

# Selected Speeches

## Martin Luther King Jr. Diversity Recognition Awards

Feb. 3, 2016

MSTF Auditorium

### **Welcome**

Good afternoon. I'm delighted to welcome you to our celebration of Black History Month and the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

This day is an affirmation.

It's an affirmation that diversity is our strength, equality our aim, and service our obligation.

It's an affirmation that a culture of inclusion makes our work better, our vision brighter, our aspirations bolder.

It's an affirmation that deep understanding and compassionate action are possible only when we honor the full range of human experience and expression.

These are the ideals for which Dr. King fought and died, and it's especially appropriate that WE take up his work. For Dr. King appreciated the power of intellectual discovery, while understanding that knowledge alone is insufficient. Through our scientific and technological genius, he said, we've made of this world a neighborhood. But now, he said, through our moral and ethical commitment, we must make of it a brotherhood.

I thank all of you for building and nurturing this brotherhood.

### **Furman Templeton Choir**

I have a special treat for you as we begin our celebration. We're honored to have with us today the Furman Templeton Preparatory Academy Choir.

As you probably know, UMB works very closely with Furman Templeton. Our School of Social Work coordinates services at the school to lift up children and strengthen communities. And I know that many of us here consider these children family. So we're delighted to share this celebration with them.

The choir was formed five years ago, and it's open to all students in kindergarten through 5th grade. That means some of these students are choir veterans, and some have been singing only a couple of months.

The group is featured at events throughout the city, and they travel as well. Over the past five years, they've performed in Buffalo, New York; Niagara Falls; Disney World; Ontario; and the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville. This summer, they're off to sing at the famed Harlem Children's Zone School.

Please welcome the Furman Templeton Preparatory Academy Choir, performing *Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing*.

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What an inspiring way to begin!

I thank the students and the choir's coordinator, Ms. Kristine Rose; musician, Mr. Tevin Brown; and parent directors Ms. Latea Williams, Ms. April Harris, and Ms. LaTonya Russell.

I mentioned earlier that the choir travels out of state once a year to perform. The students are asked to fundraise to offset the cost of these trips—\$300 apiece—and I know they'd be thrilled to take your money. The University is contributing to the cause as well, because everyone deserves to hear these students sing.

And if you were thinking of slipping out of this program early, I should mention that the choir will be back at the very end for two more songs. You'll definitely want to stay for them.

### **The Hon. Robert M. Bell**

I'm delighted and humbled to introduce our keynote speaker this afternoon.

The Honorable Robert Bell is former chief judge of the Maryland Court of Appeals, the very first African American to be named the state's chief jurist.

Judge Bell is synonymous with Baltimore's civil rights movement—his name enshrined in the court case that would ultimately mark a turning point for the movement: *Bell v. Maryland*. The case centered on a trespassing conviction handed down to Judge Bell, who was then only 16 years old—a student-leader at Baltimore's Dunbar High School. His infraction? Demanding service in a whites-only restaurant following a student-led protest to end segregation.

His conviction was ultimately overturned, but not before being upheld by the Maryland Court of Appeals, the same body that—years later—he would lead. And his case was prosecuted by lawyers whom he would later join as colleagues on the court.

Judge Bell completed his studies at Morgan State University and Harvard Law School, and launched his legal career as an attorney at Piper and Marbury. In 1975, he began nearly four decades on the Maryland bench.

And when he was named chief judge of the Maryland Court of Appeals in 1996, Judge Bell became the only active judge to have served at least four years at all four levels of the Maryland judiciary.

In 2013, the same year he retired from the bench, the University of Maryland, Baltimore conferred on Judge Bell an Honorary Doctor of Laws degree. (And, for me personally, I very much enjoy his friendship.)

Please help me welcome the Honorable Robert Bell.

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Thank you, Judge Bell. We have a couple of gifts for you to show our gratitude.

First, you have a long and legendary reputation in Baltimore as a very smart dresser. We hope to enhance your sartorial flair with this UMB bow tie. I'd be thrilled if you'd add it to your rotation.

Second—and more importantly—we've made a contribution in your name to the Access to Justice Commission, an organization obviously close to your heart. The commission will work to ensure equal access, fair outcomes, inclusive decision-making, just laws, and equitable enforcement for every Marylander who encounters the civil justice system. It's a fitting tribute to the work you've undertaken throughout your career.

Thank you, Judge Bell, and I hope you'll stay on stage with me as we honor our diversity award winners.

## Diversity Awards

So without further ado, let's recognize our 2016 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Diversity Award recipients—faculty, staff, and students who are sustaining Dr. King's work of building a free and just society. People who—in the words of Dr. King—make a career of humanity.

I thank the Diversity Advisory Council for forwarding such worthy nominations for my consideration. Of course, they represent only a fraction of the extraordinary work being carried out by UMB's people. And so to *all* of you striving for justice, equity, and inclusion—to all of you illuminating the value in every life and every struggle—I thank you.

## Faculty Award

[School of Social Work | Tanya Sharpe]

Our first award goes to a faculty member, and our deserving recipient this year is Dr. Tanya Sharpe.

As the School of Social Work's senior-most African American female faculty member, Dr. Sharpe has led countless efforts to advance equality and social justice.

She's a mentor and counselor to many students and colleagues at the School—but especially those of color who seldom see sufficient diversity within the faculty corps. Dr. Sharpe has served as faculty advisor for the School's African American student group, and she's a founding member of its Diversity and Anti-Oppression group.

Some of you might have first met Dr. Sharpe during the Baltimore uprising last spring. She facilitated group discussions and “safe spaces” for students, faculty, and staff struggling with the same pain, anger, and hopelessness we saw in the protesters themselves. She guided us as we undertook a Universitywide “Conversation About Race.” And there we saw her deftness in dealing plainly—yet sensitively—with difficult issues of race, power, and privilege.

Dr. Sharpe's research is critical in a city like Baltimore. She's among a handful of scholars nationwide focusing on African American survivors of the homicide epidemic. And she works with community agencies to implement culturally responsive programs for those coping with profound trauma and grief. Dr. Sharpe's expertise in this regard is routinely sought out by scholars, community leaders, policymakers, and the media—all trying to make sense of the violence plaguing Baltimore.

She brings us closer to the communities we serve, offering access to the isolated, and a voice to those whose pain is often lost under the city's crushing homicide rate.

In her research, teaching, and advocacy, Dr. Sharpe is what we—as an institution—strive, every day, to be. And I'm honored to present Dr. Tanya Sharpe the 2016 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Diversity Award.

I ask Dr. Sharpe to the stage, along with the School of Social Work Dean Rick Barth.

### **Staff Award**

[Office of Community Engagement | Brian Sturdivant]

Our next award—for a University staff member—goes to Brian Sturdivant in the Office of Community Engagement.

Mr. Sturdivant is director of Strategic Initiatives and Community Partnerships. And there is no one at UMB who can claim more responsibility than he for assembling the platform on which we've built our community engagement efforts.

Without question, Mr. Sturdivant opened doors for us in West Baltimore. His decade of work has allowed us to become a trusted partner in the community. He lent us credibility—credibility we might not have been granted, had he not paved our way.

Mr. Sturdivant's passion is contagious—and he easily inspires colleagues and students to commit to this important work. In fact, many of them call him the “Mayor of West Baltimore.”

And while Mr. Sturdivant oversees many University initiatives, I believe the one that's closest to his heart is CLUB UMB, a program that helps Baltimore's children achieve the success we know is possible for them.

Last year, under Mr. Sturdivant's guidance, students from the Southwest Baltimore Charter School competed in the Maryland Science Olympiad. They placed third among all Baltimore City schools. Then they were invited to the statewide competition. Unlike many of their competitors who had significant funds backing them, our students had to make do with what they had.

So Brian and the children were creative in their project design, and their crafty innovation paid off. Southwest Baltimore Charter School earned silver and bronze medals in the statewide challenge.

Brian has a deep and abiding love for the students of West Baltimore. And I don't know anyone at UMB who doesn't have that same love for Brian.

I'm honored to present the 2016 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Diversity Award to Brian Sturdivant.

I ask Mr. Sturdivant to the stage, along with Ms. Ashley Valis, executive director of the Office of Community Engagement.

### **Student Award**

[School of Dentistry | Hispanic Dental Association]

Now to our Student Award: This year we recognize the Hispanic Dental Association, a robust student group dedicated to serving the underserved.

The group conducts biannual oral health screenings at Wolfe Street Academy in Baltimore City and the Langley Park Health Fair in Prince George's County. The students of Wolfe Street and the families of Langley Park are largely Hispanic. Many are recent immigrants. Many are undocumented. And they face significant barriers to good oral health care.

So the students conduct exams for oral cancer and dental disease, while providing oral health education, basic preventive services, and access to follow-up care. They're tracking their success in reducing the incidence and prevalence of dental disease in these vulnerable communities. The group has logged the number of students at Wolfe Street who require follow-up treatment with a dentist—a number that's dropped by an incredible 75 percent since 2008.

But the group does more than provide free services to patients with little money, little security, and no insurance. They do so in a culturally competent way that's essential to bridging the divide between University and community.

They host Spanish-language lunches to improve their communication skills. They understand the differences between oral health practices and traditions in the U.S. and in Latin America. They strive to truly and deeply know the patients they serve.

Dr. King said: Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health is the most shocking and the most inhumane. And so for their service and their humanity, I'm proud to present the 2016 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Diversity Award to the Hispanic Dental Association.

I'll ask the group's president, Ms. Allegra Lichauco, to the stage, along with her fellow officers—and with the School of Dentistry Dean Mark Reynolds.

## **Special Award**

[Freddie Gray's Baltimore | Carey School of Law]

Typically, we have only three awards to give at this celebration. But we made an exception this time.

It was in April of last year that Baltimore rose up in anger and frustration following the death of Freddie Gray. It was nearly a year ago that we saw the pain of our city laid bare.

And in that civil unrest, there were some profound lessons. And so as a community, we endeavor to hear. We endeavor to learn.

The Carey School of Law designed a course examining the underlying causes of the citywide unrest: practices in policing and criminal justice; inequity in housing, health care, and education; concentrated poverty and isolation; systemic and sustained joblessness; neighborhood disinvestment.

That course became "Freddie Gray's Baltimore: Past, Present, and Moving Forward." Organized by Prof. Michael Greenberger, the course drew on the interest and expertise of many. The School of Social Work got involved. Faculty who were on leave came back to teach a session. Guest speakers flocked to UMB to take part. Top policymakers—Congressman Cummings among them—were eager to join the effort.

And over a summer of intense planning and preparation, the eight-week course was offered in fall 2015. It's since spurred out-of-class conversations and activities. It's linked up people who have the power to effect on-the-ground change in matters of opportunity and justice. The course is being offered again this semester—and it's being offered, as well, to undergraduates in College Park.

Its success is a testament to what we can do—and the speed with which we can do it—when we harness the passion, the dedication, and the commitment of this UMB community.

And so I'll ask to the stage Prof. Michael Greenberger and the faculty of Freddie Gray's Baltimore, along with Carey School of Law Dean Donald Tobin.

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Dr. King said: Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle—the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.

My greatest privilege in leading this incredible University is that I am surrounded by these dedicated individuals—and that I can see, every day, what their passionate concern does reap.

It is, in a word, extraordinary.

I thank all of you for sharing in our celebration today—for honoring the memory of Dr. King and the humane principles to which he dedicated his life.

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