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## 2011-01-19: Strive to be voices rather than echoes

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## "Strive to be voices rather than echoes"



Roderick L. Ireland, PhD '98, Hon. '98, was the keynote speaker at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Convocation. Photo by Mary Knox Merrill.

**January 19, 2011**

Inspiring speeches and rousing music marked Northeastern University's Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Convocation on Wednesday. The annual event honors King's legacy and celebrates the vibrancy and diversity of the Northeastern community.

This year's keynote speaker, Roderick L. Ireland, PhD '98, Hon. '98, was the first African American to be nominated to the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, and was recently confirmed as its first African American chief justice. He earned his doctorate in law, policy and society at Northeastern.

Ireland noted that King's dream of racial equality, his commitment to non-violence and his pursuit of social, economic and political justice are central to the civil rights leader's enduring legacy.

"Dr. King was a leader in the truest sense of the word. He looked beyond his own self-interest and looked beyond his fears to become the pre-eminent spokesman for freedom and justice in our country," Ireland told students, faculty, staff and community members gathered at Blackman Auditorium.

Over the years, Ireland said, what has resonated deeply with him about King's life is the idea of "the power of one." Likewise, he said, "Each of us has the power to change a life," and urged those in attendance to discover how to follow through on that goal.

"Let us renew our sense of commitment to social justice," Ireland continued. "In all of our actions and interactions with each other, let us strive to be voices rather than echoes, headlights rather than taillights, players rather than spectators. We must be voices for our community and advocates for people of all races and creeds."

President Joseph E. Aoun welcomed Ireland to the convocation, saying, "We are extremely proud of his achievements and what he represents."

Aoun also said King's words inspired people to celebrate diversity in our society and promote non-violence—themes, he added, that the University embodies and teaches on a daily basis.

The arts were prominently featured throughout the convocation, with performances by the community dance group IntaAfrika and the Unity Gospel Ensemble, composed of Northeastern students. Soloist Marchelles Jacques-Yarde performed King's favorite song, "Take My Hand, Precious Lord."

In addition, Marsha White, a graduate student and MLK Graduate Fellow, and Ryan Fox, president of the Student Government Association, each read one of King's inspiring speeches.

Northeastern has held the convocation, which is sponsored by the **John D. O'Bryant African-American Institute**, for more than 30 years.

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