

Opening of MLK Day

Introduction:

Speaker Brown, Distinguished Guests, Friends and Colleagues

It is a very great pleasure for me to

be able to welcome you here today on behalf of the University of Michigan for the opening event of the Martin Luther King Symposium.

We are here this afternoon to honor the memory of one of our nation's greatest leaders, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who was born on this day some 59 years ago.

Indeed, the challenge and importance of this evening and the next several days is conveyed by the title of this Symposium:

"The Multicultural University:
Enlightenment, Empowerment, and Equity:
A Challenge of the King Legacy"

I believe that this is precisely the spirit and purpose of the events planned for the University of Michigan's educational program honoring Dr. King and confirming our commitment to diversity, to pluralism, and to building a truly multicultural institution to serve our state and our nation.

Let me dwell a moment on this latter point since it is so important to us at this point in the University's history.

The Challenge

Many of us have become firmly convinced that the ability of the University to achieve and sustain a campus community

recognized for its racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity will determine not only our capacity to serve our state and nation and the world, but indeed will become the cornerstone of our efforts to achieve excellence in teaching, research, and service in the years ahead.

It is clear that our nation is changing rapidly...

America of the 21st Century will be the most pluralistic, multicultural nation on earth.

In this future, full participation of underrepresented minorities will not be just a matter of equity and social justice.

It will be the key to the future strength and prosperity of America, since our nation cannot afford to waste the human talent represented by its minority populations.

America cannot afford the loss of this human potential, this cultural richness, this social leadership.

If we do not create a nation that mobilizes the talents of all our citizens, we are destined for a diminished role in the global community and more tragically, we will have failed to fulfill the promise of democracy on which this nation was founded.

This is probably the most serious challenge facing American society in the years ahead.

And while it is certainly true that universities cannot solve this problem alone, we must allow this fact to paralyze...to give us an excuse for doing nothing.

Indeed, we believe the University of Michigan has a

mandate to build a model of a multicultural community for our nation...an environment which is supportive of all individuals, regardless of race, creed, national origin, gender, or sexual preference...

Which values and respects and indeed, draws its intellectual strength from the rich diversity of peoples of different races, cultures, religions, nationalities, and beliefs--even as we are drawn together by common values and purposes.

Indeed, we view this commitment to the achievement of diversity as the key element in our efforts to build a University for the 21st Century.

From this broader perspective, the events of the next several days take on unusual significance for three fundamental reasons:

- 1) Of course, it is fitting and important that we remember and honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., one of our great national leaders.
- 2) The events we have planned are also designed to focus the University's attention on both the importance and the challenge of our efforts to build a model of the type of pluralistic, multicultural community necessary to serve America in the years ahead.
- 3) And, of course, by coming together to participate in these activities, we recognize the importance of community--that only by working together, with love and respect, can we move toward Dr. King's dream of a nation united.

Remembrance

This afternoon, as we begin the commemoration of the life of Dr. King, it is appropriate that I briefly reflect on why his life exemplifies the values of our university--indeed, the values of centers of learning throughout the world.

Inspired by Dr. King's memory, we have set aside this time to come together as a community...

...to find inspiration in a life Dr. King lived heroically for others...

...to learn together from the lessons of his life...

...to renew our commitment to create a diverse and pluralistic community in which each person is valued and respected.

In remembering Dr. King, I am personally inspired by

...his belief in the power of ideas to change the world...

...his influence for good as one of the great teachers of mankind...

...the way in which he used his gifts and his knowledge to serve his fellow man.

Dr. King awakened the consciousness of America...

...with the power of his ideas...

...with the force of his teaching...

...he forever changed our nation and the world...

In the academic community we understand better than most the power of ideas...and we revere great teachers...

Hence I believe that universities such as ours have a special reason to honor Dr. King's memory.

But Dr. King also reminds us of a very important truth...

that the power of ideas to change the world by

no means guarantees that the change will be for the better.

From his teaching and the example of his life we learn that

unless ideas are inspired by love for our fellow man...
...in the sometimes painful reality of our limitations...
...as well as in the glory of lives such as Dr. King's.
they will not move us toward his dream of a people united
by equity and mutual respect.

For ideas alone cannot change the world...

Dr. King's wonderful lesson is that only ideas infused with love
give us hope for the future
and strength for the struggle towards justice.

As teachers and students it is good to be reminded of this
vital power of moral purpose...
...of love...
...of community...
...for our lives and our work.

Let us try to remember and act on this wonderful lesson
throughout this year and not just on this special day of remembrance.

A Personal Note

Let me close by sharing with you a very personal memory...

Although it is sometimes traumatic to acknowledge, this June will
mark 25 years--a quarter century--from my graduation.

At that time, 1964, the burning issues on American campuses was
the Civil Rights Movement in America...

My college generation of the 1960s was ignited by the spirit and
leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King in his effort to blaze a new
path of opportunity for all peoples.

Indeed, it will be exactly 25 years ago this June that I
graduated from college...and at my commencement,
Dr. King himself was the commencement speaker.

Indeed, he had to be released from jail to attend the commencement and to receive the honorary degree bestowed upon him.

His message filled my class with hope...

...with faith in ourselves and in each other.

He convinced us that together we could overcome the most dreadful scourages of mankind...

...ignorance, prejudice, and fear.

If we replace them by love and respect for one another!

We believed!

Dr. King's life and work have proven convincingly that this is so.

Even in death the power of his ideas and teaching grows stronger with each passing day.

Indeed, today in this gathering, we draw strength from his example.

I hope that it will inspire all of us to move forward to finish his great work.

That is our purpose in coming together to remember Dr. King today.

To help us to continue the struggle for justice and equality,

for true community in our University and in the world around us.

We must learn Dr. King's lessons well.

We must not turn back.

Together we can fulfill his great dream.

Conclusion

On behalf of the Regents, the Officers, and the entire University community,

I want to thank the members of the planning group...

for putting together such a wonderful and inspiring program for the next several days

I am confident it will help us come together in the spirit of Dr. King.

Let me extend a special thanks for Dr. Homer Neal, Chairman of

the Department of Physics and co-chair of the Martin Luther King Symposium.

I now I would like to introduce the other co-chair of the Committee,

Dr. Claude Steele, Professor of Psychology

and a distinguished member of our faculty

Who will introduce Speaker Brown.

Professor Steele.