



UNBOWED
and
 UNBROKEN
 The Enduring Struggle for Justice

KEYNOTE MEMORIAL LECTURE
 JANUARY 19, 2026

MLK40

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
 REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
 40TH ANNIVERSARY SYMPOSIUM



MLK.UMICH.EDU

A Message from the 40th Anniversary MLK Symposium Planning Committee

Celebrating the University of Michigan's 40th Anniversary Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Symposium is more than a milestone; it is a tribute to one of our institution's most enduring and transformative traditions. This symposium honors Dr. King's vision for justice and equality, and it stands as a testament to the lasting role students have played in shaping our university's ongoing commitment to progress.

Each year, our committee takes on the task of creating a symposium that meets the needs of our students, faculty, staff, and the broader community. We aim to enhance the university's mission by facilitating deeper learning and understanding across diverse perspectives. We hope that each year, these events become increasingly meaningful and impactful, providing strategies and inspiration to continue Dr. King's work.

To continue serving our campus and the broader community, we'd like to gain a better understanding of how you feel about the symposium.

Please take a minute or two to complete this brief survey.

Your insights will be invaluable in helping us build
on this tradition for many years to come.



The survey is also available at mlk.umich.edu

Welcome from President Domenico Grasso



Welcome to the 2026 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Symposium, the University of Michigan's annual commemoration of an unparalleled leader of principles and morality.

Today's gathering is a shared moment for our community to pause, reflect, and act on the words of Dr. King and our respected speakers.

A distinguished university such as ours is the ideal setting for meaningful conversation about the role and power of education in shaping and uplifting society.

Dr. King was convinced that higher education was about more than just earning a degree and getting a job. He understood this during his time as an undergraduate at Morehouse College, when he wrote: "The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically ... Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education."

At Michigan, we aim every day to provide a strong moral compass, foster intellectual empathy, and cultivate a deep appreciation for everyone's personal experiences.

Thank you for attending today and for your dedication to serving the public good through knowledge, research, and service.

Sincerely,

Domenico Grasso

President

Remarks from Vice Provost Angela Dillard



Dear Colleagues and Community Members,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to this year's Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Symposium. Today's event marks the 40th anniversary of the University of Michigan's tribute to Dr. King. This symposium, created by the university's faculty, students and staff, is intended to inspire reflection and meaningful dialogue. It encourages all of us to consider how Dr. King's teachings and legacy can be applied to today's critical issues of equity and justice, while examining

our individual and collective responsibilities in advancing our communities and society as a whole.

This year, our 2026 symposium will explore the theme, "Unbowed and Unbroken – The Enduring Struggle for Justice." Inspired by his theological roots, Dr. King spoke of the struggle for justice as a journey of perseverance, often drawing parallels with the story of Exodus and a belief in a long moral arc for the nation and the universe.

Being "unbowed and unbroken" not only speaks to the great sacrifices of those who have come before, but to our own refusal to yield to injustice and to continue the journey with irrepressible resolve. It is the audacity to face landscapes riddled with discrimination not in resignation, but in defiant hope, believing in the possibility of change.

Throughout the month, the MLK Symposium schedule provides a broad collection of events created and hosted by members of our university community. I encourage you to participate in as many of these events as possible, whether in person or online, and to share information about the symposium with your networks—including faculty, staff, students, alums and community partners. Opportunities to gather in educational settings, to meet each other where we are, to listen intently, and discuss the futures that we might create together are invaluable.

Finally, I extend my immense gratitude to the MLK Symposium Planning Committee, invited speakers, and the many individuals across our campus who contributed to the planning of this year's events. Your work has not gone unnoticed.

Sincerely,

Angela Dillard

Interim Vice Provost for Access & Opportunity

Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education

Richard A. Meisler Collegiate Professor of Afroamerican and African Studies

Professor of History in LSA

40th Annual Keynote Memorial Lecture

OPENING FILM

A Day On, Not a Day Off – 40 Years of the MLK Symposium

SINGING OF THE BLACK NATIONAL ANTHEM

B’Nathaniel Orlu

Master’s Student, Voice Performance M.M.

LAND & LABOR ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Aaron Robinson

Senior, Applied Physics and Aerospace Engineering

PRESIDENT’S WELCOME

Dr. Domenico Grasso

University of Michigan President

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Dr. Laurie McCauley

Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

SPECIAL PERFORMANCE

Detroit Youth Choir

Directed by Anthony White

ADVANCING ACCESS & OPPORTUNITY

Dr. Angela Dillard

Interim Vice Provost for Access & Opportunity; Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education; Richard A. Meisler Collegiate Professor of Afroamerican and African Studies; Professor of History in LSA

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS INTRODUCTION

Yacine Lo

Junior, Public Health Sciences and Biomolecular Science on a pre-med track

2026 MEMORIAL KEYNOTE LECTURE MODERATED DISCUSSION

Donzaleigh Abernathy

Godchild of Dr. King, Civil Rights Activist, and Award-winning Actress and Writer

Derrick Johnson, J.D.

19th President and CEO of the NAACP

Moderated by Dr. Alford A. Young, Jr.

Associate Director of Center for Social Solutions; Arthur F. Thurnau Professor; Edgar G. Epps Collegiate Professor of Sociology; Professor of Afroamerican and African Studies; Professor of Public Policy

CLOSING PERFORMANCE

Mama Sōl

National hip-hop and spoken word artist, transition trainer, and humanitarian

UNBOWED *and* UNBROKEN

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., taught us that the pursuit of justice is neither linear nor easy. On December 11, 1964, Dr. King accepted the Nobel Peace Prize and gave a speech entitled “The Quest for Peace and Justice.” In it, he said:

“But before we reach the majestic shores of the Promised Land, there is a frustrating and bewildering wilderness ahead. We must still face prodigious hilltops of opposition and gigantic mountains of resistance.

But with patient and firm determination, we will press on...”

As we honor Dr. King’s legacy, we center our reflection and action around the theme: *Unbowed and Unbroken: The Enduring Struggle for Justice*. This theme calls on us to embody both the refusal to yield to injustice and the irrepressible resolve to answer the call to equality, even when the path is steep and the journey long.

Unbowed: The Posture of the Soul

“Unbowed” speaks to the posture of the soul that stands tall, refusing to exist as anything less than the fullness of humanity to which we all are entitled. It is the audacity to face the entire landscape of oppression, not in resignation, but in defiant hope, believing in the possibility of change: “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.”

We may entertain compromise, but never capitulation.

Unbroken: Strength Through Struggle

“Unbroken” signals the relentless strength forged in the fire of adversity. It remembers the oppressive history and the battle-worn yet steadfast fighters for freedom who have persisted through storm and strife and who have passed the torch forward. The vision remains undimmed, the purpose undeterred by the discriminatory tactics of yesteryear or the fresh injustices of today. The posture of strength is reinforced by faith in the necessity of a just outcome.

The Power of “And”

“Unbowed and Unbroken” expresses dual truths: The conjoining of unbowed and unbroken emphasizes the duality of strength. Justice requires that we stand strong and endure. Not merely for ourselves, but for those who come after. Not in isolated moments, but in a continuously unfolding movement which requires us to keep pressing forward. We must press forward unbowed in posture, unbroken in purpose.

But it is in the emphasis of the inextricable union of Unbowed and Unbroken where the enduring power of the struggle for justice is revealed. The “and” is essential; it is not enough to stand tall if we cannot also withstand the storms. It is not enough to be steadfast if we are not also unrelenting in the unapologetic posture that demands the worthiness of respect and fairness.

The Struggle for Justice is a Journey

Justice resounds with both: the unwavering refusal to bend, and the tenacity to remain whole through adversity. This dual posture of standing strong yet enduring reflects the deepest lessons of Dr. King's life. He taught us that true progress is achieved not in solitary moments of courage, but through persistent, collective, and resilient movement. It is the unyielding spirit of "and" that propels us forward, not merely for ourselves, but for generations yet to come.

Justice calls us to more than an occasional act of resistance; it calls us to sustained action. The philosophy of being unbowed and unbroken is sung in the freedom songs of the civil rights movement, urging us to keep walking, keep talking, keep pressing forward together:

**Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round
Turn me round, turn me 'round
Ain't gonna let nobody, turn me 'round
I'm gonna keep on a walkin', keep on a talkin'
Walkin' into freedom land**

Traditional Freedom Song

In our time, new forms of old injustices still persist – in systems, in silence, in the weariness that tempts us to give up. But the call remains: to stand unbowed and unbroken until justice rolls down like waters. In pressing forward, we must claim the anatomy of a posture that is rooted in the clarity that when we are unbowed, we persist with dignity, bearing witness to injustice and refusing to be diminished by it.

When we are unbroken, we cultivate endurance, drawing strength from community, history, and righteous conviction to sustain a labor for change.

As in the past, our journey ahead is buoyed when our strength is rooted in commitment. Not to the comfort of complacency, but to the vigorous movement of hope, action, and accountability – undaunted by setbacks, emboldened by purpose, and united by the dream of true equality. To stand unbowed and unbroken in

pursuit of justice is to embody the enduring spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. We rise with dignity, as King rose, refusing to be diminished by injustice, refusing to bow to fear or complacency, always believing in the inherent worth of every person. Dr. King often quoted William Cullen Bryant, “truth crushed to the earth will rise.”

We remember King’s relentless hope and his call to “press on” despite prodigious opposition; we honor those who marched beside him and those whose names may be lost to history, but whose spirit of resistance lives in our every step.

We echo King’s admonition that “we must never allow ourselves to become satisfied with unattained goals.” Instead, we answer his call to action with movement and hope and accountability – undaunted, united, and determined in our pursuit of true equality.

Together, we remember and honor those who came before, take up the mantle with clarity and compassion, and persist through hardship with the knowledge that each step widens the path for those who will follow.

As we continue the movement forward in strength and resiliency, let us renew our collective commitment. Let us be bold in vision, persistent in action, and enduring in hope.

**Let us forge onward
as a community
UNBOWED AND UNBROKEN
bearing the light of justice
for our time,
and for all time.**

Keynote Speaker

Donzaleigh Abernathy

Donzaleigh Abernathy is the youngest daughter of the American Civil Rights Movement Co-Founder Rev. Dr. Ralph David and Mrs. Juanita Jones Abernathy. She was born in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement, as her father and his best friend, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., established the nonviolent social movement that changed the course of American history. Her life began with the bombing of her parents' home and her father's First Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. She and her siblings



witnessed and participated in all of the major Civil Rights movements and marches, including the Freedom Riders, the March on Washington, the Selma to Montgomery March for “The Right to Vote”, and the Chicago Housing Demonstrations. The Abernathy and King children integrated Spring Street Elementary School, which led to mass integration of schools in the South in 1965. She witnessed from her home the pivotal decisions that helped shape American laws, including the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (which included public accommodations provisions), the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Fair Housing Act of 1968, the establishment of affirmative action policies, the expansion of the National Food Stamp Program, the introduction of free meal programs for low-income students, and, years later, the creation of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday.

In 2004, she authored *Partners To History: Martin Luther King, Ralph David Abernathy, and the Civil Rights Movement*, which was nominated as one of the “Best Books for Young Adults” by the American Library Association. She was a contributing author to the Smithsonian Institute’s book *In the Spirit of Martin*. Her play, *Birmingham Sunday*, is a winner of the Tanne Foundation Award.

Ms. Abernathy delivered her first public speech at the age of 12 at The Children for Survival March in Washington, DC. She has been the keynote speaker for the National Association of Women Judges Annual Conference, the Judicial Division of the American Bar Association - Mid-Year Conference, the Annual Unemployment Appeals Court Judicial Conference, the NGO United Nations Women’s Federation for World Peace, and for the 2016 Democratic National Convention - African American Caucus. She has spoken for the Senate and Congressional Faith in Politics Civil Rights Pilgrimage, for Congresswoman Barbara Lee’s and Elihu Harris’ Lecture

Series, “Daughters of the Civil Rights Movement” with Luci Baines Johnson, Kerry Kennedy, and Peggy Wallace Kennedy. She has lectured at Harvard University Law School, University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth, Pepperdine University’s Distinguished Lecture Series, Michigan State University’s College of Osteopathic Medicine, Michigan State’s Women’s Peace Summit, and more. At the 45th Anniversary of the Montgomery Bus Boycott Celebration, she was given the honor of introducing Mrs. Rosa Parks in one of her last public appearances.

She was one of the leading actors in the Civil War epic, *Gods and Generals*. She starred as the leading lady in the Emmy and Golden Globe Award-winning HBO film, *Don King - Only In America*. She also starred in the Emmy and Golden Globe-winning *Miss Evers’ Boys*, in NBC’s Golden Globe-nominated *The Tempest*, and NBC’s DGA Award-winning movie, *Murder in Mississippi*. Along with her husband, Dar Dixon, they created, directed, and produced the documentary *Saint Francis Medical Center*. For the Atlanta Gay Men’s Chorus at the National Black Arts Festival, she wrote and starred in Billy Strayhorn’s *Lush Life*. She wrote, directed, and starred in *The Women of Niagara* for the National Park Service of Harper’s Ferry Centennial Celebration of the Niagara Movement and WEB DuBois. For the University of Utah at Park City and the grandson of John Brown, she wrote and performed with Dar Dixon in *John Brown - The Abolitionist*.

She is a founding Trustee of the New Visions Foundation/Coalition for Engaged Education and a former Vice President of the Board and New Roads Schools. She was a Spokesperson for the CDC’s HIV/AIDS Awareness Program and for Amnesty International. She currently volunteers for juveniles in the Los Angeles County Justice System.



Donzaleigh Abernathy (front left, wearing a striped sweater) and her siblings lead the SELMA TO MONTGOMERY MARCH in 1965. Their parents, Dr. Ralph D. Abernathy and Juanita Abernathy, follow with Dr. and Mrs. King.

Keynote Speaker

Derrick Johnson

Derrick Johnson, J.D. serves as president and CEO of the NAACP, a title he has held since October 2017. President Johnson formerly served as vice chairman of the NAACP National Board of Directors, as well as state president for the Mississippi State Conference NAACP. A longstanding member and leader of the NAACP, Mr. Johnson has helped guide the Association through a period of re-envisioning and reinvigoration.



Under President Johnson's leadership, the NAACP has undertaken such efforts as the 2018 "Log Out" Facebook Campaign, pressuring Facebook after reports of Russian hackers targeting African Americans, the Jamestown to Jamestown Partnership, marking the 400th year enslaved Africans first touched the shores of America, the 2020 We are Done Dying Campaign, exposing the inequities embedded into the American healthcare system and the country at large, and most recently the victorious 2020 Supreme Court lawsuit *NAACP vs. Trump*, which prevents Donald Trump's administration from rescinding the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program for millions of young immigrants.

President Johnson also continues to be on the frontline of some of the most pressing civil rights issues of our time, calling out Virginia Governor Ralph Northam for his use of Blackface, condemning the burning of Black churches in Tennessee and Louisiana, testifying before the Senate Judiciary Committee in opposition to Attorney General William Barr's nomination, and overseeing the NAACP's vote to impeach President Donald J. Trump at the 110th National Convention in Detroit. Born in Detroit, Mr. Johnson attended Tougaloo College in Jackson, MS. He then received his JD from the South Texas College of Law in Houston, TX. Mr. Johnson has also furthered his training through fellowships with the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, the George Washington University School of Political Management, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). He has served as an annual guest lecturer at Harvard Law School, lending his expertise to Professor Lani Guinier's course on social movements, and as an adjunct professor at Tougaloo College.

Mr. Johnson is a veteran activist who has dedicated his career to defending the rights and improving the lives of Mississippians. As state president of the NAACP Mississippi State Conference, he led critical campaigns for voting rights and equitable education. He successfully managed two bond referendum campaigns in Jackson, MS, that brought \$150 million in school building improvements and \$65 million towards the construction of a new convention center, respectively. As a regional organizer at the Jackson-based non-profit, Southern Echo, Inc., Mr. Johnson provided legal, technical, and training support for communities across the South.

President Johnson is frequently featured on CNN, MSNBC, CBS, ABC, and many others, advocating on behalf of the Black community and all those who are affected by systemic oppression and prejudice.



Derrick Johnson speaks on the Future of Black America at the 115th NAACP National Convention (2024)

“History matters.

**Without understanding where we’ve
come from as a people,**

we cannot properly navigate the road ahead.”

- Derrick Johnson

Alford A. Young, Jr.

Dr. Alford Young, Jr. is University Diversity and Social Transformation Professor, Edgar G. Epps Collegiate Professor of Sociology, and Arthur F. Thurnau Professor of Sociology, Afroamerican and African Studies, and the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy at the University of Michigan. He also serves as Associate Director for the Center for Social Solutions and Faculty Associate Director for Anti-Racism Research at the National Center for Institutional Diversity, both at U-M. He is President-Elect of the American Sociological Association.



A proud product of East Harlem in New York City, Professor Young attended Wesleyan University (B.A.) and the University of Chicago (M.A. and Ph.D.). As a scholar, Professor Young has spent much of his career focused on the plight of low-income, urban-based African American men. His primary research has focused on the understandings that these individuals construct about various aspects of social reality (including the world of work, pathways to mobility in American society, and fatherhood and family living). Among his accomplishments, Professor Young has published *The Minds of Marginalized Black Men: Making Sense of Mobility, Opportunity, and Future Life Chances* (Princeton University Press 2004), *Are Black Men Doomed?* (Polity Press 2018), and *From the Edge of the Ghetto: African Americans and the World of Work* (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2019). His most current work includes a study of how African American scholars who research and teach about the African American experience consider the social utility of race-based scholarship.

At the University of Michigan, Professor Young served for nine years as Chair of the Department of Sociology. He also serves on and is former chair of the Mentoring Others Results in Excellence (MORE) Committee, housed in the Rackham School of Graduate Studies.

In terms of the broader community, Professor Young serves on and is former chair of the Board of Directors of the Ann Arbor YMCA. He also serves on the Board of Directors of the Dispute Resolution Center of Washtenaw County and the Detroit Community Health Council, an initiative sponsored by Aetna Insurance. He has served on the Board of Trustees of Wesleyan University and the Archbishop's Leadership Project (which was a youth-focused initiative sponsored by the Catholic Archdiocese of New York City).

Professor Young has partnered with researchers and policy centers to conduct assessments and evaluations of programs serving socio-economically disadvantaged individuals, including projects with Mathematica Policy Associates and the Urban Institute. He has conducted analyses for the Transitional Jobs Reentry Demonstration Project for the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation and of the Ypsilanti Michigan Housing Commission's Drug Elimination Program. He also founded and directs the Scholars Network on Masculinity and the Well-Being of African American Men (which is comprised of nearly 100 scholars in the humanities, social sciences, and professional fields throughout the country who aspire to influence social policy and broader public understanding of the condition of African American men).

Performances by

Mama Söl



Mama Söl was the voice of the 2021 Detroit Pistons ‘We Hustle Different’ campaign, a national hip-hop and spoken word artist, transition trainer, humanitarian, two-time breast cancer survivor, and single mother.

Born and raised in Flint, Michigan, Mama Söl is no stranger to adversity, yet she remains on a constant mission to see, bear and be Light! She has made motivating and assisting people her life’s work.

Söl’s distinct style of delivery combines her love of lyrics, rhyme and music with her love for youth. She electrifies audiences, urging them to see beyond their circumstances, to choose solutions over excuses. Counteracting the negativity often associated with hip-hop, Söl uses her extraordinary gift and passion for words to encourage others towards self-love, uplifting perspectives, and greater purpose.

B’Nathaniel Orlu

B’Nathaniel Orlu is a bass-baritone and master’s student at the University of Michigan, where he is actively engaged in performance, pedagogy, and leadership through music. A proud alumnus of Morehouse College, he brings a deep commitment to equity, history, and community engagement into his artistry. Through both his academic work and performances, B’Nathaniel uses music as a vehicle for storytelling, reflection, and honoring the legacy of Black voices and traditions.



Performances by

Detroit Youth Choir

The Detroit Youth Concert Choir & Performing Arts Company (DYC) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to serving young people across the Detroit Metropolitan area. Through a vibrant blend of music education, dance, and theatrical arts, DYC helps students ages 8 to 18 unlock their creative potential. DYC's vision is to provide Metro Detroit youth with a world-class performing arts experience, nurturing their skills and talents for the stage and beyond.



The Detroit Youth Choir is proud to have performed at events throughout Detroit, across the nation, and around the world. Highlights include the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Michigan Outdoor Adventure Center, where the choir sang before Governor Rick Snyder and Mayor Mike Duggan, as well as the Rhythm & Blues Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony, sharing the stage with celebrities, dignitaries, and music industry icons.

DYC's accomplishments are substantial. The choir was featured in the IMAX documentary film "America's Musical Journey," which was screened in IMAX theaters nationwide. They've recorded with the UK band The Go! Team, appearing on seven tracks of the group's album. Most notably, the Detroit Youth Choir soared to national fame on *America's Got Talent*, traveling to Los Angeles, CA, and achieving second place in the competition.

Locally, DYC has performed for organizations such as Spectrum Children Services, the Detroit Pistons, U of M Basketball Club Ann Arbor, FCAAN, BCBS, DTE, Cleveland Cavaliers, Scholars for Dollars, Focus Hope, Arise Detroit, A.I.M. Youth Conference, the D-drop New Year's Eve Celebration, IMPACT TV, Light up Detroit, Youth Development Commission of Detroit, and the Detroit Public Library.

Student Speakers



Yacine Lo serves as the Speaker of the Black Student Union (BSU). The BSU uses the term ‘Speaker’ rather than ‘President’ to pay homage to Malcolm X, who served as the Speaker for the Nation of Islam as part of his life. Yacine believes that a speaker should “speak life” into their community, and hopes to continue on the legacy of those before her. She is a first-generation student at the University of Michigan, and is currently a junior pursuing a dual degree in Public Health Sciences and Biomolecular Science

on a pre-med track. Yacine is passionate about community building, advocacy and mentorship, music (her favorite artist is Lauryn Hill), musical theatre, and her family (who originate from Senegal). She is the oldest of four children and often goes home to Kalamazoo to visit her family. Yacine wants to especially shout out her BSU Executive Six and Committee Chairs for this year, highlighting their hard work and dedication to Black UMich.



Aaron Robinson is an Aerospace Engineering senior in the College of Engineering and a participant in its Dual Degree in Engineering Program partnership with the Atlanta University Center (AUC-DDEP). As a dual-degree transfer student from Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, where he majored in Applied Physics, he aims to apply his combined degrees, education, and skills to advance sustainability, affordability, and safety in the aerospace industry. He is also dedicated to utilizing

his passion for technology and problem-solving to drive advancements that benefit communities and society as a whole.

MLK Symposium

Planning Committee

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Sharon Burch & Hector Galvan, Interim Co-Directors

Office of Academic Multicultural Initiatives

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Helen Look, University Library

Kellyn Mackerl-Cooper, Trotter Multicultural Center

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Michigan Creative

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MLK Symposium student volunteers
OAMI staff and student staff

The Shared History of OAMI and the MLK Symposium

Student activism is a hallmark of the University of Michigan, and it is through this activism that the Office of Academic Multicultural Initiatives (OAMI) and the MLK Symposium were born.

While the first campus-wide observance of MLK at the University of Michigan occurred in 1986, the same year Martin Luther King Day became a national holiday, the symposium as we know it did not happen until 1988. In 1987, hundreds of U-M students led by the third Black Action Movement (BAM III) and the United Coalition Against Racism (UCAR) blocked the administrative units of the university in protest of multiple racist events on campus. Each group developed a list of demands for the university aimed at improving the enrollment of Black students and other students of color and improving the campus climate. One of the demands of BAM III was the creation of an Office of Minority Affairs, while UCAR demanded the university recognize Martin Luther King, Jr. Day by closing offices and canceling classes because, “This holiday would be a key opportunity for the university to educate and bring together majority and minority students on the problem of racism and cultural and ethnic diversity on campus.” Both demands were granted.

The Office of Minority Affairs, renamed the Office of Academic Multicultural Initiatives, would take on planning the annual MLK Symposium and coordinating events across campus. Early observances adopted the national slogan “A Day On, Not a Day Off” and were kicked off yearly with a student march from the then Trotter House on Washtenaw Avenue to the Diag.

OAMI continues to serve as a proud sponsor and organizer of the MLK Symposium and works to honor the tradition by offering an educational annual lecture, bringing together the campus and community in an annual breakfast, and working with a planning committee of faculty, staff, and students who study the ministry and teachings of Dr. King to help spread his message of peace and justice across campus.

MSA election guide:

Parties take stands on UCAR demands

After recent racist incidents the United Coalition Against Racism (UCAR) issued twelve demands to the University.
Opinion Page editor Henry Park interviewed the presidential and vice-presidential candidates of the various parties to see where the parties stand on the twelve demands. The results are in the chart to the right.

UCAR DEMANDS

1. Submit a plan
2. Establish an autonomous supervisory commission elected by the minority campus community
3. Create a Plan of the Chair
4. Establish a mandatory workshop on racism and diversity for all incoming students
5. Set up a program of affinity counseling for minority students to meet and talk with students from the same racial or ethnic background
6. Institute a program of affirmative action
7. Create a minority students center
8. Establish a required course on diversity and respect for all students before graduation from the University, with input from African-Americans and Asian students.
9. Full observance of the Dr. Martin Luther King holiday including cancellation of classes and the closing of offices.
10. Full observance of the Dr. Martin Luther King holiday including cancellation of classes and the closing of offices.
11. Honorary degree for South African leader Nelson Mandela at this commencement.
12. Full, public, and immediate investigation of all reported incidents of racial harassment, with a new ban on sex, to facilitate the on-going reporting and documentation of such incidents.
13. The immediate removal of all those involved in incidents of racial harassment from University housing since they have demonstrated their inability to live in an integrated setting.



United Coalition Against Racism rallyers cheer yesterday at the Fleming Building. The demonstrators marched from the Diag to present their 12 demands to University Provost James Duderstadt. "We are going to indict the University administration for not responding to past demands," said rally speaker Barbara Ranshy, a history graduate student.



Students honor King's birthday. Members bow their heads in a moment of prayer for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. before starting a march and rally in his honor yesterday. Only Photo by DAN PAGE

Confrontation

Coalition demands action on racism

The Michigan Daily

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ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN - THURSDAY, MARCH 19, 1987

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BAM takes action against 'U'

Pickers hold Union boycott

By WENDY LEWIS and ELLIOTT PARK
In one of the largest protests on campus this year, more than 350 Black students converged on the Union yesterday to begin a new Black Action Movement. BAM organizers called for a 24-hour economic boycott of the Union, which ends today around 1 p.m.



Ann Ranshy, president of the United Coalition Against Racism (UCAR), gives the Black power salute to the 400 other Black Action Movement (BAM) members, both men and women, at the Union last night. Ranshy is a 1986 Black Action Movement member.

In one of the largest protests on campus this year, more than 350 Black students converged on the Union yesterday to begin a new Black Action Movement. BAM organizers called for a 24-hour economic boycott of the Union, which ends today around 1 p.m.

The protest began with a march and rally from the Rackham building to the Diag and ended three hours later after students had formed a revolving human chain around the front and north side of the Union.



To learn more about past student activism visit OAMI.UMICH.EDU/BAM

Messages from the Sponsors



The Office of Academic Multicultural Initiatives (OAMI) is proud to partner with administrators, faculty, students, and staff to present the 40th annual Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Keynote Memorial Lecture. As the host office chairing the cross-campus planning committee and coordinating the keynote lecture, we are grateful to all the individuals and groups who dedicate their time, resources, and passion to bringing this symposium to fruition. We acknowledge the exceptional talent that is committed and their significant contributions, whether through funding, hosting, or attending events throughout the month.



With a commitment to honoring Dr. King's legacy, the planning committee studies the ministry and teachings of Dr. King to develop a memorial keynote that enriches knowledge of his life and his pursuit of social justice and equity, fostering positive change within our campus community and beyond.

As we explore the 'enduring struggle for justice,' we have given special attention to past students who demanded that the university not only celebrate Dr. King's birthday but that it commit to fostering dialogue that expands and enriches the aims of this institution of higher education. Such dialogue continues to grow and evolve in response to the needs of our community and the current moment.

Through this work, we become energized to act for the betterment of those around us and our broader society. Through the most arduous times, we stand together, unbowed and broken, continuing to work side by side and aspire towards Dr. King's 'beloved community.' From the beginning of our office's existence, we have met the challenge of facilitating this deeply meaningful tradition, strengthening the ties between the student activists of the past, the challenges of the present, and the dreams of our collective future.

With deep gratitude,

Sharon Burch, M.A., and Hector Galvan, M.A.
Interim Co-Directors



Every year the **Michigan Ross** community honors Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream and legacy through important events and activities that embody his commitment to social justice, service to humanity and civility. This legacy remains at the forefront of our values as we continue to strive toward our mission to create a better world through business. It is my hope that the Michigan Ross community is inspired by these events and the chance to reflect, learn, have conversations, and take action in pursuit of creating a world with abundant opportunities for all people.

Sharon F. Matusik, Ph.D.

Edward J. Frey Dean

Stephen M. Ross Professor of Business



Michigan Engineering is honored to join the university community in reflecting on this year's MLK Symposium theme. Dr. King's charge to persist in the face of adversity calls us to educate, innovate, and lead with purpose. As we advance knowledge and prepare the next generation of engineers to tackle society's greatest challenges, we are reminded that progress is most powerful when it strengthens communities and widens opportunity. May this symposium inspire us to stand tall in purpose, persevere through challenge, and work together to shape a better world.

Karen A. Thole, Ph.D.

Robert J. Vlasic Dean of Engineering

Professor of Mechanical Engineering

Professor of Aerospace Engineering

2026 MLK Symposium Events

Department of Romance Languages and Literatures MLK Lecture

January 15, 2026

4:30 pm–6:00 pm

MLB 4314 (RLL Commons)

Professor Ollie Johnson explores forty years of Afro-Brazilian activism, affirmative action, and the ongoing struggle for political representation.

MLK Children and Youth Program

January 19, 2026

8:00 am–3:00 pm

Marsal Family School of Education,
610 East University Ave

Pre-K through grade 12 students celebrate Dr. King's legacy with interactive and educational activities focused on civil rights.

36th Annual MLK Health Sciences Lecture: Health Equity, Power Dynamics, and the Future of Healthcare

January 19, 2026

1:00 pm–4:00 pm

School of Nursing Building 2
426 N Ingalls, Room 2000

Dr. Beverly Malone's keynote and panel discuss health equity, structural power, and community-centered transformations in healthcare.

Brian Jones: Black History Is For Everyone

January 19, 2026

2:00 pm–3:10 pm

Shapiro Library

Brian Jones demonstrates how Black history reshapes our understanding of race, nation, and collective storytelling.

20th Annual Michigan Community Scholars Program MLK Day Circle of Unity

January 19, 2026

3:00 pm–4:00 pm

East Quadrangle, Concourse and Atrium

Celebrate MLK through music, dance, spoken word, and performances by local artists and U-M students, honoring justice and unity.

Marjorie Lee Browne Colloquium

January 19, 2026

4:00 pm–5:00 pm

East Hall, 1084

Professor John Urschel presents a lecture on historical and modern mathematical moment problems in linear algebra and analysis.

Wallace House Presents a Conversation with Caitlin Dickerson of The Atlantic

January 20, 2026

4:30 pm–6:00 pm

100 Hutchins Hall, Law School

Caitlin Dickerson examines America's ongoing immigration challenges, policies, and their civil rights implications.

Food as Resistance

January 20, 2026

6:00 pm–8:00 pm

South Quad Dining Hall, 600 East Madison Street

Michigan Dining chefs lead a tasting that explores food's role in resistance movements and community care.

**Donia Human Rights Center
Annual Martin Luther King, Jr.
Lecture**

January 21, 2026
4:00 pm–5:30 pm
Weiser Hall 1010

Hala Al-Karib draws parallels between African human rights advocacy and the US Civil Rights movement.

**Social Justice Through a Disability
Health Lens**

January 22, 2026
12:00 pm–2:00 pm
Towsley Center, Sheldon Auditorium,
UH South

A documentary and panel highlight barriers and solutions for accessible, quality healthcare for Americans with disabilities.

**A Relay, Not a Sprint:
Intergenerational Perspectives on
Environmental Justice & Resilience**

January 22, 2026
5:30 pm–6:30 pm
SEAS, Ford Commons,
440 Church St

Intergenerational changemakers share insights on the environmental justice movement's evolution and future resilience.

**Center For Middle Eastern and
North African Studies MLK Day
Lecture**

January 26, 2026
4:30 pm–7:00 pm
Weiser Hall 555

Huwaida Arraf shares experiences in Palestinian liberation advocacy and international human rights organizing.

Rick Lowe: In Spite Of

February 5, 2026
5:30 pm–7:00 pm
UMMA, Helmut Stern Auditorium

Artist Rick Lowe discusses creative public art collaborations and social sculpture for equity and sustainable change.

Wynton Marsalis in Conversation

February 4, 2026
5:30 pm–7:00 pm
Lydia Mendelssohn Theatre, Michigan
League

Wynton Marsalis and Dean Watkins-Hayes reflect on music's power to inspire social justice and amplify marginalized voices.

**Bridging Intergenerational Social
Justice Wisdom Panel**

February 12, 2026
5:00 pm–7:00 pm
Michigan League, Vandenberg Room

IGR alumni share social justice career journeys and connect with students through panel discussion and networking.

See the full schedule
and event details at

MLK.UMICH.EDU



MLK Symposium Keynote Speakers

Positions and titles listed reflect status at the time of lecture

- 1986 **Rev. Richard Gilmore** of the Ypsilanti Second Baptist Church
- 1987 **Rep. William Gray III** of Pennsylvania
- 1988 **Gov. Douglas Wilder** of Virginia
- 1989 **Mayor Willie Brown, Jr.** of San Francisco
- 1990 **Cesar Chavez**, President, United Farm Workers Union & **Kevin Locke**, Traditional Native American Dancer and Musician, Lakota Nation
- 1991 **Adelaide Sanford**, Regent, State University of New York
- 1992 **Maulana Karenga**, Director of Black Studies, California State University, Long Beach
- 1993 **Rep. Shirley Chisholm** of New York
- 1994 **Charles Long**, Director for Black Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara
- 1995 **Benjamin Hooks**, Executive Director of the NAACP
- 1996 **Jocelyn Elders**, US Surgeon General
- 1997 **Mary Frances Berry**, Chairperson of the US Commission on Civil Rights
- 1998 **Cornel West**, Professor of African American Studies and Religion, Harvard University
- 1999 **Nikki Giovanni**, Poet, Author and Essayist
- 2000 **Henry Louis Gates Jr.**, Director of African American Studies, Harvard University
- 2001 **Edward James Olmos**, Actor and Humanitarian
- 2002 **Benjamin Carson**, Neurosurgeon and Medical School Alumnus
- 2003 **Grace Lee Boggs**, Detroit Activist and Author
- 2004 **Lani Guinier**, Harvard Law Professor and Author
- 2005 **Henry G. Cisneros**, Former Secretary – US Dept. of Housing & Urban Development
- 2006 **Anna Deavere Smith**, Professor, Playwright, Actress
- 2007 **Kweisi Mfume**, Executive Director of the NAACP

- 2008** **Louis Gossett, Jr.**, Academy Award-winning Actor, Founder of the Eracism Foundation
- 2009** **Julian Bond**, Former Chairman of the NAACP
- 2010** **Gwen Ifill**, Moderator & Managing Editor of PBS's "Washington Week" and Co-anchor for the "PBS Newshour"
- 2011** **Shirley Sherrod**, Civil Rights Activist and Former Georgia Rural State Director for the United States Department of Agriculture
- 2012** **Michelle Norris**, Author and Award-winning Journalist
- 2013** **Morris Dees**, Civil Rights Activist and Founder of the Southern Poverty Law Center
- 2014** **Harry Belafonte**, Singer, Songwriter, Actor and Social Activist
- 2015** **Marc Lamont Hill**, Journalist, Scholar, Author and Activist
- 2016** **Naomi Tutu**, Race and Gender Activist
- 2017** **Amy Goodman**, Broadcast Journalist, Author and Activist, & **Issa Rae**, Actress, Writer, Director and Producer
- 2018** **Hill Harper**, Award-winning Actor, Best-selling Author, Philanthropist, and Youth Advocate
- 2019** **Tim Wise**, Author and Scholar & **Julia Putnam**, Detroit Principal and Writer
- 2020** **Angela Davis**, Political Activist, Author, and Professor
- 2021** **Gloria House**, Poet, Essayist, Educator and Human Rights and Community Activist & **Malik Yakini**, Educator, Farmer, Food Justice Advocate and Guitarist
- 2022** **Rashad Richey**, University Professor, Lecturer, Emmy-nominated Broadcaster, and Political/Social Analyst & **Maria Hinojosa**, Mexican-American Journalist
- 2023** **Aletha Maybank**, Physician, Chief Health Equity Officer, **Edward Buckles**, Documentary Filmmaker & **Jalen Rose**, Former U-M and NBA Basketball Star, Civil and Human Rights Awardee, Philanthropist, and Author
- 2024** **Michelle Alexander**, Best-selling Author, Legal Scholar, Social Justice Advocate, and Columnist
- 2025** **Erika Alexander**, Activist, Entrepreneur, Creator, Producer, and Director

History of the MLK Holiday

- 1968** On April 8, four days after Dr. King is assassinated, US Rep. John Conyers (D-Michigan) introduces the first legislation providing for a Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday.
- 1971** During April, petitions gathered by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference bearing six million signatures in support of a King Holiday are presented to the US Congress. But Congress takes no action to move the holiday legislation forward.
- 1973** First state King Holiday bill, sponsored by then-Assemblyman and later Mayor of Chicago Harold Washington, is signed into law in Illinois.
- 1974** Massachusetts and Connecticut enact statewide King Holidays.
- 1975** New Jersey State Supreme Court rules that the state must provide a paid holiday in honor of Dr. King in accordance with the state government's labor contract with the New Jersey State Employees Association.
- 1978** On November 4, National Council of Churches calls on Congress to create a King Holiday.
- 1979** Mrs. Coretta Scott King testifies before the US Senate Judiciary Committee and before joint hearings of Congress on behalf of a national Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday and directs the King Center staff to begin intensive organizing of a nationwide citizens lobby for the holiday. The King Center launches a new nationwide King Holiday petition campaign, which is signed by more than 300,000 before year's end.

President Jimmy Carter calls on Congress to pass a national King Holiday. Energized by a grass roots "prairie fire," the King Holiday bill finally begins to move through Congressional committees.

During November, the King Holiday bill is defeated in a floor vote in the US House of Representatives.

- 1980** The renowned composer, singer and musician Stevie Wonder releases “Happy Birthday,” a song celebrating Dr. King and urging a holiday in his honor. It becomes a hit and a rallying cry for the holiday. During November, the King Holiday bill is defeated again, but by only five votes.
- 1981** The King Center mobilizes a coalition to lobby for the holiday. Stevie Wonder funds the holiday lobbying office and staff based in Washington, DC.
- 1982** On February 23, Mrs. King testifies in support of an MLK Holiday before the Subcommittee on Census and Population of the House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service.
- 1982** Mrs. King and Stevie Wonder present King Center petitions bearing more than six million signatures in support of an MLK Holiday to Rep. Thomas “Tip” O’Neill (D-Massachusetts), Speaker of the US House of Representatives.
- 1983** During August, the House of Representatives passes the King Holiday Bill sponsored by Reps. Katie Hall (D-Indiana) and John Conyers (D-Michigan) by a vote of 338 to 90.

On August 27, the King Center convenes the “20th Anniversary March on Washington,” in which more than 750,000 demonstrators at the Lincoln Memorial call on the US Senate and President Ronald Reagan to pass the King Holiday Bill.

On October 19, the King Holiday Bill sponsored by Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Massachusetts) passes the US Senate by a vote of 78-22.

On November 3, Republican President Ronald Reagan signs a bill establishing the third Monday of every January as the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Holiday.

- 1984** On August 27, President Reagan signs legislation providing for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission.
- 1986** On January 20, the first national King Holiday is observed.
- 1989** On January 16, the number of states that have legislated an MLK Holiday grows to 44.

1990 The United Auto Workers union negotiates contracts with the Big Three auto companies requiring a paid MLK holiday for all auto union employees.

On January 15, the Wall Street Journal reports that only 18% of 317 corporate employers surveyed by the Bureau of National Affairs provided a paid King Holiday.

1992 On November 3, after a coalition of citizens for an Arizona King Holiday launches successful protest and boycott campaigns, the citizens of Arizona pass a referendum establishing a Martin Luther King, Jr. state holiday.

1993 During January, Arizonans observe their first statewide King Holiday, leaving only New Hampshire without a state holiday in honor of Dr. King.

1994 On August 23, Democratic President Bill Clinton signs the Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday and Service Act, expanding the mission of the holiday as a day of community service, multiracial cooperation and youth anti-violence initiatives.

1996 Martin Luther King, Jr. Federal Holiday Commission concludes its mission and transfers responsibility for coordinating nationwide holiday activities to the King Center in Atlanta.

1998 A Bureau of National Affairs survey of 458 employers found that 26% provided a paid holiday for their workers on the King Holiday. The survey found that 33% of firms with union contracts provided a paid King Holiday, compared with 22% of nonunion shops.

1999 On June 7, Gov. Jean Shaheen of New Hampshire signs King Holiday legislation into law, completing recognition of the holiday in all 50 states.

On October 29, the US Senate unanimously passes legislation establishing a federal holiday requiring national observance.

2000 South Carolina is the last state to approve the day as a fully recognized employee holiday. However, the law is passed along with recognition of another state holiday called Confederate Memorial Day, which would take place in May.

Nondiscrimination Policy Statement

The University of Michigan, as an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer, complies with all applicable federal and state laws regarding nondiscrimination and affirmative action, including Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The University of Michigan is committed to a policy of nondiscrimination and equal opportunity for all persons regardless of race, sex, color, religion, creed, national origin, or ancestry, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, disability or Vietnam-era veteran status in employment, educational programs and activities, and admissions. Inquiries or complaints may be addressed to the Senior Director for the Office of Equity, Civil Rights and Title IX/Section 504 Coordinator, Office of Equity, Civil Rights and Title IX at 2072 Administrative Services Building, 1009 Greene Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 48109, 734-763-0235

Statement of Freedom of Speech and Artistic Expression

The University of Michigan strives to create an open forum in which diverse opinions can be expressed and heard. Members of the University community, speakers, artists, and other invited guests have a right to express their views and opinions, and the University will protect that right. The University also supports the rights of those with differing views to express their opinions. In the interest of protecting these rights for all, speech that breaks the law, violates the University of Michigan's code of conduct, or threatens harm to another person will not be tolerated. Persons engaging in such speech may be warned by University representatives, and if the warnings are not heeded, may be removed from the building. The policy extends and affirms University policies set forth by our Civil Liberties Board in our Student Handbook; and in the U-M Standard Practice Guide; Regents Ordinance Article XII, Section 1; and state statutes.

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Notes

MLK 40

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UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
40TH ANNIVERSARY SYMPOSIUM