Des Moines and lives in Illinois, and Bev, who is from West Virginia, are both doing further graduate work, Rick at the University of Iowa and Bev at the University of Utah.

I think you will agree that these are all remarkable young people and deserve a great deal of credit for their accomplishments. We professors are pleased to be able to assist them as they prepare themselves for their futures.

**Joseph Ellin**