

# VIRTUAL MLK SPEECH OPENS STUDENTS' EYES

Talk not recorded in 1960 is 'seen' at Molloy College

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It was one of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s important speeches, but as far as historians know, no one recorded it.

So a North Carolina State University team have put together a virtual recreation of King's "Fill Up The Jails" speech in Durham, North Carolina, in 1960, when he endorsed the new "direct action" protests of sit-ins at Woolworth's lunch counters to end segregation.

On Friday, the program came to Molloy University in Rockville Centre, where 120 students from public high schools in Roosevelt, Freeport, and Baldwin watched the recreation through virtual reality headsets.

For some, it deepened their admiration of America's foremost civil rights leader. For oth-

ers — recent immigrants from Latin America — it was a chance to learn about something they knew little of: historic institutional racism in the United States.

Bianca Ballesteros, 17, a student at Freeport High School and a recent immigrant from Colombia, said she was stunned by scenes in part of the program that showed Blacks forced to use a separate entrance to the Royal Ice Cream Parlor in Durham, and prohibited from entering the area reserved for whites.

"It's really good to learn about this, because before I knew very little about him," she said in Spanish. "There was a lot of racism, and they didn't have rights because they were Black."

Johanny Gutierrez, 14, also a Freeport student, said the program was "really inspirational and very empowering. I think more people should have the ability to see" it.

The program is part of the Virtual Martin Luther King Jr. Project at North Carolina State University. A then-doctoral stu-



Kesson Sorsor, a senior at Freeport High School, at the virtual event. ■ Video: [newsday.com/longisland](https://www.newsday.com/longisland)

dent who worked on it there, Max Renner, is now an assistant professor of communications and new media at Molloy.

King gave the speech at the White Rock Baptist Church on Feb. 16, 1960, about two weeks after the famous sit-ins started in Greensboro. For the first time, he was encouraging activists to disrupt and break the law through nonviolent confrontation, even if it meant "filling up the jails."

He came to Durham partly because a half-dozen Black students under the tutelage of one of his former classmates, the Rev. Douglas E. Moore, had staged their own sit-in three years earlier at the segregated

Royal Ice Cream Parlor. After refusing to leave, they were arrested and fined \$10 plus court fees.

Some historians believe the Durham action on June 23, 1957, inspired the Greensboro activists, whose lunch counter sit-ins ignited similar protests throughout the South, Renner said.

But the Durham sit-in went largely unnoticed among the public, in part because — unlike in Greensboro — there were no TV cameras and other media to record it, he said.

The North Carolina State University researchers put together King's speech through a transcript written by a news re-

porter that is now in his archives at Stanford University.

"Let us not fear going to jail," King told the gathering. "If the officials threaten to arrest us for standing up for our rights, we must answer by saying that we are willing and prepared to fill up the jails of the South."

The researchers hired a voice actor to read King's speech, and produced a digital recreation of the church and the speech.

The speech shows how King "realized that this is the future of the civil rights movement," Renner said. "It has to be a form of more direct action, even if it means filling up the jails of the South."

# Yellen: U.S. likely to hit debt limit Thursday



Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen says the U.S. must avoid default.

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen notified Congress on Friday that the United States is projected to reach its debt limit Thursday and will then resort to "extraordinary measures" to avoid default.

In a letter to House and Senate leaders, Yellen said her actions will buy time until Congress can pass legislation that will either raise the nation's \$31.4 trillion borrowing authority or suspend it again for a period of time. But she said it's "critical that Congress act in a timely manner."

"Failure to meet the government's obligations would cause irreparable harm to the U.S. economy, the livelihoods of all Americans, and global financial stability," she said.

"In the past, even threats that the U.S. government might fail to meet its obligations have caused real harms, including the only credit rating downgrade in the history of our nation in 2011," she said. Yellen was referring to the debt ceiling impasse during Barack Obama's presidency, when Republicans had also just won a House majority.

In this new Congress, the

debt ceiling debate will almost certainly trigger a political showdown between newly empowered GOP lawmakers who now control the House and want to cut spending and President Joe Biden and Democratic lawmakers, who had enjoyed one-party control of Washington for the past two years.

The White House has insisted that it won't allow the nation's credit to be held captive to the demands of GOP lawmakers.

"We have seen both Republicans and Democrats come together to deal with this issue," White House spokesperson

Karine Jean-Pierre said Friday. "It is one of the basic items that Congress has to deal with and it should be done without conditions."

House Republican leaders liken the debt ceiling to a credit card limit and have said they would only raise the statutory ceiling if doing so also secures a spending overhaul.

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy told reporters he had a "very good conversation" with Biden about the debt ceiling.

"We don't want to put any fiscal problems to our economy and we won't," he said.