

Event: Remarks by Chancellor Charles R. Bantz, Martin Luther King Jr. Dinner
Date: Sun 1/18/2009 Time: 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM
Place: Cosmopolitan Ballroom, Hyatt Regency

Good evening.

My thanks to the Black Student Union for organizing this 40th celebration.

It was exactly nine months ago, to the day, that Presidential Candidate Barack Obama gave his now-famous speech on race at Constitution Center in Philadelphia.

Let me remind you of some of the sentiments he gave voice to that day:

“ . . . words on a parchment would not be enough to deliver slaves from bondage, or provide men and women of every color and creed their full rights and obligations as citizens of the United States. What would be needed were Americans in successive generations who were willing to do their part - through protests and struggle, on the streets and in the courts, through a civil war and civil disobedience and always at great risk - to narrow that gap between the promise of our ideals and the reality of their time.”¹

IUPUI students, faculty, and staff have been among those who fought to achieve “the promise of . . . ideals [amidst] . . . the reality of their time.” IUPUI was in its infancy as the turbulent ‘60s came to a close. In the succeeding 40 years, IUPUI has continued to struggle to make our ideals a reality. Our annual State of Diversity report is part of the effort to keep us focused on our progress.

As Barack Obama reminded us during his campaign for president, “the issues that . . . surfaced . . . reflect the complexities of race in this country that we've never really worked through - a part of our union that we have yet to perfect.”

The data reported in the State of Diversity report (both in the booklet and on the web site) remind us of the complexities of race. The members of the Diversity Cabinet, whose charge it is to monitor diversity performance measures and grade our progress, were heartened by the upward trends we observed.

¹ All quotes from Remarks of Senator Barack Obama, "A More Perfect Union," Constitution Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, March 18, 2008.

However, we also took a hard look at what real improvement means. It means sustainability of progress over time. You see that reflected in the new way we have scored this year's performance indicators. The movement on many diversity issues is in the right direction, but we won't be satisfied until we see durable measures over several years. That is how we intend to make real our ideals.

Only then will we be convinced that institutional progress on diversity is deep and broad and thoroughly entrenched in the culture.

The election of our nation's first African American President does not mean that we no longer have issues with racism in our society. On the contrary, it means that we have to redouble our efforts. The stakes have been raised, the aspirations lifted, not only for historically underrepresented populations in our society but for all Americans with this historic election. All of us have had to come to terms with our attitudes toward race over the course of a presidential election campaign.

Our new president put it this way in that historic speech just nine short months ago:

"For the African-American community, that path [to a more perfect union] means embracing the burdens of our past without becoming victims of our past. It means continuing to insist on a full measure of justice in every aspect of American life. But it also means binding our particular grievances . . . to the larger aspirations of all Americans. [And] it requires all Americans to realize that your dreams do not have to come at the expense of my dreams."

Let's honor our newly elected and soon-to-be-inaugurated president, Barack Obama, by taking up his challenge.

Can IUPUI be a commanding leader in making our ideals of diversity a reality on our campus? Can we make sure that all members of our academic community realize their dreams?

Yes . . . We can!

Let's make that our pledge for this 40th anniversary year.

Yes . . . We can!

Let's make that our pledge this year and every year.

Yes . . . We can!

Thank you.