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Marian Wright Edelman, 2017 Inamori Prize Recipient

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Marian Wright Edelman, 2017 Inamori Ethics Prize Recipient Vanitha Raguveer

Marian Wright Edelman was the 2017 Inamori Ethics Prize winner and stands as an exemplary model of ethical leadership and advocacy. As the founder and president of the Children’s Defense Fund, she has served as a voice for underprivileged populations, working to ensure all children have the opportunity to succeed with a “Healthy Start, Head Start, Fair Start, Safe Start and Moral Start to life.”¹

The first black woman admitted to the Mississippi Bar, Edelman graduated from Yale Law School and went on to lead the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund in Mississippi. She went on to work for the counsel for the Poor People’s Campaign, then found the Washington Research Project, serve as the Director of the Center for Law and Education at Harvard University, and then start the Children’s Defense Fund in 1973. Through the past almost fifty years, she has received over one hundred honorary degrees, the Albert Schweitzer Humanitarian Prize, the Heinz Award, the MacArthur Foundation Prize Fellowship, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and the Robert F. Kennedy Lifetime Achievement Award for her many writings. These writings include but are not limited to: *The Sea Is So Wide and My Body is So Small: Charting a Course for the Next Generation*; *Lanterns: A Memoir of Mentors*; *Guide My Feet: Prayers and Meditations on Loving and Working for Children*; and so many more.²

In her time since the Inamori Awards Ceremony in September, Edelman has continued to act as a voice of reason and passion for civil rights in America. Almost immediately following the awards ceremony, she spoke at the Association for the Study of African American Life and History annual conference in Cincinnati, Ohio. She was also awarded an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Ohio State University in December. Over the last year, she has been an integral part in California’s banning of “Lunch Shaming,” or lunchroom practices that humiliate public school children for unpaid lunch debts. This bill went into effect on January 1, 2018, and combats one of the various ways, big and small, that inequality can subsist.³

On April 4, at the National Civil Rights Museum’s event, *An Evening of Storytelling*, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., she spoke at a panel discussion with other civil rights leaders including Rep. John Lewis (D-GA), Diana Nash, Gina Belafonte and

Tamika Mallory.⁴ On April 6, she gave the keynote address at the Beloved Community Talks Symposium at the King Center in Memphis, Tennessee.⁵

Most recently, she was featured in an HBO documentary called *The King in the Wilderness*, doing interviews to help shed light on Martin Luther King Jr.'s last few years. The documentary aired in early April.⁶ She was also featured in Deborah Santana's anthology, *All the Women in My Family Sing*, which features narratives by sixty-nine women of various ages in efforts to shed light on the culturally dynamic struggles of women.⁷

In the coming weeks, she will be speaking with Gloria Steinem, women's rights advocate, and Michel Martin, weekend host of NPR's *All Things Considered*, at the Peace and Justice Summit held at the Montgomery Performing Arts Center in Montgomery, Alabama, on April 26, to celebrate the opening of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice and the Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration.⁸ On May 20, she will also be receiving an honorary doctorate from La Salle University at their commencement ceremony. She will also be featured in the new Netflix documentary *Bobby Kennedy for President*, premiering on April 27, 2018.

Marian Wright Edelman remains one of the strongest speakers against inequality in America, using her voice to inspire younger movements and reflect on the current political climate. From calling on Congress to act on the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program (DACA) and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) before the government shutdown, or encouraging students at the March for Our Lives, she reminds us that "we must move forward together to keep our children safe."⁹

Notes

1. "Marian Wright Edelman," April 18, 2018, <http://www.childrensdefense.org/about/leadership/marian-wright-edelman/>.
2. "Marian Wright Edelman—Living Legends," Library of Congress, April 2000, <https://www.loc.gov/about/awards-and-honors/living-legends/marian-wright-edelman/>.
3. D. Mansini, "Mansini and The Meatball Chronicles Brings an Italian Brand of 'Actorism' to Los Angeles," March 15, 2018, <http://www.prweb.com/releases/2018/03/prweb15320695.htm>.
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6. H. Stuever, "Review: HBO Documentary About MLK's Final Years Shows an Exhausted, Conflicted Hero," April 1, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/tv/hbo-documentary-about-mlks-final-years-shows-an-exhausted-conflicted-hero/2018/04/01/dcb5cffe-339f-11e8-8abc-22a366b72f2d_story.html?hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main-mlk%3Ahomepage%2Fstory&hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main-mlk%3Ahomepage%2Fstory.

7. M. Rhor. "Anthology by Deborah Santana Celebrates Strength, Resilience of Women of Color," March 28, 2018, <https://www.chron.com/life/article/Anthology-by-Deborah-Santana-celebrates-strength-12784554.php>.
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9. M. W. Edelman "Let's Move Forward Together," April 1, 2018, <https://www.charlestonchronicle.net/2018/04/01/lets-move-forward-together/>; M. W. Edelman "Action: Congress Must Do the Right Thing on: CHIP, DACA, and OPIODS Crises," January 27, 2018, <http://www.blackstarnews.com/us-politics/justice/action-congress-must-do-the-right-thing-on-chip-daca-and-opiods>.