

0:00

good afternoon folks and welcome to the to the University of Maine we're so very thrilled to see all of you here let me begin by reminding us that the University of Maine recognizes

0:13

that we are located on Marsh Island in the homeland of the Penobscot Nation and our sister

0:19

campus the University of Maine at Machias recognizes that it is located in the homeland

0:25

of the Passamaquoddy tribe, issues of water and territorial rights and encroachment upon

0:31

sacred sites are ongoing. Penobscot and Passamaquoddy homelands are connected to the other Wabanaki tribal Nations

0:40

the Maliseet and Mi'kmaq through kinship alliances and diplomacy the University of Maine and

0:47

the University of Maine Machias recognize fully that the Wabanaki tribal nations are

0:52

distinct sovereign legal and political entities with their own powers of self-governance and

0:59

self-determination so today we are treading on sacred sites for a sacred discussion about

1:06

the renaming of formerly C.C. Little Hall thank you for all of you coming today this

1:15

is a momentous opportunity for the University of Maine I'm Robert Dana I'm the vice president for student life and inclusive excellence here in Orono and in Machias thank you particularly

1:27

to the family of Beryl Warner Williams and there are many of them here get a chance to

1:34

say just a little bit about them as we go on particular thanks to Rachael Keri Williams

1:39

who has been a critical voice and a fully engaged partner in this important effort she

1:46

has served on this naming group she has been very instrumental in today's activities so

1:53

thank you so much to Rachael thanks to the C.C. Little renaming task force into the

Little

2:01

Hall name task force thanks to Kenda Scheele who was chairperson of both of those efforts

2:09

and thanks very much to the Williams Hall visualization committee in the Williams Hall kiosk committee and finally I thank you so very much to the students and the others who

2:20

ignited the flames of change resulting in today's ceremony Beryl Warner Williams was

2:28

an amazing person and she will be a persistent voice for social justice and equity through

2:35

the naming of this building the magnificent lobby that you've all seen on the way in the

2:42

remarkable Williams Hall kiosk Beryl Warner Williams was a Bangor native she earned both

2:49

of her bachelor's and master's degrees in mathematics in 1935 and 1940 here at the university

2:57

and she became a university leader at Morgan State University sadly after receiving her

3:04

master's degree she was barred from teaching in Maine because of her skin color as a citizen

3:13

and as a person she looked at horror in the eye and proceeded to greatness as a contingency

3:22

of fate however she met her future husband at Claflin College and they had a son and

3:28

now this amazing family laid out before me and in front of all of you Beryl Warner Williams

3:36

was a thinker and a doer she was a musician a textile artist a champion of black history

3:44

a historian she was a champion of desegregation public education mutual aid a current concern

3:53

at the University of Maine in the Dignity of Aging and that history and more is why

4:00

we are here today we are committed to anti-racism and to the undoing of injustices perpetrated

4:09

today and yesterday long ago C.C. Little was a eugenicist racist and racism and exclusion

4:19

have no home here a building name doesn't change history it doesn't cause the world

4:30

to change but it does provide an opportunity for learning about our past and the purpose

4:36

the true purpose of a university a building name educates our community in succeeding

4:43

generations about history and about our values in values that are held dearly in society

4:52

a building name signals that our understanding of the past changes over time awareness and

5:00

values based commitments lead to meaningful engagement and that meaningful engagement

5:07

with the past as in this case righting the wrongs of society of a person must be replaced by what is right

5:18

and what is just to this end President Joan Ferrini-Mundy convened several groups with

5:26

the explicit understanding the explicit understanding there was no deterring from the meaning of

5:33

her expectation that history a present and the future demand the clear eyes the clear lens of justice and equity

5:49

she commended us to this change process and we are at this moment right now. So to that

5:56

end let us begin I'm very very pleased to invite Eve Elizabeth Williams

6:05

granddaughter of Beryl Warner Williams to come and join me at the podium

6:13

good afternoon

6:21

when I think of my grandmother I think of two poems I think of Langston Hughes' "I, Too"

6:31

which you may be familiar with which I do quote at the end of my first piece and

6:37

I think I was Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I a Woman?" I am an American I am American now when I say I'm American I mean I am not from this

6:53

place I am from this place of people who are not really from this place I mean I am

the

6:59

hyphen I am that to halves that aren't really whole but many more that are always less than

7:06

when I say I'm American I mean I don't know where I'm from I come from Buffalo as much

7:12

as no one is from Buffalo no where are you really from I'm from Buffalo no really before

7:18

that the Atlantic Ocean ships auction block Ellis Island exotic trauma salt and blood

7:24

bodies I am the schools that wash the blood red from my great-grandma's skin and painted

7:29

it black again said you cannot be both again either or you have no choice you are one and

7:35

less than whole I am American when I say I'm American I mean no one wants you here I mean

7:42

go back where you come from I mean they and them and us and I when I say I'm American I mean I am a [_] negro [_] mulatto half cast I mean where I come from is a pit

7:54

I carry the hollow with me I mean I can Salsa and Merengue but not all the way I mean I

7:59

can Grapevine Two-Step Cotton Candy sweet as gold but not so bad or Kuduro no when I

8:06

say I'm American I mean I am a pit and all I have to fill it with is bloodshed and tokens

8:12

I mean I am a token affirmative action pull yourself up by the bootstraps when I say I'm

8:18

American I mean you gotta play to win I'm craps in game theory and boardrooms and alleys

8:23

when I say I'm American I mean I am the factories shuttered I am rust and dust when I say I'm

8:29

American I mean I'm a [_] [_] you asked for it I mean fast I am 400,000 untested rape

8:36

kits in millions unspent I mean I am spent I am my dirty underwear and all the undirty

8:42

underwear I never sent I don't exist in present tense when I say I am American I mean I am

8:49

history I mean reservations and tribal logs bylaws I mean I and laws that split my body

8:55

in half and quarters and sixteenths I mean split I mean my body is a million pieces and

9:01

just one drop I mean there is never just one drop but a puddle I mean a river when I say

9:07

I'm American I mean don't drink the water I mean I'm dried up preserved in statues and

9:12

mascots I am missing a memory a dream I am what's past is past get over it when I say

9:19

I'm American I mean I am hungry and I gorge myself I mean I am bulimic the dark underbelly

9:24

and the one that ate itself when I say I'm American I mean I eat myself I cost too much

9:32

I mean I am cheap I mean being American costs too much and I just don't know what I mean debt I mean bombs going off in other countries is better than gunshots outside of my doorway

9:42

when I say I'm American I mean I'm yellow tape I make mass graves and I walk on them

9:48

when I say I'm American I mean I walk on bodies and I don't see them when I say I'm American

9:54

I mean to see how beautiful I am and be ashamed I Too Am America

9:59

thank you

10:12

[applause]

10:19

thank you Dear America you are my mother I know not the words to your Anthem but your song of

10:30

it I am the LIE the truth you can only find in the inhale heavy I hear it when I sleep

10:37

wake in the morning it haunts me like morning bells of all those who came before taunting

10:44

and never says I'm sorry America you made me an apology and tell me that I must forgive

10:50

you and yet you are guilty of nothing tell me though it is all my fault I owe you I am

10:56

a debt and you owe so much of it me I should be grateful for all that you gave the spoils

11:02

of your stolen wealth I never did ask for no you did not rape me mommy but created the

11:08

conditions for it and then called me a [__] talking about it hurts you more than me crying always crying begging me to save you threatening to die but you are killing yourselves

11:19

Mommy and I can't save you America my love for you has always been what kills me I cannot

11:27

forgive and forget and you are so good at forgetting you are when it serves you and

11:33

I do try to but there's always that nagging still in my feet the soil beneath my toenails

11:39

in the same sea I was born of that long memory yours and theirs salt and blood torn open

11:45

thighs but I did not ask to be born brought forth of your forgotten wounds a scar scab

11:52

to pick at you tell me I am the knife but did you not weld me as soon as you wield the

11:57

cuts you made you said I did that America but did you not give me these hands but tie

12:03

them also with pride and dignity respect you say I am your mother as if mothers don't drown

12:11

their own children and claim to be drowned by them as if you didn't fertilize this soil with the remnants of my sister's brothers fathers mothers before and then beg me to

12:20

wash your hands of them but you stink America as do I I of you mommy my country my home

12:28

I have left your borders only to have you follow me only to find I carry you with me

12:35

in I can't rid myself of the stents train this blood I tried to give up your flag

hang

12:41

it upside down but I am hung by it my feet roots I tried to burn but I am burned by its

12:47

set of flame no I have left but I can't leave you hold everything I hold dear hostage I

12:56

am and you are rotting this house I was born in standstill crumbling from the foundation

13:01

you are dying and I am not happy mommy for as much as I have wet my tongue with dreams

13:07

of reparation I do not want you to die your daughter I am still your daughter still I

13:15

want you to be saved still I want you to pay still I want you to heal America Mommy I don't

13:26

want you to die today [applause] So this last piece I finished up this morning never read it out loud and I was and bolstered

13:53

by the introduction that I heard and I'm happy to hear the words that I heard so

14:02

On October 23rd 1956 the grand statue of Lenin in downtown Budapest was pulled down and destroyed

14:09

and what newspaper is called a Monumental symbol of revolution on April 9 2003 Saddam

14:18

Hussein stone had crumbled on the streets of Baghdad and the American media gleefully reported Iraqi's freedom from tyranny in 2015 Bree Newsom climbed the South Carolina State

14:31

House flagpole and tore down the Confederate flag that had been flying not far from where Dylan Roof murdered nine black church goers in Charleston and she was charged with defacing

14:42

property and what else would you expect I mean of course she was this country loves

14:48

to demonize the Nazis but fails to acknowledge how it was our eugenic society that trained

14:53

them we assail the Holocaust but ask not the cost of our discovery this government never

15:00

apologized for the enslavement of Africans never paid retribution reparations never said

15:06

we are sorry we were wrong it demands our pride our patriotism after the murder of George

15:14

Floyd sparked the largest protest movement in this country's history symbols of white terror and supremacy like that old General Robert E Lee were destroyed but instead of

15:23

political support thousands were arrested and from the left you heard cries appealing

15:29

for history I mean can you imagine there are no statues of Hitler standing in Germany ladies

15:37

of Ye Olde right clutching or swastika pearls terrified we might forget their history our

15:43

history we will never forget for this history is living we live its brutality until the

15:49

grave and then our ancestors cry it from the soil 90 percent of the Confederate monuments

15:54

were erected decades after the war because at least be honest about what we are nostalgic for history is written by the victor and white supremacy is ours no how could you expect

16:05

Berlin to kill from Nazism when his institution still honored them how can the children of

16:10

women whose wounds will remove from them walk through Halls named after men who held the

16:15

scalpel to them because that's what UMaine did when it named this building Little two decades after my grandmother's doctor and made us victim of his accomplishments yes

16:26

C.C. would have been proud they made our borough sterile our ancestors were led to slaughter

16:32

and I don't expect you to know what happened to my grandmother but I will not let you forget and we demand that you do better in Germany they required civil servants to look at images

16:41

of liberated concentration camps and massacres before they could return to office after apartheid

16:48

the Truth and Justice Commission oversaw community meetings and wealth redistribution Rwanda

16:53

didn't just up and declare itself healed just because Kagame became president

grassroots

16:58

reconciliation empowered victims with self-driven justice and restoration so no removing a statue

17:05

doesn't erase the wealth gap changing the name must be just the beginning for it allows

17:11

you to leave yourselves good believe yourselves liberal non-racist white folk without asking

17:17

why it took you so long to say racism and genocide is a bad thing just to rename a thing

17:25

I once heard racism described as a moving walkway and all y'all white people are on

17:31

it you have a choice you can even actively walk or even run along with it verily despicable

17:38

despiteful in your blatant hatred or you can just stand and ride reaping the benefits complicit

17:45

in its system and structures declare I'm good and feel good about it or you can actively

17:50

fight turn around and walk against it you have a choice you have no choice you make

17:57

it every day so UMaine must ask where do we stand you must ask where do I stand when asked

18:07

why she did it Bree Newsom said because I am free because I am free so how will you

18:18

make monuments to our black freedom for this must just be the beginning thank you

18:25

well thank you so much Eve that was magnificent moving and we heard you

18:52

we heard you I wanted to also thank Gretchen Faulkner in the back who oversaw the committee that also

19:04

brought us to this day and please read your program because it tells you about the many

19:10

people who were involved in today now I'll ask President Joan Ferrini-Mundy to come and

19:17

join me here President Mundy is a champion of what's right she's a social justice warrior

19:28

she has since her time here at the University of Maine impressed me and I know many many

19:35

other people with her commitment to viewing the world in a different way to viewing the

19:41

world through the lens of social justice and equity she is not sufficiently satisfied if

19:50

we just talk about diversity she's not sufficiently satisfied if we just talk about equity she's

19:59

not sufficiently satisfied if we just talk about justice she recognizes that as an amalgam

20:08

and to move a university like this one that must be moved we need her fighting for us

20:13

so President Ferrini-Mundy [Applause]

20:18

Good afternoon everyone and thank you Eve thank you today we gather to honor the life

20:31

and legacy of an inspirational University of Maine alumna who had a distinguished career

20:37

in education and as an active civic leader Bangor native Beryl Warner Williams hasn't

20:43

this slideshow been fantastic what a chance to get a feeling for Beryl and her life thank

20:48

you to all who put that together [Applause] we are also honored to have so many of Beryl's

20:55

family Beryl's family members with us here today including her son Dr Scott Williams her grandchildren and their families thank you for being here everybody welcome to the

21:06

University of Maine and thank you for your collaboration these many months including the historical research and dialogue led by Beryl's granddaughter Rachael Keri Williams

21:15

we thank you all of this has been important in the preparation of this dedication ceremony

21:21

for Beryl Warner Williams Hall thank you for sharing your mother grandmother and family history with the UMaine community with Maine and beyond to make this day particularly noteworthy

21:32

Dr Williams was an extraordinary woman she broke barriers and overcame obstacles despite

21:37

deep structural adversities she faced discrimination and a lack of opportunity and she became a

21:44

trailblazer in her field making her mark as an educator and community leader in Baltimore

21:49

and well beyond Beryl's story and her worldview as we can infer it from her writings her family's

21:55

stories and her accomplishments are a testament to the power of determination resilience and hard work and the importance of her unwavering commitment to helping achieve a more equitable

22:06

just and inclusive society and now back at UMaine where she began her post-secondary

22:11

education we were able to mark the impact that she has had in this commemoration of

22:18

this building on her birthday May 23rd in 1960 Beryl Warner Williams wrote a letter

22:23

to University of Maine dean of women Edith Grace Wilson we no longer have a dean of women

22:29

here at the University following her attendance at a gathering of the UMaine alumni in Baltimore

22:36

this document is in the University of Maine's special collection and it is a beautiful account

22:42

that offers insight into the challenges that Beryl Warner Williams faced her very active

22:47

engagement with an expansive list of community and national organizations along with her work and leadership at Morgan State University and she reflects on aspects of her time at

22:58

UMaine citing both fond memories and hard truths critical barriers and she concludes

23:04

the University of Maine is an institution and I'm quoting her here the University of Maine is an institution of which I am proud to be an alumna the state of Maine part of

23:13

this country and this world has taught me to adjust to fall to rise and move forward

23:19

without bitterness when discrimination in the words of Maureen Elgersman Lee I quote

23:26

a teaching culture generally inhospitable to African Americans in Maine when that culture

23:32

made it impossible for Beryl to student-teach in Maine she went out of state to South Carolina

23:37

when she began her distinguished career at Morgan State University she saw the need and advocated for the value of continuing education opportunities and founded a center there she

23:48

helped lead the fight for the desegregation of Baltimore public schools and spent years advancing the cultural and international fabric of that community when I established the University

23:59

of Maine's Council on Diversity Equity and Inclusion in 2020. I noted that inclusive

24:04

excellence must be foundational at this University I acknowledge that our institution has not

24:11

always exemplified the core values we strive toward today inclusion diversity equity and

24:17

anti-racism we must continue to confront the disquieting truth that systemic racism and

24:23

discrimination have been a part of our history and we've talked about C.C. Little today at

24:28

that time I said and I maintained today that the challenge for all of us is also the great

24:34

potential and promise to seek out diversity. Diversity of ideas cultures experiences and

24:40

backgrounds in order to have a thriving intellectual and humane living and learning environment

24:46

we have a responsibility to learn from the past and to do far better to ensure a greater good for the future today in this ceremony we dedicate one of our most widely used academic

24:57

buildings to the life and legacy of an alumna who made a difference with this naming Beryl

25:02

Warner Williams now has a prominent place in our University's history and mindset visible to all we have a stunning mural and the informational kiosk in the atrium that will inform community

25:13

members and visitors but perhaps most importantly for the hundreds of students who

walk the

25:18

halls and sit in the lecture rooms of this building daily Beryl Warner Williams Hall

25:23

is a focal point even a call to action we hope students when studying this rich mural

25:29

and learning through the kiosk will pause to get to know Beryl Warner Williams to learn

25:34

about her and about the University of Maine at her time and reflect on this woman's remarkable

25:40

life I know they will be inspired by the courage compassion and tireless work of Dr Williams

25:46

to build a more inclusive world one student one community at a time and be motivated to

25:51

play their own important part in that important work our ongoing efforts will include accelerated

25:57

planning to increase accessibility for all in Beryl Warner Williams Hall and all of our facilities we will continue to actively seek out and amplify diverse voices and we must

26:09

remain committed to hearing and learning from those who've experienced marginalization and discrimination and acting on what we learn Beryl Warner Williams was a trailblazer who

26:19

paved the way for generations of students and educators to come by renaming this hall

26:25

for her let us continue to honor her memory by embodying the values of diversity equity

26:31

and inclusion and by striving to create a more just and equitable world for all to quote

26:37

Beryl Warner Williams in the passage that's quoted out above the mural it all ties together

26:42

in the end where you go and what you make of life and Eve I want to assure you this

26:47

is just the beginning thank you [Applause]

27:02

thank you very much President Ferrini-Mundy I did want to call out just a couple of people

27:12

I mentioned Rachael but when Rachael couldn't be here Lauren Babb was the eyes and ears

27:21

of the family and we should thank her very much because she had a very present focus

27:28

so thank you [Applause]

27:39

and Dr Kimberly Whitehead's here and she was on the original committee and was actually the nominator of Beryl Warner Williams so [Applause]

27:58

so thank you very much now it's my pleasure to bring Scott Warner Williams I love the

28:06

bio in this program he's a blacksmith a publisher a poet and an author and he's a magnificent

28:14

mathematician to boot so Scott this is Beryl's son

28:23

I think I can read my phone anyway

28:35

I mean you just have to read your phone all right how do I get this thing to turn the

29:03

right way goodness well we'll try it this way

29:08

it works okay I mean I can use cheaters or my real glasses either all right so one thing

29:18

here called living with mom

29:25

living with Beryl my mother as dad was in World War II I was born in a naval hospital

29:37

in New York City Beryl's father died a month before I was born so we moved to Bangor to

29:48

live with Grandma and Aunt Althea my father Kent was back two years later and was working on his doctorate my first memories

30:05

reached back to when they were when they both taught at North Carolina Agriculture and Technical

30:13

College which for those who don't know it's one of the many historical black colleges

30:20

in our country I never realized how much sexism my mother faced in mathematics world where not only

30:29

could she not teach here she lost her position at Morgan State in I think 1950s to

know those

30:40

dates quite accurate I get to forget but anyway when I was five we moved to Baltimore with

30:48

my mama's math instructor and father as Chair of Psychology in 1950 the sexism did not reappoint

30:57

my mother as a math instructor in fact had no women teachers for the next 15 years

31:06

after sexism did not reappoint my mom as a math instructor she became a dynamo she went

31:16

to grad school in another subject she switched from teaching math to teaching English she became as cellist the first woman

31:28

member of a Baltimore Symphony she became active in civil rights

31:35

I recall often a house full of academics in various fields from history chemistry and

31:46

physics discussing their fields and civil rights I was the only non-speaker present

31:52

I was young but I was young with big ears so

31:59

I did not learn mathematics for my mother however I used her undergraduate and graduate

32:09

textbooks from the University of Maine to teach myself from age 18 my Christmas and birthday presents were what two mathematics books do you want

32:26

I did not realize how much Beryl my mom wanted a doctorate in mathematics but sexism made

32:34

that hard I heard the first African-American female PhD in mathematics occurred the year

32:42

I was born at first that wasn't acknowledged in the news of bio's until I was 60 years

32:51

old why we just didn't know anything about it nobody said anything about it in fact when

33:00

President Bush the younger President Bush went to Yale to congratulate them for having

33:09

the first PhD in mathematics somebody from Catholic University said oh no ours had a

33:16

PhD five years earlier that's when we learned who really was the first PhD

African-American

33:23

woman PhD in mathematics I was 60 at that point

33:31

I had no interest in graduation for any graduate degrees even undergraduate degree that couldn't

33:40

afford the undergrad avoid the undergraduate because my parents were both work today as

33:46

a college well in graduate school I never told my parents about the Master's Degree

33:53

they were so disappointed that I had a Master's Degree for a year without them knowing I had

34:00

one that's my mother contacted that University which is Lehigh University and learned the

34:08

time and place of the ceremony for my PhD the day before they showed up with robes and

34:17

told me they were taking me to the ceremony I recall how happy they were after that event

34:26

was over they were really really happy my PHD present from them of our mother was a

34:33

full witch doctor ceremonial rose which my mother brought back from Africa from a priest

34:39

in Africa and he was yes maybe Kenya I don't remember my aunt Althea was in Kenya at the

34:47

time so I'm saying maybe Kenya after the University of Maine awarded her in 1972 a doctorate in humanities we were

34:58

a three doctorate family mom visited every position I held after my doctorate everyone the 1959 postdoc at Penn

35:12

State and the 1980 research professor at The Institute for medicine in mathematics even

35:21

in 1987 when I was a Fulbright Professor in Czechoslovakia she was extraordinarily pleased

35:30

with my career and asked for reprints of every paper I published as they went between 40

35:39

and 50 or something there wasn't that many

35:51

last Saturday that's my good friend Leon Woodson over there who knew my mother as

well last

35:59

Saturday I turned 80. when my mother was 80 she learned to play the bassoon I was proud

36:11

thank you I also want to thank Michael Scott who leads ASAP Media Services and he was very critical

36:38

in the development of the kiosk they had a wonderful group working with him and I promise

36:46

I wouldn't do this but I'll name a few more people as we continue on but Lisa Newman was also when Lauren couldn't

36:58

be the eyes and ears Lisa was so thank you to Lisa back there

37:09

we also want to say thank you to Gen. Dianne Dunn the President's chief of staff and to

37:16

Meredith Whitfield former Chief of Staff who shepherded this project along as well so thank

37:22

you to both of them [Applause]

37:31

now I'd like Nancy Dymond our friend a long- time friend of the University of Maine a wonderful

37:37

Bangor right and a person we all know and love so Nancy please join me at the podium

37:55

[Applause] good afternoon it's a pleasure to be here today and to participate in this much anticipated

38:06

event Bangor's black community was and is small but mighty the Dymonds the Georges and

38:16

the Warners as well as the other black families were very close-knit Beryl and my dad Sterling

38:24

Dymond Jr were Bangor natives and classmates my dad always spoke very highly of Beryl telling

38:32

his children how smart she was an excellent student and a nice person when Beryl would

38:39

come home for a visit she would always make sure to contact my dad when I was in high

38:46

school Beryl and her sister Althea invited the Bangor black community to an afternoon

38:53

event they rented a conference room at the airport hotel everybody and I mean everybody

39:04

came there were also other friends of theirs in attendance the room was full Beryl and

39:12

Althea presented a slideshow about their recent trip to the continent of Africa Beryl spoke

39:20

first and shared pictures of the motherland showing local people their culture and traditions

39:30

Beryl and Althea wore beautiful garments I remember one of the outfits was a vivid green

39:35

kente cloth with a matching headpiece and I thought that is so cool for years I've wanted

39:44

to buy a traditional African outfit and finally did so this year and wore it to school during

39:50

Black History Month thank you The

39:57

students loved my outfit and asked a lot of questions which was a good thing the Warner

40:03

sisters made a lasting impression upon me former newscaster Tom Brokaw called the men

40:10

and women of Beryl's growing up years the greatest generation I agree especially black

40:17

Americans who fought against fascism overseas to then return home to fight racism here I

40:26

often think how difficult it must have been for black Mainers like Beryl studying to become

40:31

educators having to leave their home state to complete their student teaching requirement

40:37

in order to graduate and/or leave after graduation because no job opportunities were available

40:44

to them yet black Mainers kept moving forward making great contributions in the fields of

40:52

education politics and in their communities that generation began the modern civil rights

41:00

era demanding change in laws and opportunities for a better life because of these individuals

41:08

I was able to student-teach in my hometown graduate from UMaine and be hired as a classroom

41:15

teacher in my hometown [Applause]

41:28

I'm grateful for their sacrifice of all those who went before me and continue to be in awe

41:34

of their strength and tenacity I'm sure you're familiar with the saying to teach is to touch

41:42

a life forever through Beryl's outstanding achievements I know that she embodied that

41:49

statement I can't think of a better more deserving person than Beryl Warner Williams to have

41:56

Little Hall renamed in her honor in her home state on the campus of her alma mater I have

42:04

no doubt that future generations of UMaine students will not only know who Beryl was

42:11

but will realize that she was an overcomer and be inspired no matter how rough the road

42:19

gets Beryl welcome home

42:39

next I'd like to ask Dr Leon C Woodson to join me at the podium he's a professor of

42:45

mathematics at Morgan State and of great humorist he was sitting with a bunch of

42:53

over there the president and Scott and he was able to come up with a joke that defied

42:59

any of my understanding so I know he's good

43:06

all right how's everyone good good I've talked a number of times for but usually every time

43:19

I talk I ended up drifting and talking about myself I'm not well never mind

43:32

Dr Beryl Williams I'm reading from documents that I covered about her like it a promoter

43:44

of black culture women's rights who taught mathematics and English at Morgan State University

43:51

right skipped a part about her history you know she graduated from high school in Bangor

43:57

and so forth go down to a quote from the former president at Morgan State University he says

44:06

she was an extraordinary woman whose life history was here at Morgan it is clear that

44:15

Morgan was always the center of her interest she was a pertinent member of the community

44:22

here right and that's true all right one of the things that she's best known for is the

44:31

Center of Continued and Professional Studies at Morgan State University she started it

44:37

right she was referred to as the mother of continued studies right the yeah the program

44:47

was perfect for Baltimore city Baltimore city was you know a town a blue collar town had

44:57

a large population that didn't get the normal gifts that one can get in a university in

45:06

the university and a college right so she had programs that were set up for people what

45:14

they call non-traditional students right and the program was run for non-traditional students

45:20

the program is still running now and it runs well right but she formed it she ran it and

45:33

it was I was getting ready to go back to quoting I'm not gonna quote you know but the program

45:42

was one that like I said she's clearly it's all it's always going to be remembered for

45:49

her now she let's see I'm back on the continued another quote from the former president says she was

46:02

always said that continuing education was of great and lasting value to the university

46:09

and as the workforce changed there would be a need for people to retool their skills right

46:19

the dean of the school at the time Dr Hollis says she really was the mother of continued

46:35

education and she directed its growth through the formative years right she was described

46:44

as a very fine person and one of the most devoted colleagues I've ever seen on campus

46:53

that again quoting Dean Hollis right now I did that. you needed enlightenment

47:11

so now okay now I was at Morgan as an undergraduate student don't laugh I heard that and I taught

47:26

there for 27 years right so most of my adult life was at Morgan State right of course Dean

47:37

Hollis and Dr Williams would tell me to shut up

47:43

if I if I were to say that out loud

47:50

you know even though it's true most of my adult life was at Morgan State and it would

47:56

be true that they would tell them to shut up right

48:02

you know now what also included in that and this picture ended up going up is there's

48:10

a she has a scholarship fund named after her at Morgan State for the continuing education

48:16

program right and it's been there it's been active the picture was up earlier right now

48:26

she didn't just do her thing at Morgan State she was involved in the city some people may

48:33

know she was Vice President of the of the city school board for a decade right at the

48:43

time when she came in it was a period of turmoil some of you may know in some of the southern

48:50

states Brown versus Board of Education was let's talk about it, you know and so there

48:59

was movements to talk about it and a number of places Baltimore being one talked about

49:07

it for about 10 years and that was an unusual number that was common all over the place there you know I couldn't

49:18

bore you with a lot of stories about that but the school board was in turmoil when she

49:26

took over and when she took over she fixed a lot of things for those decades there were

49:35

things that she fixed that was fixed after you know before I'm sorry before I was involved

49:44

with the school system before I was a student and I didn't understand what had happened

49:52

before I thought you know hey things are really pretty good you know things are at least better

50:00

pretty good that's I'm stretching that I'm sorry

50:07

I'm stretching that things are better and but I realized how bad things were until you

50:13

know she came there and she was active there going with another quote lifelong public servant

50:24

she played a major role in the desegregation of the Baltimore city school system as a member

50:31

and officer of the school board right now she did not limit her activities to just academia

50:43

you know and some people know that I'm gonna go through the list of the organizations that

50:49

she was involved with she was involved with the Baltimore Urban League the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People Civilians for Black History Morgan State University's

51:01

Women Delta Sigma Theta Sorority the National Congress of Negro Women the National Negro

51:12

Business and Professional Women Red Cross Women's International League for Peace and

51:21

Freedom and this Center Maryland Girl Scouts Council right so she did a couple

things for

51:30

women yeah you know over decades they're just you know you gotta got a little bit in a little

51:44

bit done right also she was a champion of black history art and in Africa right and

51:53

there's students right now I said no I didn't I didn't say it did I okay right when

the one the first conversation

52:09

I really had with her was while she was Dean I was a student right and I the chair

of the

52:18

mathematics department was not a friendly guy let's say you know he was kind of

task

52:26

master you know and he would complain about things up you know I think a term that

was

52:37

used would have been that I was a sweatog of course you don't know what that is

right

52:44

neither do I I'm too young but but you know and you know but he you know he was not

he and I didn't get along well

52:59

at all and one of the things that happened you know I've been telling a story you

know

53:04

when you took an exam you walk up and take your exam from the instructor in those

days

53:12

that that Morgan the institution you know when exams are being returned you came up

53:17

to this stuff and you took the exam out of his hand right and so uh we were doing

this

53:24

and he was the instructor was a different instructor he's ranting and raving about

how

53:30

lousy the class was how bad they performed and you know and so I go up and I pick

up

53:37

my paper you know oh yeah everybody didn't offer everybody did offer I got a 95.

right

53:43

so you know I turn it toward the class right and start heading to my seat you know

so they

53:51

could see the grade right he said and you could have done better and I'm saying

mathematically

53:59

speaking it's hard to argue that right so I did not right I'm picking a class with Dr

54:10

Talbert and Dr Talbot is doing the same thing everybody's picking up their paper and he

54:17

says you know he's yelling at everybody you know he could have done better he could have

54:22

done better I got a hundred I'll take it I've turned it toward the class make sure they

54:27

could see it and he says and you could have done better and I'm saying wait a minute my

54:34

math is pretty good and so he says Scott Williams would have gotten 110.

54:42

I said I don't know who he is but I know I hate him

54:54

you know and maybe 10 years later I you know I told Scott the story and he laughed and

55:01

he said yeah I got 110. you know but because I was having you know I'm getting back to where I should be the

55:17

department felt that I needed to talk to somebody because I was really not getting along with Dr Talbot at all so they scheduled me to meet with Dean Williams and I sat with her and

55:31

you know she talked to me and she talked about African-American mathematicians and which

55:39

I knew nothing about at the time I did not know that there was anything going on all

55:44

I know was I'm you know I'm taking my classes you know not doing well enough

55:54

you know so you know that was my first introduction there you know she said and she told me all

56:01

this information gave me all this information when I came back to work at Morgan she excuse

56:08

me sorry she's with the women of Morgan table they you know and they greeted all the new

56:18

faculty members you know which is really cool uh you know that's the only school I ever seen do that but you know the really nice thing you know this outreach they had you

56:28

know a couple other organizations not just the women in math and they were there greeting the new faculty members and talking to them so you know she greets me and you know 10

56:37

years later it's no surprise if she doesn't remember me and she says so you know what

56:43

department are you in I said mathematics and she jumps out of the chair and runs around

56:50

and says do you know my son Scott Williams I said can I tell her that I hate him you know I think maybe I can't I can't do that

57:03

you know but now Dr Talbot who I was you know talked about earlier he was one of the people

57:09

who formed the organization the National Association of Mathematicians there was I think it was

57:16

about 15 16 that they got together to form a group I worked with the National Association

57:26

of Mathematicians for about 30 years 25 years I was the executive secretary for the organization

57:34

one of the other ones I can't remember his name there was somebody from Morgan that also

57:40

was one of the those that helped form the organization

57:52

[room chatter off-mic]

57:59

they form the organization

58:04

you know one thing that you can say about somebody you know and I said this recently

58:11

if you really want to know a person if you want to find out about a person see that family

58:18

and their grandkids so see how great and marvelous and super they are and that tells you about

58:30

the person you know and that's one of the things that I know like Scott is internationally

58:40

known mathematician he's you know he's done a ridiculous amount of stuff in mathematics

58:52

and also for African-American mathematicians you know he's probably the most famous African-American

58:59

mathematician in the world when you say that I knew I knew you wouldn't

59:08

right now I just want to remind him of this story this happened a few years ago I just

59:16

reminded while we were sitting there and I'm going to mention it again like you know we

59:22

both went to Morgan but we also both went to Baltimore City College and that's the high

59:29

school yeah if Baltimore City College High School that's what they call it now so people

59:35

don't get confused I'm serious we were offended by that

59:41

but I've given talks and we talk about first you know a lot of things you know this was

59:49

the first that did this first and we would go through all this list of firsts and there are a lot of them you know that would happen and a lot of them the Scott is categorized

1:00:00

he you know he has you know in his website found out a lot of these right and so I was

1:00:10

talking and I said you know we talk about first I said I'm the first African-American

1:00:17

to graduate from Baltimore City College to get a PhD in math and Scott goes [raises hand]

1:00:26

and so I say I'm the greatest mathematician to graduate from you know Scott goes [raises

1:00:41

hand] but still you look at and I'm just repeating what I said before if you want to know about

1:00:56

her right talk to her grandkids talk to Scott you know and see how fantastic these people

1:01:09

are and know that they come about it honestly right and I'm going to stop there before I

1:01:18

say anything about myself

1:01:24

that's it

1:01:35

you didn't know Dr Woodson's a professor

1:01:42

and now it's a privilege to bring Rachael Keri Williams granddaughter of Beryl Warner

1:01:50

Williams to the podium with me and as I pointed out Rachael's been an integral part of this

1:01:57

entire enterprise we're very very thankful for your voice

1:02:10

thank you

1:02:17

thank you for coming I woke up with no voice this morning so I hope that you can understand

1:02:25

what I'm saying and

1:02:33

two years ago I at the invite of my father I had a meeting with Kimberly Whitehead and

1:02:40

Joan Ferrini-Mundy and as a result of that meeting I found myself working online not

1:02:51

in person with several people from UMaine in order to honor my grandmother's legacy

1:03:00

and at the same time to prevent my grandfather's burying place from being destroyed in Harrisburg

1:03:12

Pennsylvania these two things are not entirely separate obviously as black people in this

1:03:23

country we have faced erasure and we have in a large part been erased from history books

1:03:34

so much so that it can be very difficult to even begin to know where to look to find someone's

1:03:44

story so as the saying goes there's an old African proverb

1:03:56

and it says until the lions have their own historians the history of the hunt will always

1:04:06

be written by the hunter in participating in this project I who am a lion

1:04:21

have authored my grandmother's history and shared what I can and hopefully sparked a

1:04:30

bit of a flame for other people too to look for that history that has been seemingly erased

1:04:41

but is not it only seems erased because you're not looking for it you don't think it's there

1:04:52

my grandmother as Joan quoted earlier to um very frequently said you know in variations

1:05:05

there is a lot of work left to do

1:05:11

this project is by no means finished you know I'm proud of it it could have been brighter

1:05:21

and bigger it could have been painted on the outside of the building right it could have been this

1:05:33

so loud expression of black joy and resilience that it would have sparked pride and Joy across

1:05:49

the country but an understanding that there are black people who are from Maine

1:05:56

because I don't think that's a history that's remembered very often there were a lot and

1:06:04

are black people black Mainers that go way back to the 1700s mid 1700s if not earlier

1:06:17

in this renaming the as Eve you know Eve also mentioned too and it's been mentioned here

1:06:29

so this day this week as my dad said it is his 80th birthday he celebrated his 80th birthday

1:06:41

and it is also the 80th anniversary of when my grandfather Roger Canton Williams received

1:06:50

a letter from the military Hospital telling him that the doctors accidentally removed

1:06:56

his wife's uterus during the process of giving birth

1:07:04

and that he was lucky that he had one son that was going to be his only son obviously

1:07:15

that my grandmother carried this you know her whole life and it is something that connects

1:07:29

very much this Legacy of C.C. Little Clarence Cook Little and Beryl Warner Williams together

1:07:38

that it also without anyone knowing obviously here that there was this connection

between

1:07:48

you know our family and this man who championed eugenics and taught it that Althea, Beryl's

1:08:01

sister very clearly writes was her experience in educational classes here in psychology

1:08:09

classes that she sat through and you can see that information the archives and she was

1:08:14

taught in classes that she was inferior and incapable this was not uncommon at all at

1:08:22

the time UMaine is not unique in having taught eugenics courses or having a president that

1:08:30

was a eugenicist I think it's something like 196 universities have this legacy it is so

1:08:39

important to not forget that these things are tied together that they are still with

1:08:48

us that my grandmother only had one son right

1:09:00

that this lives on that there is inequality and there is erasure that still happens today

1:09:15

even in this process and even in this joyous moment right that we have to understand within

1:09:22

ourselves how we perpetuate in silence and a race

1:09:41

I know that my grandmother is very proud

1:09:48

of this that she could have maybe sometimes be thought of as vain that she always stated what her degrees

1:10:00

were what committees she sat on what she was a head of that it could have seemed like it

1:10:09

was prideful boasting you know that she's the head of League of Negro Women Voters or

1:10:18

Women's Voters than later on in Maryland that she had all of these things and it was always

1:10:25

and now and being part of this that I really understand that she was fighting being erased

1:10:37

always she doesn't appear in the yearbooks for UMaine

1:10:52

except maybe there's one is there one picture of her one and that's in spite of Orchestra

1:11:02

Glee Club the fact that she played music at almost every you know all these sporting events

1:11:12

and for gym classes not she's not in she's not in the pictures she's in more pictures

1:11:19

in Bangor High School yearbooks than she is at UMaine that drove her you know she mailed

1:11:30

in clippings of accomplishments you know I met with the archivist yesterday and he was

1:11:36

like this is a surprisingly large file that we have on Beryl and I'm looking at each clipping

1:11:45

and her handwriting is on for my file you will not forget me

1:12:04

[applause]

1:12:11

build on that and please and look for her and for others like her in all of the places

1:12:24

because we're everywhere and our history is strong it still exists

1:12:32

[applause]

1:12:39

I don't often speak for the president but I'll speak for both she and myself I can assure

1:13:13

you Beryl Warner Williams will not be forgotten at the University of Maine now let me ask

1:13:20

Mike MYQ Farrow to join us here at the podium Mike [Music] all right so it's my I guess responsibility to talk about the future and so this song

1:14:01

is called better days not better days the song is called reckoning I wrote a series

1:14:07

of songs about better days you can't make a better world if we can't imagine it and

1:14:12

so this is an imaginary song about a day of reckoning [Music]

1:14:39

your day will come before you know it all the things you took for granted all the lazy

1:14:46

little habits will be gone oh one day a day will come

1:14:52

it's like the sun in the heavens shining shining rays across the ocean tells us day is over

1:15:00

day is done oh one day your day will come and they will burn in effigy every Elvis record

1:15:11

NCD and dance with circles merrily around the fire and they will sing enjoy and praise

1:15:17

about the ways we overcame like a loud and smoking haze around the fire your day will

1:15:25

come it's gonna be a reckoning [Music] I've done enough my notice has been given so I

1:15:44

spend my moments living completely done with my forgiving please please forgive me

1:15:53

see I found faith learn truth is not worth hiding noodles while I'm smiling vitamins

1:16:02

to those I've heard because I'm guilty oh sometimes I'm guilty [Music]

1:16:15

[Music] laugh out loud smoking haze around the fire or your day will come oh it's gonna be a reckoning

1:16:49

[Music] I can't be canceled because I already am and I'm tired of living my life

[Music]

1:16:55

can't wait till it's over oh I can't wait to write supremacy and all it's born

1:17:03

and they will burn it after G every Elvis record NCD and dance with circles merrily

1:17:14

around the fire better days [Music] your day will come oh and it's gonna be a reckoning [Music]

1:17:37

[Applause] since I forgot the words on the last one I'm nervous so I'm gonna do a different song this

1:18:05

song is about the work that needs to be done still if you didn't know on the day that on

1:18:14

the day that George Floyd verdict was handed down a 16 year old was murdered by the police

1:18:23

and cleared of all charges Ma'khia Bryant is her name and I'll say her name during this

1:18:29

song but it's important to realize that there's still work to be done [Music]

1:18:36

thank you I know a low down dirty liar when I see you one cause I was one that was me I heard a

1:18:54

preacher sing a lot straight to the choir he said that God would expand your property

1:19:03

or the creature on the TV said get rich or living get rich dying get rich loving get

1:19:14

rich trying do what you gotta do do what you need do what you must to get free

1:19:25

[Music] what line must be to be told to say that it was justified the killer cross a child dead

1:19:43

in the streets the kid Ryan was her name her death is our Collective shame without a soul

1:19:55

to blame how can it be my people we [Music]

1:20:00

[Music] do what you need do what you must [Music] foreign

1:20:06

[Music] I cannot help you with yourself down I can't take away your apathy so I say get

1:20:33

joy living and get joy dying get joy loving get joy trying to do what you gotta do do

1:20:54

what you need do what you must to get free

1:21:00

[Music] and do what you gotta do do what you need do what you must find any means necessary

1:21:21

do what you made [Music]

1:21:27

right Robert Jones Jr said we can disagree and still love each other unless your disagreement is

1:21:35

rooted in my oppression and denial of my humanity and right to exist and so I always find it

1:21:42

so interesting when there's a discussion there's two sides let's talk about each side let's hear it out and there are two sides to most things but when it's about my humanity and

1:21:52

right to exist I'm a human you're a human human beings are allowed to exist So This

1:21:58

song is called there is power

1:22:04

there is power in hiding or slavery behind bars there is power enforcing them to work

1:22:12

there is power and labeling them all as criminal criminals so we can ignore how Injustice works

1:22:19

there is power in claiming that there's two sides and there is power in declaring that

1:22:26

you're hurt there is power equating a genocide to anything but an unnamed grave in the earth

1:22:36

I'm from the land of slaves oh where we found failed pandemics like COVID and AIDS

1:22:47

where my friends are working three jobs just to get paid but who am I who might complain

1:23:02

there is power when we talk about our salary there is power when we discuss our wages there

1:23:10

is power telling the boss we're finished until the day that he can pay us there is powering

1:23:16

claiming your own body all there is power when they move we say no there is power in

1:23:26

all of our chosen families in the office that we will undoubtedly throw oh I'm from the

1:23:33

land of overturned Graves

1:23:43

also at community

1:23:54

[Music]

1:23:59

so this last part of the song I will be making up but at the end of it we are going to sing

1:24:09

negro national anthem so please stand when we get there solidarity

1:24:15

Among The Wretched of the Earth [Music] those who labor those who labor for lasting there

1:24:34

were solidarity Among The Wretched of the Earth

1:24:42

those who have been harmed and hurt since their birth [Music] solidarity Among The Wretched

1:24:57

of the Earth when it's due

1:25:03

solidarity for those who pick our coffee for those who make our sugar all of those solidarity [Music]

1:25:20

of the Earth [Music] the right to choose they lost their choice solidarity Among
The Wretched of the Earth

1:25:38

[Music] all those who don't have a voice but we do and we can say thank you lift
every voice

1:25:55

and sing till Earth in heaven ring ring with the harm of knees of Liberty let our
rejoicing

1:26:16

rise high as the listening Skies let it resound loud as the road

1:26:25

song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us sing a song full of the
hope

1:27:01

that the presence brought [Music] us facing the Rising Sun of our new day be gone
let

1:27:23

us march on till victory is one [Music] so we sing solidarity among those who don't
as

1:27:44

much as we do we sing solidarity among those who are [Music]

1:27:58

we true thank you for a lot a lot of tears down here and that was absolutely
magnificent so thank you so

1:28:13

very much for this momentous occasion and thank you to the family for being here
sharing

1:28:19

Beryl Warner Williams with us I'll say it one more time she will live on forever
here

1:28:25

at the University of Maine and in the hearts and minds of our students our faculty
our

1:28:30

staff and everyone whoever comes to the university so thank you very very much and
that will

1:28:36

turn to yes please foreign Luiz Goncalves de Silva playing the cello and Holden
Zuras playing the guitar thank

1:28:57

you very much to our all Maine women ushers and thank you thank you thank you thank
you