

DePaul News 4: MLK Prayer Breakfast – An icon remembered.

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“Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.” – Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The early morning of January 17, 2011 hosted a gathering of DePaul University’s faculty, staff, students, and alumni community to celebrate the 13th Annual Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Prayer Breakfast. This event, hosted by the Center for Intercultural Programs, is one of many of the President’s Signature Series of events recognized throughout the institution. The life and memory of Dr. King is remembered through the year’s specific theme, theatrical performance, and keynote address. This year’s theme was “Fierce Angels: Women in the Civil Rights Movement,” which examined and highlighted the roles of women during what was later termed the Civil Rights Movement.

The multi-purpose room was filled with people of various backgrounds. A strong sense of pride, activism, unity, and solidarity floated through the air as people mingled and found their seats. Edwin Darrell from Residential Education hosted and opened the prayer breakfast. He recalls, “I was proud to see the diversity of attendance. It makes me proud to be a part of the DePaul community when faculty, staff and students can come together to celebrate the legacy and message of a phenomenal individual.” He then introduced Glenance Green, a Graduate student at DePaul who offered the official welcome to everyone.

In her address, Green reminded us that it is “not wrong to go back to what we have forgotten”, however it is essential to do what we can for society today. She left us with the question, “What is your greatest contribution to society?” DePaul University’s President, Rev. Dennis Holtschneider, C.M. addressed everyone shortly after, addressing the theme and emphasizing that the Civil Rights Movement was not only about Rev Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., but those he inspired as well, especially the women of the movement.

Following President Holtschneider, LeAaron A. Foley – President of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., Nu Rho Chapter - spoke about Dr. King’s legacy and the new memorial that will be constructed in Washington, D.C. in between the Lincoln and Jefferson Memorial sites. This memorial is to commemorate the life and contribution to peace and non-violence Dr. King lived.

The prayer breakfast was nicely split into two parts with breakfast being served in the middle of the celebration. This time was spent eating, socializing and networking with others before the keynote address and theatrical performance.

We were honored to have activist and author Elaine Brown as this year's keynote speaker. Brown is best known for her role as leader of the Black Panther Party in 1974 and the author of several books, including *A Taste of Power*. The wealth of knowledge Brown shared with us about the Civil Rights Movements and the role of women in general was inspiring. However before she gave us specific examples on the role of women she first examined the history of "The Black Experience" in America. She touched on many important events and leaders, such as, the Great Migration, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, Rosa Parks, and the Freedom Struggle. She stressed the importance of self-determination as a woman during this period and the amount of courage and bravery required to be involved in the movement. Brown received a standing ovation and a great deal of respect from everyone in the room. It was truly an honor to be in her presence and hear her stories and experiences.

In regards to Elaine Brown and her controversial presence on campus on member of the DePaul community says the following:

"Elaine Brown is a goddess. She came to a campus that is currently struggling on a number of levels on how to deal with the intersections of race and gender, and schooled all of us. Given the recent racism allegations towards Dr. Quinetta Shelby and Dr. Namita Goswami (among others), Ms. Brown's words had a powerful resonance for so many of us. Despite her standing as a revolutionary, her lectures were not only informative—they were real. Elaine Brown coming to DePaul was one of the most powerful experiences I've had at this university"

—Anonymous

Continuing the theme and celebration of women in the Civil Rights Movement, Dexter Zollicoffer, Diversity Advisor and professional actor at the DePaul Theatre School, presented a series of monologues portraying strong women activists. The actresses featured were graduates Loresa Grigsby, Sarah Hecht, Mercedes Frierson and Shannon Matesky. The four women embodied Civil Rights activists Delores Huerta, Mary White Ovington, Dorothy Height and Claudette Colvin, telling their stories of hardship and success experienced during the movement. The audience got a glimpse of the Civil Rights Movement from an informal and day-to-day basis in the eyes of a woman.

In the midst of motions being set to condemn Elaine Brown's presence at DePaul, it may cause you to wonder what the university was promoting by bringing this leader to our campus. When asked the following, Scott Tharpe, Director of the Office of Diversity Education responds declaring that "the University was promoting the importance for all members of our beloved community to understand the holistic context and struggle of the civil rights movement from a perspective that is not often considered. She reminded us of the equal importance for the creation

and maintenance of cultural equity for all.” This message resounds through our halls today.

Director of the Center for Intercultural Programs, Katrina Caldwell, Ph. D. closed out the prayer breakfast thanking many of the student organizations and outside sponsors that were involved in the efforts. She expressed that the event will continue each year and is grateful for the amount of support and dedication. Without Dr. Caldwell and the many others, the prayer breakfast would not have been such a success.