SPEECH TO THE KING WEEK OPENING CEREMONY
Colorado State University
Jan. 18, 1991

Sixty two years ago, a man was born whose memory we honor here today. This man—a man of courage, humility and conviction—challenged us to dream, to fight for our beliefs and to assert our inalienable rights as human beings. Martin Luther King showed us that an idea, which happens to be the right idea, can change the course of a society. He spoke out for freedom, truth and justice, and through his words he forced us to face ourselves and our humanity.

Today, Dr. King's legacy is especially significant. Our country is at war, and we worry greatly about the sanctity of life and the safety of those we love. We find ourselves in armed conflict, where men, women and children become filled with the passion of hatred and fear and confusion.

As a university, we must join together to draw strength from Dr. King's vision of a world in which freedom, equality and justice are simply a part of common reality. I hope that everyone at Colorado State—students, faculty and staff—will be able to share in the activities planned for this week. And I would like
to thank the Office of Black Student Services for organizing these programs for us.

And as we gather here together today, to celebrate Dr. King's life and work, we do so with the knowledge that those ideals for which he struggled, those "inalienable rights," are still, in 1991, far beyond the grasp of too many Americans. We gather with the knowledge that freedom, justice and equality of opportunity are still little more than political rhetoric for large segments of our population. We gather, too, with the hope that reason and compassion will prevail in these somber times and with the hope that Dr. King's legacy and dream will fill hearts and minds as we strengthen our resolve to create a better world.

Racism and bigotry, if not as overt and prevalent as twenty years ago, certainly appear today—in different forms, and just as potent. Today we encounter racism as a backlash against affirmative action and other special efforts "to level the playing field." We see it, too, in the many creative excuses for denying access to education, to jobs, to housing, and more generally, to the mainstream of society.

But we also see a willingness on the part of greater numbers of people--young and old, students and non-students--to engage in sincere and meaningful dialogue about racial, ethnic and cultural
We see, too, an acknowledgment of differences, to acknowledge the need for special efforts to enhance the diversity of our social, economic and political structures and to recognize the value and strength of diversity as a characteristic of American society.

Yet we still find, as I have since beginning my tenure as Colorado State University's 12th president, that too many people still try to reduce the entire issue of access to education and jobs to a decision about the level of and commitment to quality of our social and business systems and organizations.

And sadly, so much of our time continues to be spent fighting misplaced notions—taking away the excuses I spoke about a minute ago. Diversity, it must be emphasized, is not about lowering standards, or taking shortcuts, or making inappropriate compromises. These are truth because without it achieving intellectual equilibrium is impossible; integrity, as one's most

In speaking for Colorado State University, I can state that it is a charge our institution has accepted to seek ways to become stronger and to enhance our responsiveness to the society we serve. It is a charge to provide equality of opportunity and to adopt progressive measures to admit students who have a strong probability for succeeding. It is a charge that demands we make an institutional investment in support services that help increase the probability that a greater number of students will
achieve success at Colorado State.

I believe there is no greater challenge facing this nation than to bring greater numbers of the poor, the disadvantaged, and the disenfranchised into the mainstream of society. This challenge pervades all of society, affects us all...It touches all areas of government, of education, of business and of industry. Surely we cannot continue to ignore the growing polarization that exists between rich and poor, black and white, and virtually all other characterizations of our society.

Perhaps we can begin to honor Dr. King’s memory by working together to heal these wounds, by returning to those values that guided his life and his work and his dreams. Today, I would ask that you think of five such values that beg for special consideration. These are truth because without it achieving intellectual equilibrium is impossible; integrity, as one’s most precious commodity; competence to assure usefulness; commitment because life without passion seems no life at all; and compassion, born of a reverence for life.

Dr. King spoke about this essential quality of humanity in the following way:

‘If a man happens to be 36 years old, as I happen
to be, and some great truth stands before the door of his life, some great opportunity to stand up for that which is right and that which is just, and he refuses to stand up because he wants to live a little longer and he is afraid his home will get bombed, or he is afraid that he will get shot...he may go on and live until he's 80, and the cessation of breathing in his life is merely the belated announcement of an earlier death of the spirit."

Indeed, Dr. King's words speak to all of us today, no matter what our personal convictions about the war in the Middle East may be. Perhaps these words bring small comfort to those here who wait in anguish to learn of the fate of loved ones in battle. As well, they are no panacea for those among us who cling to a prayer for peace now that war has commenced.

And yet Dr. King's words point to possibilities--they ring with the force of truth, they resound with the majesty of a dream so pure it seems to walk among the stars. Indeed, after so many years, his words continue to echo in our hearts and in our minds, challenging all of us to rise to the call of humanity, to act upon our conscience, and to dedicate our dreams to ensuring a better world for our children.

Thank you and Godsspeed!