

Dr. Peterson

Welcome: MLK Institute Lecture

Wednesday, Jan. 14, 2015, Student Center Ballroom

On behalf of Georgia Tech, we welcome you to the Martin Luther King Jr. lecture, one of the high points of our month-long celebration on campus of Dr. King's life and legacy. We're grateful for the presence of our speaker Julian Bond, whose service in the arenas of civil and human rights has made a lasting impact on American life.

At Georgia Tech, we honor Dr. King's legacy and respect those who advance his cause, whether here or abroad. In November, Georgia Tech presented the Ivan Allen Jr. Prize for Social Courage to Beatrice Mtetwa, a human rights attorney in Zimbabwe. Ms. Mtetwa is a Swaziland native who grew up without electricity and running water. Her father had six wives, and she was the eldest daughter among 50 children.

She courageously challenges a Zimbabwean legal system that is constantly changing, with human rights eroding as laws are written and rewritten by the ruling party to justify its actions and preserve its domination. Just last year she went to jail for trying to stop the police from illegally searching the office of one of her clients.

In a documentary about her work called "Beatrice Mtetwa and the Rule of Law," she said, "People who go to do things under cover of darkness are afraid of light. So if you come at midnight, I'll be there with my headlights glaring."

Ms. Mtetwa is particularly known for her defense of arrested journalists, both local and international, an activity that has particular poignancy in light of last week's horrific murders of staffers at a French satirical magazine. A free, robust press is a bulwark against tyranny of all stripes. She has also defended and encouraged members of the Women of Zimbabwe Arise, a group of 85,000 women who are working for social justice.

Like so many here and abroad who have put their own lives and safety in jeopardy in pursuit of justice, Ms. Mtetwa has internalized one of Dr. King's most famous observations: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

Today's event is a continuation of month-long celebration on our campus of Dr. King's legacy. Still to come are several important events, and I hope you'll have time to participate in one or more that interests you.

One of which we're very proud is the FOCUS Program, which begins tomorrow (Jan. 15) and runs through Sunday. FOCUS gives prospective minority graduate students an opportunity to visit Georgia Tech for an overview of graduate degree programs. Georgia Tech already graduates more black engineers than any institution in the country. FOCUS is designed to encourage attendees to pursue an advanced degree at Georgia Tech or the graduate school of their choice.

On Monday (Jan. 19) we will observe Georgia Tech's fifth annual MLK Day of Service, a campus-wide initiative. Volunteers will serve in teams and engage in service projects with metro Atlanta community partners. The theme will be "A Day On, Not A Day Off!"

From Jan. 17 to 24, we'll have a Civil Rights Tour stop at the Center for Civil and Human Rights Museum near our campus. This has been a very popular event, but I'm told that student tickets are still available on a first-come/first-served basis.

Dr. King once said, "Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals."

As we reflect upon his life and work, we are reminded that his dream can be ours as well, and the journey that he started did not end with his passing. Thank you for joining us.