Commitment to Unity
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Bernard Jones’ speech:

'If man hasn't discovered something that he will die for, he isn't fit to live.'

— Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

During the 21st century, the world has begun to experience a historical change. This change has become a wide awakening to our nation, inspired us, and is a fulfilment of hope to those of the civil rights movement. The change was the victory of the first African-American president of the United States, Barack Obama. While this was a great accomplishment, that is not the only great thing we have done during these historical times.

We have sacrificed time and energy, set aside our differences of race, color and ethnicity to achieve change — an element of Martin Luther King Jr.’s memorable “I Have a Dream” speech, which brings me here today.

The time for change has arrived similar to that of the civil rights movement, which was largely organized and grounded by college students. As college students, we’re defined by what we pass on to the next generation, so it is important to understand our abilities in influencing our communities by demonstrating service, social justice and accountability for the direction of our society in years to come.

We are in a time of great opportunity when previously unheard voices are heard, empty promises are brought to attention, and effective solutions are practiced to rebandage the social justice that our previous leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. have fought for.

However, for these goals to be accomplished, we have to prepare our conscious and subconscious minds for change. We have to uphold faith and remember the values our leaders demonstrated. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."

Until we make a commitment to ourselves and to our family, friends and community, we will continue to see the increase of the social and economic barriers that separate us as a community of people.

Therefore, I challenge and question everyone today: Are we fully aware of our abilities to improve the future of Dayton, Ohio, which is now viewed as one of the nation’s dying cities? Are we ready to encourage and prepare this community for change just as the bus boycott protestors of the civil rights movement, who were ordinary people like ourselves? They were willing to shed blood, sweat, and tears for change. They were willing and ready to die for what they believed needed to be done to improve their community.

I've lived and been on the high hills of the University of Dayton and seen the city of Dayton shine like the bright gem it once was, and I know the beautiful people that have life-changing stories and remarkable ideas that can make this city shine like the great Gem City. Now I know there are several issues that hide the shine of our great city, but I guarantee there will be a great deal of change for the things we do in the years to come.

As leaders of the Dayton community, it is our time now to demonstrate to the world that we must strive toward educating and challenging our communities and find solutions that reflect the value in every individual who is here today and outside the doors around us, and that value is the bright gem within all of us.

I ask everyone in the audience today: Will you lead like Martin Luther King Jr. and others in taking full responsibility for what goes on in our communities?