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Reading Practice 2 – Impact 3

King Holiday Considered 'Mixed Blessing' By Some Historians

In the following text, the headings of five sections have been removed. Choose the best heading (A-F) for the five sections (1-5). There is one extra heading you do not need to use. You only need to write the letter in the box.

Use these headings to fill the spaces below. There is one extra you do not need to use.

A. Avoiding Difficult Questions
B. Fairer Chance For All
C. Inaccurate Legacy
D. A Question Of Necessity
E. Ongoing Struggle
F. Other Agendas

On the third Monday of every January since 1986, schools, federal offices and banks across the United States are closed so that Americans can celebrate the birth and life of Martin Luther King, Jr. Reverend King was the dynamic civil rights leader who focused the world's attention on the problem of racial segregation in the American South.

He is remembered for his strategy of nonviolent resistance and his opposition to racism. But before he was assassinated in 1968, Reverend King had begun to challenge more than America's understanding of race, and some prominent historians fear that his opposition to U.S. economic and foreign policy is being forgotten.

1. ☐

"The greatest danger by far with King birthday celebrations is the umpteenth re-playing of the 'I Have a Dream' speech," says David Garrow, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*. Professor Garrow calls the speech -- which Reverend King delivered in 1963 on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. -- an "unrepresentative sample" of what the civil leader stood for. He says the unrelenting focus on the address incorrectly makes Martin Luther King look like a "rosy-eyed optimist."

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2.

"Younger people are left with a really quite misleading impression of King that focuses too much on that one very upbeat speech," says Professor Garrow, "and oftentimes gives no attention whatsoever to King as a critic of economic inequality and American foreign policy around the world."

On the day he was assassinated, Martin Luther King was in Memphis, Tennessee, supporting a strike that had been launched by sanitation workers there. Just moments before he died, he was writing a sermon titled Why America May Go to Hell. Two years earlier, he had moved into a slum in the northern city of Chicago to call attention to urban poverty - and to challenge the notion that the South was the only region that had a problem with race.

Reverend King had also become an outspoken critic of the war in Vietnam, calling the United States "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today" during a sermon he delivered in New York in 1967. "In some respects," says Clayborne Carson, director of the King Papers Project at Stanford University, "the civil rights issues, narrowly conceived, were the easiest to resolve, because there you had a distinction between the way black people were treated in the South and the dominant values of the nation, as expressed by the [U.S.] Supreme Court in the Brown [vs. Board of Education] decision [which outlawed segregation.]"

3.

Professor Carson, who has been editing the correspondence and speeches of Martin Luther King for the last 20 years, notes that Reverend King had changed his focus before he died. "When King started to confront the issues that were as common in the North as in the South," he says, "then I think he faced a much greater challenge. And I think that's the challenge we still face today."

4.

So why is it that public remembrances of Reverend King have been so concentrated on the issues of race and non-violence, rather than on his criticisms of economic policy and the Vietnam War? Historian David Garrow says it is because very few people today object to Martin Luther King's call for an end to racial segregation. "If, on the other hand, King holiday events addressed King's identifying himself as a Democratic Socialist or King's emerging as a very outspoken critic of

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American militarism in Vietnam and Southeast Asia," he says, "then holiday celebrations would have to confront whether American society today has any greater level of economic equality than it did in 1968 and whether American foreign policy in the years since 1968 is fundamentally different than the militarism and go-it-alone attitudes that King criticized so forcefully."

5.

David Garrow argues that the so-called "sweetening" of Martin Luther King's historical reputation was unavoidable once his birthday became a federal holiday. He says even the most conservative political leaders have had to find a way to embrace Reverend King's legacy -- and putting the emphasis on the Baptist preacher's opposition to racial segregation has been that way.

For this reason, David Garrow says, Martin Luther King, Jr. Day has been a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it calls national attention to America's problematic history with race. But on the other hand, he says, the holiday has made it difficult for young African-Americans struggling with economic inequality to identify with a civil rights leader who was killed before they were born.

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