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Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration

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Syracuse University

Remarks by Chancellor Kent Syverud

Delivered on January 27, 2019

Location: Dome

Remarks: 34th Annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration

*The Chancellor was introduced by retired local television personality,
Jackie Robinson.*

Thank you, Jackie.

In 1965, over 1,000 people packed a hall at Syracuse University to hear Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. speak. People back then paid five dollars for a ticket. That price included dinner. Overflow crowds filled Gifford Auditorium and Huntington Beard Crouse Hall there they listened to Dr. King speak over loudspeakers set up on campus.

Dr. King spoke here at Syracuse University about the ideas of pacifism in the New Testament. He spoke about the civil disobedience of Thoreau. He spoke about the direct action of Gandhi. He spoke for lasting social change. Dr. King argued that when good people remain compliant with an unjust system, injustice is allowed to continue.

If our community, our campus, our society is going to fully embrace the vision of Dr. King, it will mean facing challenges here and in the world with meaningful action. For Syracuse University, this in part means working to make this campus and community an open, inclusive, and welcoming place for all people. We will achieve that goal through disciplined action, not merely words.

We welcome our keynote speaker Trevor Noah to Syracuse tonight. In Mr. Noah's memoir, he explains how some in his family would give him preferential treatment because he was mixed-race. Mr. Noah says that growing up in the way that he did, he understands how easy it is for people to accept a world that unjustly favors them over others. Dr. King also understood this. On this campus in 1965 he spoke against this feeling of complacency. Dr. King used a forest fire as an analogy for the big problems our society is facing. People's natural tendency is to run from a fire. But

Dr. King called on all of us, including those of us who benefit from our racial hierarchy, to instead have the discipline to face of the flames and fight to solve these problems. Tonight we celebrate Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s legacy. I pray that all of us at Syracuse University will face the fire and fight it.

Thank you.

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