Loyola University
Damen Center - Schmidt Hall

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Celebration
Addressing Disparity Through Awareness, Advocacy and Action

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Good afternoon. All right, folks. Thank you for being here. Can folks hear me? Good afternoon. We are going to be in this room with some housekeeping announcements. Once we have concluded formal remarks for tonight's program, we're going to invite everybody to join us next-door in the MPR north side of the MPR for a catered reception provided from air mark. So please join us if you can. The plan is to have that going on up until 7:00. But certainly if you have classes to attend to, meetings, jobs, et cetera, life, please, please know that you're free to go whenever you are called to do so.

So I'm going to get us started. Good afternoon on behalf of the department of student diversity and multicultural affairs. My name is Joe Saucedo, my pronouns are he, him and his and there are quite a few people to get to in terms of acknowledging and thanking them for putting this on. But before we get to that, I'm going to invite to the podium brother Fernando Saldivar who is a Jesuit scholastic first year student here as a grad student. Fernando? (Applause.)

FERNANDO SALVIDAR: Let us pray. Good and gracious God, we thank you for this opportunity to come together as community in Thanksgiving for the life and prophetic witness of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. And we're mindful that in this week that we mark his 90th birthday, it's been almost 51 years since our brother Martin was here to lead us by the hand and show us the way. For on his last evening with us, before the striking sanitation workers in Memphis, he told us that you would led him to the mountain top, to see the promised land, but that he wouldn't get there with us. Help us into that promised land that you showed Dr. King. Give us the food that we need for that journey. Inspire those prophetic voices among us here tonight, those in our Loyola family, those in our communities at work or at home, those yet to be born. Those voices crying out in the wilderness, preaching the hard fruits, as our brother Martin did. Not those who would use his name to sell products or to convince themselves that we as a people are on the right track. Inch flame the hearts of those prophets who see the people of God suffering and want to do something about it. Those who like Dr. King will speak truth to power and call for nothing less than racial justice, economic justice, radical nonviolence, and love. Yes, love. Because Dr. King took your admonition to heart, to love one another as you have loved us, and lived it with every fiber of his soul. Help us to love as he did. And may his words and witness help us to set our wounded world ablaze with that very love. We pray this in the name of the one who is called wonderful counselor, mighty God, the everlasting father, prince of peace. Amen.

JOE SAUCEDO: Thank you, Fernando. Again, welcome on
behalf of the department of human resources, the MLK planning committee for 2019. We are very excited to have you all here in joining us and marking and commemorating the special holiday and birthday of Dr. King. We're excited to have our speaker here with us today, Mr. Broderick Johnson to help us in honoring all the legacy that Dr. King left us with and as someone who had the privilege of listening to our speaker speak at our water tower campus, I'll say you're in for a treat. The committee members comprise of staff, students faculty here at Loyola. The list is printed in your programs but I definitely want to acknowledge and shout them out today. We have Dr. Shawna Cooper Gibson, Ariana Lewis, John Paul Stella, Taylor Thomas, Mark Torrez, and the leadership of the Black Cultural Center, BCC. So if we can have a round of applause for all the folks. (Applause.) Thank you very much.

So I do want to also remind folks that there is going to be time for Q and A. So if you have questions that you'd like to ask of our keynote speaker, we'll definitely allow time for that at the end and we'll do our best to accommodate with our time constraints to accommodate those questions. So keep that in mind.

At this time I want to invite up here to the podium Gianna Lorbeck, graduating senior, majoring in sociology. She happens to serve as an SDMA student leader intern as well as captain of Afro descent. She will be providing us a performance of lift every voice and sing and so the lyrics are also in your programs to follow along. So Gianna Lorbeck. (Applause.)

>> GIANNA LORBECK: Hello, everyone. Again, I'm Gianna, senior here studying sociology. You want everyone to stand?

>> JOE SAUCEDO: If folks can please stand, if you're able to.

>> GIANNA LORBECK: And again, yeah, please feel free to sing along. The lyrics are on the back of the program, if you have it.

(Singing) Lift every voice and sing till earth and heaven ring. Ring with the harmonies of liberty. Let our rejoicing rise high as the listening skies. Let every sound loud as the rolling sea. Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us. Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us. Facing the rising sun of our new day begun, let us march on till victory is won. Stony the road we trod, bitter the chastening rod. Felt in the days when hope unborn had died. Yet with a steady beat, have not our weary feet come to the place for which our fathers signed? We have come over a way that with tears have been watered. We have come treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered. Out from the gloomy past. Till now we stand at last, where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.
God of our weary years, God of our silent tears. Thou who has brought us thus far on the way. Thou who has by Thy might led us into the light, keep us forever in the path, we pray. Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met thee. Lest our hearts drunk with the wine of the -- oh, my bad. Lest our hearts drunk with the wine of the world we forget thee. Shadowed beneath Thy hand may we forever stand, true to our God, true to our native land. (Applause.)

>> JANE NEUFELD: Good evening. My name is Jane Neufeld, vice president for student development. And that was beautiful. Let's have another round of applause. (Applause.)

That's a tough act to follow, but I won't be singing, so, it is my great pleasure to introduce our keynote speaker tonight. Broderick D. Johnson is a public policy and political strategist with more than three decades of leadership at the highest levels of government and at the legal profession. Professor Johnson has the distinction of being appointed to senior posts under two U.S. presidents. He served as assistant to the president and cabinet secretary under president Barack Obama. In that role he was the president's primary liaison to members of the cabinet directing a team that helped coordinate policy and communication strategy between the west wing and the federal agencies. President Obama also appointed Professor Johnson to chairman of the White House's My Brother's Keeper task force, an interagency initiative designed to identify and address the disparities that hamper the success of boys and young men of color and to improve the lives of all youth. In the Clinton White House, Professor Johnson was deputy assistant to the president for legislative affairs. Professor Johnson has served in numerous senior positions on capital hill beginning in the house office of the legislative council where he drafted such landmark legislation as a family and medical leave act, FMLA, and the immigration reform and control act of 1986. He was also chief's Democratic counsel to two standing committees, including the house committee on education and work force where he drafted legislative policy and strategy on K through 12, higher education, and labor employment issues. His private sector career has included senior positions as vice president for congressional affairs with the AT&T and South Bell Corporations where he has -- where he is lead strategist in technology and tax issues. With a lifetime dedication to community service, Professor Johnson currently serves as chair of the advisory council of the My Brother's Keeper alliance, now a major program under the umbrella of the Obama foundation. He is an adjunct professor at the University of Michigan law school where he lectures on public policy and government relations. He received his BA in philosophy from one of our sister institutions, Jesuit institutions, the college of the holy cross and has his JD from the University of Michigan law school.
school. As an aside and speaking of the University of Michigan, Professor Johnson had the opportunity to talk basketball in the final four with Sister Jean today. So I promised her I would at least say go Ramblers, so please welcome to the podium Mr. Broderick D. Johnson. (Applause.)

>> BRODERICK JOHNSON: Of course I would say go Ramblers. Sister Jean, this is your room, and it is an honor to say go Ramblers in this room. I'm just grateful that the Wolverines are not playing the ramblers tonight because I'd have a really hard time. I'd have to say go blue, but since I don't have to do that, I'll say go Ramblers. I'm going to get to this picture and describe to you in my remarks what this picture is all about, but I'm going to use this as a back drop because in so many ways it represents what I want to talk about tonight. So first of all, thank you to the leaders of this great sister Jesuit institution, to the students, faculty, administrators, staff and visitors. I'm so deeply humbled by your invitation to speak here at Loyola university this evening.

Thank you to Gianna Lorbeck for your stirring rendition of lift every voice and sing. I want to add a third round of applause for your beautiful voice. (Applause.)

Thank you very much, Miss Neufeld for your generous introduction of me. When I hear myself introduced that way, I often want to meet that guy because I hear -- because it's kind of hard to believe that I've been able to accomplish the things I've been able to accomplish and still have a lot more to do in this life. God willing. And I expect to. So I know that I've been blessed to have these opportunities and the things that I do are driven by a sense that it is so important in my mission in life is to give back.

A few months ago, not quite a few months ago, actually about a month and a half ago, I was seeing my bio that says I work for a law firm as a partner, law firm Bryan Cave Paisner. Now I changed firms, and I'm now at a firm that goes by Covington & Burling. I wanted to note that because I've joined my long time friend and colleague, Eric Holder, the first attorney general of the United States, and I've come to practice law with him.

And finally let me say thanks to Joseph Saucedo for making it possible for me to be here today. I feel like I found a new friend, man, so thank you very much. And I'm sure our paths will cross many times again. So thank you very much, Joe, and the planning committee as well.

When we spoke the other day, Joseph highlighted a program here at Loyola called the Magis scholarship program. Is it Magis or Malis.

>> JOE SAUCEDO: Magis. It's an exceptional program.

>> BRODERICK JOHNSON: I'm so thrilled that students here are all contributing to this fund in order to provide
financial support for undocumented students. That is deeply inspiring and something that I hope is duplicated at colleges and universities across this great country. This evening we are here to acknowledge the life and legacy of one of the greatest human beings that ever walked the face of this planet, a giant of a man who bore the ultimate sacrifice in his all too short 39 years, to bring greater justice and human dignity to this nation and to the world. Had he lived, Dr. King would have turned 90 years old last week. Had he lived, I imagine that Dr. King would have looked as noble and distinguished as Nelson Mandela did well into his 90s. Had he lived another 51 years, Dr. King would have perhaps been this nation's first African American president or been named secretary general of the united nations. But tragically his life was cut so short, and so we can't know what else Dr. King would have achieved, had he lived longer. But we do know these things, that while he lived, he became the greatest drum major for justice, that while he lived even in the face of unspeakable threats to his life and to the safety of his loved ones, Dr. King never stopped fighting for justice and racial quality, that while he lived, he brought us all closer to the promised land, a land he was so confident would be our ultimate destination we haven't gotten there yet but as a land we spoke so eloquently about his Memphis Tennessee speech in 1968. And so the nation rightly celebrates Dr. King every year, as we should. Streets are named after him, colleges and universities are named after him. Elementary schools are named after him, but all that celebrating does an injustice to Dr. King's name if we stop advocating, if we stop taking action, if we stop making ourselves and others aware of the disparities that still plague this nation.

Hatred, bigotry, and inhumanity have not taken a pause. They haven't called a time out. In fact, those who promote hatred and intolerance and callousness and inhumanity raise their heads even more boldly in these times we live in now.

I can't address you this evening without saying something about what's going on back in Washington, D.C. See, I've worked in and around the federal government for more than three decades. I've lived through government shut downs. Nothing I've ever seen approaches the cruelty of the current government shut down. Nearly a million federal workers and contractors are being locked out of their jobs or forced to work for no pay. Proud federal workers having to stand in food lines, proud public servants having to put off rent and mortgage payments, parents having to cancel birthday parties for their children, who are being forced to rely on relatives and neighbors to provide daycare as they go to work for no pay. It is unconscionable that public servants who work for all of us -- let me just also add, thousands and thousands of DACA youth as well are being treated as political
pawns. How unconscionable and so beneath the dignity of this nation that these things are happening, that our federal government is still shut down.

I was fortunate to work for a president who every single day sought ways to lift others up, to extend compassion and opportunity for the less privileged, who embodied everything that Dr. King stood for and died for. As president Obama tweeted just the other day in tribute to Dr. King, quote, "I've always drawn inspiration from what Dr. King called life's most persistent and urgent question, what are you doing for others? Let's honor his legacy by standing up for what is right in our communities and taking steps to make a positive impact on this world." Closed quote. Amen to that message from president Obama, the 44th president of the United States.

So I was a young Catholic school boy growing up in Baltimore in the 1960s. I paid a lot of attention to what was going on in the world. Civil rights movement, the war in Vietnam and the anti war movement, the harassment and assassinations of great leaders, and the uprisings all across America. When I was about ten years old, I remember watching a news flash about Dr. King being attacked while leading a fair housing march here in Chicago. And I remember thinking that's odd, that's confusing. Chicago wasn't a southern city. I thought this stuff only happened in Birmingham or in places in Mississippi, in the south. So how could this be happening in Chicago? Then the assassination of Dr. King in 1968 led to riots all across America, in my home town of Baltimore, Maryland, the riots were among the most deadly destruction. I remember vividly the violence to troops and bayonettes, tanks rolling through our neighborhoods, and when another of our heroes, senator Kennedy was assassinated two months later in June of 1968 my social conscience grew leaps and bounds. Baltimore in many ways remained scarred by the violence and racial discord that came to a head in 1968, widespread segregation patterns still exist. Desperate neighborhoods battled for resources, broad economic and educational disparities still predominate. Conditions would have described vividly by my friend and fellow Baltimore, someone I'm sure many of you have read the great writer, coats, police still purveyed in Baltimore as it does in Chicago and many other places. Remember Freddie Gray and the unrest that followed just a few years ago. Baltimore in many ways is like Chicago on a smaller scale. Much of the same history of vibrant ethnic neighborhoods but long segregated enclaves, drugs and violence that rip apart families and deprive too many young people of the basic necessities of life, security, safety, opportunity, the right to live lives full of positive dreams and possibilities. Baltimore and Chicago are similar in that they have police departments which are full of good officers who join the force.
for the right reasons, because they want to provide peace and safety to the communities they are sworn to serve. And yet their laudable and heroic efforts can be undermined by officers who abuse their power and authority who mistreat and sometimes even kill innocent people of color. What happened here in Chicago to Laquan McDonald, the shooting, the trials, the verdicts, is inexplicable. Black lives matter isn't a slogan. It must remain a movement. And yet in Baltimore and Chicago, and throughout this great nation, with all that is wrong and must be corrected, there is much that is good and right and inspiring. Young people who despite seemingly insurmountable challenges beat the odds every day, accomplish great things, make their communities and their families better and prouder. Like so many of you at this university, and we owe it to you, to others, to ourselves, to Dr. King to be advocates for the positive, to be story tellers of achievement over low expectations, to be advocates for uplifted expectations. I'm going to tell you a little bit more about myself and to tie that to lessons about expectations that I've experienced in my own life.

I was raised by loving parents, parents who now rest with the Lord and who I miss each and every day. My mom and dad who sacrificed so much for my sisters and me. My parents were named Mary and William Johnson and they were denied so many opportunities because of segregation and white privilege in Baltimore. But they were determined that their children and their grandchildren would see opportunities denied them. And they also expected that we would make the most of those opportunities, no excuses. I don't think they ever imagined that their only son would go on to work for not just one but two presidents of the United States. Okay, maybe they thought I'd work for one, but two? And the first African American president of the United States at that? My parents carried very high expectations of me, and every day I try my best to live up to those. But, look, throughout my life there were those who sought to lower what was expected of me, of what I would expect of myself. This anchor -- and it can feel like an anchor of lowered expectations, started when I was just a little boy, followed me through college, into my professional life. For example, my first college professor at holy cross suggested I drop out of school, go west and find myself. My second college advisor, who is someone that I had grown to trust, who I chose, said to me as I was applying to law school, look, the schools on your list are going to be really hard for you to get into, including Michigan. Maybe you should change your list, apply to some other schools. Advisor in my first year of law school advised me to lower my expectations about my grade point average, accept the fact that I would probably only get mediocre grades at Michigan. He said that wouldn't be so bad after all because just consider your
upbringing, Broderick. Well, I graduated from Michigan in 1983. And for decades my dear mother would tell the story about how my second grade teacher -- because remember, I said this lower expectation stuff started when I was a child and it does for millions of young people of color, especially -- my mother would tell a story about how my second grade teacher had summoned her and my father to her office to tell them that their seven-year-old son was on a path to reform school. Now, that was in 1960s version of the school to prison pipeline, that they called it reform school. Well, my parents took me out of that school and put me in parochial school so I could be under the direction of nuns, like Sister Jean. But it made all the difference in the world because they were not going to allow their son to continue to go to a school where teachers had such low expectations of their son. And so at these family celebration, things that I've been able to achieve, for example, when I was sworn into the district of Columbia bar or when we celebrated my appointment to the White House, my mother would tell the story and boast about how her son didn't end up in reform school after all. Instead he'd become a respected attorney and senior White House advisor. And I still see that proud broad smile on my mother's face every day. My parents instilled in me a lot of great values, among them to never forget from where I came and to always give back. You don't get there by yourself, so rather than throwing around a lot of I told you sos to the people who had doubted me throughout my life, through my education, I've always looked for ways to pay it forward.

So for example, in the fall of 2011, I returned to Michigan law school on the other side of the desk as an adjunct professor. I started teaching a practicum seminar on public policy and government relations to second and third year law students, and I've taught that course in the fall of 2017 and 2018 as well. I designed a course intentionally that would allow me to give something back to the University of Michigan and to those who had supported me there, like my mentor, former secretary of the interior, Ken Salazar. Through that course I'm able to incorporate so much that I've learned throughout my unique real world career that intersects law, legislative policy, and procedure, ethics, politics, and social justice.

Let me share another story, another family story about expectations that is associated with my professorship at Michigan. Home coming weekend in 2011 and my then 12-year-old son and my mother had flown to Michigan to spend home coming weekend in Ann Arbor with me and to go to a football game in the big house. Anybody been to a game at the big house by the way? It's pretty exciting, right? It's a great way to spend a Saturday when we win, right? And that is often in the big house.

Anyway, so they came to visit me, and after the game, my
younger son, my 12-year-old and I took a walk around the quad, just the two of us, and at the end of that walk, he turned to me and he asked me in, he said dad, if I decide to come to school at Michigan one day, will you still be teaching here? Let me repeat that. "Dad, if I decide to come to school at Michigan one day". So what was so unusual about his question and why has it stuck with me for so long. See, like many of you, I would imagine my parents have never dreamed of attending a university like Loyola or Michigan. They didn't really imagine becoming lawyers themselves. In fact, my parents grew up in Maryland at a time when that state law school actually denied admission to Thurgood Marshall on the basis of his race. But my parents had pockets full of dreams for their children and grandchildren so that question posed that day by my son, their grandson, was not about pursuing a distant dream of higher education. It's a much closer reality for him, and the decisions about what to pursue and where to go to school are just that, very intentional decisions. These are decisions that him and my other children get to make all the time that had been denied their grandparents and were more difficult for me. But in fact, for all future generations of children for my family, this question of if I decide to pursue this is where they start. I want to say this about my son, my then 12-year-old who is now 18. He has achieved a near perfect score on his SAT. He knows more about things that I never could imagine. And he's waiting to hear from a list of 12 highly ranked colleges that he has applied to, and he will make a decision about where he goes, and it will be a very informed decision. And that says so much about the expectations that have been raised in my own family. And that's great for my family. It's wonderful. I could stop there, but I don't, and I won't because for me what's important about my life is giving back and trying to make sure that the expectations of other families, particularly families of color, are raised and they are protected and they are met and they are exceeded.

So I applaud you for this theme that you've chosen for this year's MLK celebration, addressing disparity through awareness and education. Let me first talk about awareness. I would imagine for many of you, you have experiences like I do when we are walking examples of disparities when it comes to economic status, race, gender, race and gender achievement. When we walk into settings where we are immediately made aware of glaring disparities, settings like the classroom and the college dorm, the police precinct, the courtroom, the law school, the corporation, the law firm, the receptions and other social gatherings, we look around us and it hits us in the face that we are still so often the only one in the room where it happens, so to speak. Or the flip side of that is that we are disproportionately among the many in a room where we don't want
to be. So sometimes I wonder, am I the only person who notices that I'm the only black person in this room that I'm in? Not this room obviously, not this room, but many rooms, whether it's meeting with colleagues or meeting with clients or going to conferences. And oftentimes you just want to know that other people understand and acknowledge the situation that people are in when they are the only one. But before we can really attack the disparities, we need to be armed with data and the facts about the disparities and not just the anecdotes because in the battle of anecdotes, disparities can be denied by those horror who deliberately choose to be blind to disparities. Call them disparity deniers, they'll cite the exceptional person of color, the woman who's in the room, and they'll say, we've made a lot of progress, and we don't need to have particular and special programs in order to give more opportunities to people who have been denied those opportunities. And we have to push back against that, against the notion that it's all just about people pulling themselves up by their bootstraps. We all have responsibility to ourselves and to our families and to our communities to do our best, but we also have to fight against systemic discrimination and racism and institutions. We have to combine both. But we've got to be able to do it with data and facts about disparities. And so here are some of the things that we know and that we are aware of and that we have to remain aware of when it comes to the gravest of disparities to separate the fortunes of children of color, young people of color, by race and by class.

First the word gap. Did you all know that by age three children from low income households have heard roughly 30 million words than their affluent peers? 30 million. It's an astounding number and in fact when you look at formulas that researchers have come up with, that in fact is the case. And then you have to think of the quality of those words. Discipline policy. African American students represent 16 percent of the public school population but make up more than 42 percent of those suspended more than once in this country, and 34 percent of students expelled. College enrollment and success. Only 12 percent of Hispanic men and 21 percent of African American men have college degrees by their late 20s, compared to nearly 40 percent of white men. Employment. A black baby boy born 25 years ago has a one in ten chance of being employed today. So what do we do to bridge these disparities? It is depressing to note these disparities if we don't do anything about them. Well, we have to advocate and we have to act. And so that brings me to the mission of My Brother's Keeper. I met a then Illinois state senator, Barack Obama in 2003. He was a candidate for the U.S. senate seat in Illinois. A mutual friend, a woman by the name of Cassandra butts asked me to meet a friend of hers named
Barack Obama in consideration of helping him win his senate seat and thus began a friendship and political journey that took me to his rousing speech at the 2004 Democratic convention in Boston, to his election to the U.S. senate in 2006 to early discussions with him in 2006 about his potential run for the White House -- I'm sorry. His senate election was in 2004. In 2006 he started talking about running for president. And then through his meteoric and successful presidential campaigns of 2008 and 2012 and I'm so proud to have been with him all along the way.

Soon after his reelection in 2012, the president and I started talking about a potential role for me in his White House in the second term. So it was in February of 2014 that I joined his senior staff as assistant to the president which placed me among his top aides, along with my dear friend and fellow Chicagoan for you all, Valerie Jarrett. And I was his cabinet secretary, making me his main liaison to all members of the cabinet, which included on a daily basis working with other great Chicagoans, like Arnie Duncan and Penny Pritzker. And he also helped me develop this bold new initiative he had in mind called the My Brother's Keeper initiative. See, the murder of Trayvon Martin and the subsequent acquittal of George Zimmerman deeply troubled President Obama. And I was on the campaign in 2011 and 2012 and I remember we were having this debate among the campaign staff here in Chicago about whether and what the president might say about the shooting of Trayvon Martin. And we were going at it about whether he should say anything, what should he say, whatever, and then we got word that he had already decided sitting in the White House that he was going to say something and he was going to say something to the nation that morning. And so he did. And it's fair to say that the intellectual foundation of My Brother's Keeper was poured when the president responded to the acquittal of Zimmerman by saying, quote, "Beyond the protests and the vigils, the question is are there some concrete things that we might be able to do", closed quote. And as he described his vision to me a few weeks later, the president was convinced that he should use his power as president of the United States to employ the resources of the federal government and to call upon the public and private sector to do much more, much differently, to address the plight of boys and young men of color in this nation, and that that effort would be driven from the oval office. On July 2nd, 1964 -- and I'd like you all to go back and look at those photographs -- president Lynn done Johnson had signed into law a law in 1964 and did it in the east room of the White House and surrounding him were Dr. King and other civil rights leaders, members of Congress and labor officials. This historic civil rights legislation was about Outlawing the legislation and for more than 50 years this nation has struggled to make real the effects of the promises of the '64 act. On February 7th, 2014,
almost 50 years to the day, the first African American president of this nation spoke in that same east room of the White House and he signed into law the memorandum that established My Brother's Keeper. This time the stakeholders around the president were young men from Chicago and Washington, D.C. and other cities, not politicians, not great leaders of foundations or organizations, respect them, that's great. But the stakeholders and the president wanted everyone to understand the greatest stakeholders for MBK were people like the young men that he brought around him. We didn't think about it that day, we didn't think about the significance of the 50 year difference between the '64 act and My Brother's Keeper, the fact that it was being signed in the same room. But later as we looked back, we thought, wow, that's pretty meaningful, symbolically and substantively, that these two things happened in the same place. I want to draw your attention to this picture here then, and would urge you to take your time to look at it. As I get into the essential details of My Brother's Keeper, from the outside, it was crafted as an evidence based community driven approach that barriers that began in infancy to identify what exists with regard to those disparities and to promote and scale what makes a difference in reversing or closing those gaps. And the president directed the federal agencies to do rigorous research, the same kind of rigorous research that's done in anything that is a White House initiative. My Brother's Keeper was not to be some sort of second fiddle, something that we would do kind of our best at, but in fact we were going to have to do it the most exceptional level with rigor and determined approaches, anything else that President Obama directed us to do. And we looked at some of those disparities. I've mentioned some but here's a couple of others I just want to mention. Because awareness about the disparities is so important as a theme that you all have here for your celebration of Dr. King. Thousands of preschoolers, we found, little three foot nine, 80-pound, that's sort of the typical like preschooler, were being routinely suspended or expelled from preschools in the United States. Thousands of them on an annual basis. And that they are disproportionately children of color and disproportionately male. Now, imagine what happens to a family when that happens. Imagine a parent living on a fixed income, a parent who is working an hourly job who doesn't have time off typically, except maybe a few days a year. Imagine that parent getting a call from a preschool or daycare center that your child, your big head little boy is going to be suspended from our program because he is -- he's acting up. For many of those young boys, especially, that acting up is a result of trauma that they deal with and face at home. And they bring that to the preschool setting. But oftentimes it's just about being excited as a four-year-old. Right? Being out of control. You all probably
have brothers who -- or maybe yourselves were out of control as you grew up.

But anyway, so we were finding, though, these preschoolers were being suspended. We also became aware of the fact that repeated suspensions from elementary and middle schools placed boys of color in a school or prison pipeline. And we became aware of the tremendous harm done by that box on the employment application, that asked whether the applicant has ever been convicted or even arrested for a suspected crime. We were able to collect data on the likelihood that checking that box would doom the chances for someone seeking a second chance to turn his or her life around and the disparities there based of course, on race, and they are profound. We know these and many other troubling and unacceptable things, and they go beyond anecdotes because it's important that we collect stories and information but that those anecdotes become statistics that we can use to address the challenges that we face in bridging these disparities and to make sure the public and private sectors understand that they have a role to play as well.

While we were at the White House and we had My Brother's Keeper as a White House initiative, we incentivized school districts to stop expelling preschoolers, so very few preschoolers are suspended or expelled anymore across the United States. While we had the White House we developed new collaborations among federal agency to address recidivism. For example, Arnie as many Duncan identified money to award second chance programs to 12,000 incarcerated individuals in prisons across the United States. While we had the White House we devised new introduction strategies and programs that were implemented by the department of justice across the United States. And while we had the White House, President Obama ordered all federal agencies to ban the box, to take that box off the employment application for federal jobs, and he urged the private sector to do so as well. And many of America's largest corporations in fact did so and have continued to do so.

And while we had the White House with My Brother's Keeper, we had 250 communities, at least one in every state, the district of Columbia and Puerto Rico, they became MBK communities and remain so today.

Frequently the president would speak about My Brother's Keeper, he would mention that his commitment to MBK would extend beyond his presidency that would remain his life's work. That's because it's personal. And that's what this picture tells you. If you look at the president's face, you can see that he is incredibly proud of these young men and of his role in helping to change their lives. Who are these young men? So we haven't walked the walk in the White House. We couldn't just talk about how communities need to do My Brother's Keeper mentor type
programs. The president directed us to find dozens of young men from the DC area who could benefit from being mentored. So these essentially are his men teas. This is the first class of his mentees. In that day what had happened was we were having a meeting in the White House. It was a Tuesday afternoon, and we were having a meeting with the mentees, because there was a group of us who served as their mentors, and they were doing a resume writing workshop in a room really close to the oval office. So the president heard that we were in that room, and he came in and he surprised these young men, because they weren't expecting to see him that day. And he talked with them for awhile, and then the one on his -- his left, who's -- he's laughing pretty hard, but the kid to his right, Noah is laughing even harder and I don't know what that's about. But Noah is about to graduate from college and was on his way to reform school. Anyway, the kid on the left in the room in the White House said, Mr. President, when are we going to get to play basketball with you because we hear you're pretty good, but we're better.

So again, the president had a pretty, very organized hard schedule, as he always had every day, other than when he was on vacation, but this particular day, of course, he did, and he said, we can go now. So of course, then, the secret service is like what? Because they have to -- they know where all his movements are, so they have to adjust to it. Then we also had meetings that we had later in the day had nothing to do with My Brother's Keeper, meetings with foreign policy or whatever else, and they all had to be shifted. It didn't mean they weren't going to happen. It just meant the rest of the staff was going to have to be there even later so the president could go down and play basketball with these guys.

So this is them walking down, you see the White House in the background, them walking down to the basketball court. When they get to the court, he takes off his jacket and his tie and he plays a game of horse with the young man to the left who talked a lot of -- anyway (laughter). So they played horse, and they played for awhile. The president's a really good basketball player, very got athlete, he's very good at everything he does. But this game went on for awhile. Horse is only five letters. So anyway, just saying, I think he was missing on purpose. But anyway, in between, he only played this one kid on the left, but in between each shot, he engaged in a discussion with these young men about really basic day to day things. How you doing in school? How's your college application process going? Have you decided who you're going to take to your prom? How's your family? And they would ask him questions, too, like what's it like having Broderick Johnson work for you every day, a range of questions, very personal, very personal questions about just life. And so I draw your attention to this, and again I want you to spend time.

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looking at this. All these young men are now either about to finish college. Some are in the military, and off in their training programs. They are all doing very well and it speaks to the power of mentorship. And so I just draw this picture to your attention because it's my favorite picture from My Brother's Keeper, and we've gotten many, many inspiring photographs, but that's the one to me that says what I know he has always felt, and that this is his life's work for him and the fact that we have now moved out of the White House for two years, I don't know if the Trump administration is to continue, but we keep doing it from the Obama foundation, because for President Obama, this is work that is about what his life could have turned out to be, how different things could have been for him. He would often say -- in fact, he did say in 2015, I want every young man to know that I'm not that different from them. I wasn't born into wealth. I wasn't born into fame. I made a lot of mistakes, but I kept at it. So that is why now MBK is a major component of the Obama foundation and I can continue to get to work with him on that as the chair of the advisory council for My Brother's Keeper. And now we're making smaller investments in communities like Chicago and Oakland and other communities across the country. In fact, we have the first national Summit of MBK called MBK rising in Oakland, California, next month. So look, here's the fundamental question for children of color I want you all to think about. We talk about the disparities and the statistics, but do we tell them that at the outset that they are victims of grave societal disparities and that when they struggle, they should accept the fact that they just are on the wrong side of those disparities? So lower your expectations? Shoot for a little bit more it -- shoot for a different life. Don't expect too much of yourselves. Do we say that to them? People will tell them that. People told me that. You all have probably heard that. It's not just with regard to race, right? It could be the community that you come from, your economic background, your gender. Lots of us hear this kind of stuff about how lower your expectations. You'll do well from where you came. So we all know what the answer has to be. Fight for change and to provide young people with the emotional and tangible support they need to succeed and also make sure we can change the narrative. I had a white board in my office in the west wing of the White House for the last six months because I wanted to make sure that as we were winding things down, the president would tell us keep running through the tape. So I had these expressions that I would have my staff read every morning to make sure they stayed motivated. And they did, and I did. And one of those expressions was, quote, "Make exceptional no longer the exception". Because, see, I continue to be personally unsettled by the fact that I am in many ways still the exception to the rule, that my sons -- I have two
sons and my daughter, are still seen that way in many settings. And so ways this nation has progressed since 1968. We can't deny that. We still have to go many, many, many, many long journeys to change things in this country and to bring a bright future for all children in this society. But we also need to realize that there are a lot of exceptional young people in this country who have fought against the odds, who have achieved a lot. But we need to continue to work to make sure that being exceptional, particularly as a young person of color, is not the exception to the rule.

I'm often asked what was the most memorable experience I had at the White House, and there were so many. But let me just refer to two. The first one was the day that Pope Francis visited the White House in 2015. So I was raised Catholic. I've stayed Catholic. I'm a pretty devout Catholic, very much driven by the social set of justice of values that I learned at Catholic school and at holy cross. In my political work in all three presidential campaigns that I've worked for, especially the Obama campaigns, I chose as one of my responsibilities to organize Catholic voters to support President Obama, especially in key swing states with substantial Catholic populations, like Ohio and Pennsylvania. President Obama won Ohio and Pennsylvania in both elections, largely, I'd say, because he was able to reach voters, many of whom were Catholic, to talk about how important things like health care were to people who had been raised and have what many would refer to as a set of values that they learned from their experience as growing up as Catholics. I'm so proud to say that President Obama won the Catholic vote in the election so when Pope Francis came to the United States in 2015 I was extended the incredible privilege of having President Obama introduce me to Pope Francis, to have President Obama tell the Pope about all the work that I had done, driven by my social justice values that were informed in my experiences as a young Catholic and throughout college and beyond. So there were many experiences that I had in the White House that stands among the greatest, and the second most memorable one was on June 26th, 2015. That was the day that President Obama traveled to South Carolina for the memorial service for the people who had been massacred at that church in Charleston, South Carolina. You all remember that that's the day he broke out -- the event he broke out into singing amazing grace. I can't describe for you how deeply moving that was, but that was also the same day that the U.S. supreme court ruled in favor of gay marriage across the United States. And so when we got back to the White House that evening from very, very emotional day in South Carolina, to celebrations, though, around what the supreme court had decided, that was an incredible day when you realize the power of what it was that the Obama presidency really was all about, and about how there are, in fact, still reasons to hold
great faith in this country's institutions, including our Cortes. That of course can be hard, given what happened, for example, the other day, the supreme court. And as we look at some of the other things that we face, the supreme court will decide about basic liberties. But nevertheless those were two of the proudest moments in my time working for President Obama in the White House.

Oftentimes at celebrations, people give speeches about Dr. King for king's celebrations. People project what would Dr. King say about the state of America these days. Some will say he would be disheartened by the state of things by the disparities of black on black crime, of the racial hatred and division that still plagues this country. I don't profess to know what Dr. King would say about these conditions. But I feel perfectly confident about a couple of things that I believe he would be proud of. We have, in fact, made progress against bigotry and hatred in this country. I think Dr. King would be proud that millions more black and brown and native and Asian students are graduating from colleges and medical schools across the United States. I think he'd be beaming with pride that we elected our first African American president not once but twice and I think Dr. King would be over the moon that the fact that the first African American first lady is among the most popular and admired figures in the world. And she gives us all such great hope. But I also know Dr. King would urge us to keep working to eradicate the disparities, to fight to eliminate hatred and war as well, and he would not let despair get in the way of us continuing to fight for those things.

So thank you, Loyola, and oh, by the way, thank you for that game last year in the final four against the brave. As was mentioned, I had the great privilege of meeting Sister Jean a few hours ago. Incredible memory. She's still paying very close attention, of course, to Ramblers basketball and also Michigan basketball. She said maybe we'll meet again this year. I hope that happens. It would be great to watch. But I've been here all day. This is -- this has been an incredible day for me. I feel quite honored to be here. I hope you've learned some lessons that you will carry throughout your studies as students and as you go beyond, is that you continue in your own ways to fight to make this a better and greater country. So thank you very much. God bless. (Applause.)

I can take a few softball questions.

>> JOE SAUCEDO: So we've got time and then before we officially wrap up, I'll invite our co-presidents of BCC to -- we've got a strong line up of black history events that kicks off very soon so we'll have that as well. But for now, questions from the audience, you have, anyone? It's okay if we don't. So -- and I know, yeah, we've got food set up next-door, but at this time -- yeah, do you have --
>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: Okay. So for those of us who are interested in like public interest and serving our communities, oftentimes we are worried about one, money, the amount of money (inaudible), and also keeping our sales and taking care of our sales and mental -- ourselves and our mental health. A lot of us, I'm worried about the future, the work that I put in, will I actually see results, and then if I don't, how do I cope with that. There does seem to be a lot of support around us -- there doesn't seem to be a lot of support going around us to those fields. So to work in public service area with like not a lot of money support for this initiative.

>> BRODERICK JOHNSON: Sure. Trayvon, would you stand up because I'm going to brag about you. I met Trayvon this summer. He was in a summer program at the University of Michigan public policy school, the Ford school. And I taught, I don't know, three session course on public policy and criminal justice reform, and Trayvon and his classmates had to make regis to me about how they could get criminal justice reform done in Congress. And their presentations blew me away. All these students were exceptionally bright. Trayvon was among the best and the brightest in that group and he was part of inviting me to come here to speak. So if you like what I said, give him the credit for it. (Applause.) So to answer your question, though, Trayvon, this -- you know, college debt, and I'm sure for many of you in this room, the issue of how you finance college, how your parents can help, how much debt will you graduate from college with, has such an impact on the choices that you can make about what it is that you do. Those choices become even more profound for many when it comes to graduate school, law school, medical school, particularly graduate school and law school, where many people go because they want to make a difference in the world in terms of policy, for example. So it's hard. And so the first thing you've got to do, I think, is to -- you can honestly get financial support, find scholarships, other ways to reduce the debt, right? And there -- and it takes a lot of work to figure that out, but there are ways to do that.

The second thing I'm going to say, for those of you who think you're going to go to graduate school, law school, whatever, keep this in mind. And if you need something to motivate you to like work hard, get the best grades you can possibly get, there are among the most elite graduate schools in this country, they have large endowments and they can finance a graduate education, particularly for students of color because we are still very much the exception. So you can graduate with no debt. There's schools that actually will sort of -- you can get into a bit of a bidding war with some of those schools. So that's an incentive if you're thinking of graduate school, to work exceptionally hard so that you can take advantage of those things so that you can

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then make choices to go into public service, whether it's -- the people who work on capitol hill with federal agencies doing amazing work, a lot of people who were furloughed now who live from paycheck to paycheck, the debt that they've accumulated is part of the reason that it's even harder in these circumstances. So those are some strategies that I would lay out there, you know, try to make sure you can reduce the impact of debt on the choices that you can make and the difference that you can make in this world. I was paying my debts for law school back in -- well into my 40s, and Barack and Michelle Obama talk about that as well. They were paying their debts, you know, even as he was, I think, running for the Illinois legislature the first time. So there are some ways. Any other questions?

>> JOE SAUCEDO: I have a question. A question around My Brother's Keeper. I'm just curious if there's been conversations around the effort around how we can serve our women of color or women communities and up lifting and all of that.

>> BRODERICK JOHNSON: Yeah, so I mean, one of the things that -- there were some -- while we were in the White House, there were some activists, some organizations, that were critical of us and even threatened to sue the administration over My Brother's Keeper, saying that it was gender discrimination. And that stems from sort of a false idea or notion that because we were emphasizing disparities that particularly have an impact on boys, on males of color, that we were then devising programs that would exclude women and nonmales from these programs. And we would then point to the fact that under the U.S. constitution, we could not discriminate on the basis of race and gender, so we couldn't tell the department of education, you know, only work to make sure that young boys of color are not being suspended and expelled from preschool. We couldn't do that, right? And so we didn't do that. And we thought, had the perspective that if we could address the disparities where they're our gravest, it can have an impact on all children. That's why we would oftentimes would emphasize all youth, that MBK was about all youth. In fact, a lot of our programs had that impact. But I would also say then -- this is very much the case now with My Brother's Keeper being in the Obama foundation, that the former first lady has programs that are very specific to girls and young women of color and otherwise as well, the international women's day, for example, is a very important part of the work that she does and continuing. So these are not either or propositions. There's collaborations around all of this and it all I think fits nicely together. So all right? Thank you, all. Good night.

(Applause.)

>> JOE SAUCEDO: So before we officially wrap, if I can have Jocelyn, Dillard and Trayvon come up to the podium with some announcements about black history month.

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Everyone, my name is Trayvon, for those who don't know. My name is Jocelyn. We're both co-presenters. We're a student organization here on campus that serves the black population here all around African diaspora. We're not a closed group if you would like to come out. So we provide programming and service opportunities and community for our black students here on campus. We have a lot of events coming up.

So our second black uninterrupted is to showcase black talent we have on campus in the Chicago area. We find very rarely do we have spaces where we can showcase our talent and really celebrate our culture, what makes us proud to be who we are. So we invite you all to participate. If you're interested, you're more than welcome to follow us on our social media. You'll see all different types of communication as well, advertisement through SDMA and other departments, the diversity council, etc. So please consider joining us, whether just to watch or to participate. But also be on the lookout for a variety of events we're hosting as well. We have anything between black voice interrupted, BCC round table talk to redefine what community building on campus looks like to just racial gender and all different disparities and also to talk about what's going on in our communities and all the way to our ending event, eastbound any event to celebrate what makes us black and the greatness in our community as well.

So please come out January 31st, that's next Thursday to our first event and you'll get a lot more information about events coming up.

And we'll also be around if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you, Mr. Johnson. (Applause.)

JOE SAUCEDO: Thank you, everybody, for making this week possible. There's an event happening, a keynote at the medical school tomorrow, Stritch school of medicine in Maywood. There's also volunteering. Anybody in here volunteering this Friday? We've had students, faculty sign up to engage in service throughout Chicago, so we thank you for that. That officially concludes this part of the program. Please, if you care to join us in the next room over, we've got some catering from Armark, so thank you very much and have a good evening. (Applause.)

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