



Address at the 25th Annual MLK Breakfast

**Given by Mark B. Rosenberg
on January 15, 2016**



This speech was presented to the attendees of the 25th Annual MLK Breakfast held at the Graham Center Ballrooms on January 15, 2016.

Happy New Year! 2016 will be a momentous year for our country; it will be a momentous year for our university. No better way to begin this year than with your fellowship celebrating the memory, impact, and hope of Dr. Martin Luther King. I want to take a moment to give a special thank you to the members of our MLK committee.

Thank you to Dr. Dorret Sawyers, who has chaired the commemorative celebration for the past five years. Thank you to all of the students, faculty and staff who have made this commemoration possible for the last 25 years!

With your hard work and determination as inspiration, we as an institution are honoring and carrying on Dr. King's work. Today, we mark 25 years of coming together as a family to honor Dr. King's legacy.

What a contrast – the anger out there – among some. The hope, good will, and solidarity in here, among us. The accelerating belief out there among some in the wisdom of divisiveness; the cascading resonance about collaboration and engagement in here. The strength that some of our brothers and sisters draw from bright lines – out there; the strength that we draw from blurring lines and reaching out in here.

I know we are here because we refuse to settle for the low base denominator that is a specter upon us from some out there. I know that this gathering gives us strength and determination to pursue the better world that Dr. King visualized and that still galvanizes our hope.

The MLK Commemorative Breakfast has grown beyond a breakfast. This is a month-long celebration of Dr. King's legacy. Our events bring together the diverse areas of our university, and bring us closer to our community and students from our local schools.

Our keynote speaker – Marian Wright Edelman, she wrote that “service is the rent we pay for living. It is the very purpose of life and not something you do in your spare time.” And this year, we are embracing service as part of our month-long MLK celebrations, like never before. We are marking 25 years with 25 service projects. FIU’s students, faculty, staff, alumni and supporters will be out in the community making a difference. We’ll be at senior high schools like Booker T. Washington and Miami Northwestern; parks such as Arch Creek memorial and Virginia Key Beach and nonprofit organizations such as New Acropolis Miami, Breakthrough Miami, South Florida SPCA and Feeding South Florida.

I urge you to participate! Service is the rent we pay for living!

We are honored to have Marian Wright Edelman with us today. For four decades, the Children’s Defense Fund has been relentless in its pursuit of a level playing field for all children. As a university, we share in the sense of urgency of creating a level playing field. We know education is the key to prosperity for many of our young people.

We have redoubled our commitment to providing access to higher education opportunity to all young people in our community who have the preparation, drive and determination to pursue a university degree.

There are 45 high schools in Miami Dade County – we want graduates from each of these schools. We believe that we can be a force for good; to help close education gaps that lead to opportunity and income gaps. The accident of birth in certain zip codes should not determine the opportunities of residents there and it should certainly not preclude the opportunity for a college education. That is unacceptable as a standard for the 21st century.

This year we’re celebrating the five-year anniversary of our Education Effect partnership with Miami-Dade County Public Schools at Miami Northwestern High School. Funded by grants from the JPMorgan Chase Foundation, we’ve worked in collaboration with M-DCPS – as well as parents, teachers, administrators and the community. We’ve supported the school’s efforts to boost student achievement, promote 100 percent graduation and ensure that students are college and career ready.

By all measures, the partnership has been a success, the school has gone from a historic D/F grade to an A or B ranking. Ten percent more students are going on to post-secondary education – and they are receiving millions of dollars in scholarships. Last year’s 345 graduates received more than 400 acceptance letters for college. Combined, they earned nearly \$5 million in scholarships to continue their education. The school’s graduation rate – 82.5 percent – is now higher than the state average. Based on this success, in 2014 FIU secured \$1 million from the Lennar Foundation to expand the Education Effect to a second school, Booker T. Washington Senior High School in Overtown.

And we continue to collaborate on even more projects. The Nicole Wertheim College of Nursing & Health Sciences, in collaboration with the Jessie Trice Community Health Center, Miami-Dade County Public Schools, and The Children’s Trust, received a \$1.45 million grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration to fund a school-based, primary health care clinic at Miami Northwestern. It had its grand opening last week.

Annie R. Neasman, Dr. Ora Strickland and Principal Wallace Aristide – what a powerful collaboration in Liberty City. What a powerful statement of hope for an area that should not be so embattled.

The clinic will serve as a health care “hub” for children and families in Liberty City. We also know that in Liberty City, just 30 percent of the households have Internet access. That’s why we teamed up with leaders in Liberty Square on a community WiFi project, in coordination with our FIU Education Effect initiative and our journalism and mass communication program.

We don’t just want to close the digital divide in Liberty City – we’ve got to close this divide. This is particularly true for students, for whom access to the Internet is so vital to their future success. It’s critical to their ability to succeed in school and complete the online courses they need to graduate.

We’ve got to do this for Liberty City residents and Northwestern high Graduates like John Gamble. You see, to get access to the internet – he became a digital nomad – spending hours on Metrorail – so that he could get access to the Internet to complete his high school studies.

Special thanks to FIU faculty Moses Shumow and Metro Dade County Mayor Carlos Gimenez and his team for leadership to get this done! This is a pilot program that could be adopted at other public housing across the county.

By championing education and the future of our young people, we are living Dr. King’s legacy.

Soon—soon we will have a permanent visible symbol of our commitment to Dr. King’s legacy on our campuses. Ysmelio Lopez from Cimagos Nursery has donated two Martin Luther King Jr. busts to FIU. Every day thousands of FIU students will soon see Martin Luther King on each of our two campuses. They will draw curiosity, and then hope and strength from Dr. King so that they too can reach for the stars, pursue their dreams, and provide leadership for a better tomorrow.