



January 17, 2017

Lifting every voice: Patuxent River celebrates Martin Luther King Jr. Day



"Diversity is more than a buzzword; true diversity permeates every aspect of the organization," said Dr. Tuajuanda Jordan, president of St. Mary's College of Maryland, at a Martin Luther King Jr. Day event held at Patuxent River, Md., Jan. 12. (U.S. Navy photo)

NAVAL AIR WARFARE CENTER AIRCRAFT DIVISION, PATUXENT RIVER, Md. — You may have heard the term "American melting pot," but what about "gumbo societies?"

Gumbo, a thick stew that originated in southern Louisiana, has a distinct flavor and is often used as a metaphor for a mix of cultures.

"I don't believe in a 'melting pot' phenomenon. I am a firm believer in what I call 'gumbo societies' — recognizing each piece individually," said Dr. Tuajuanda Jordan, president of St. Mary's College of Maryland. "The ingredients work together to make something so rich, so satisfying."

Jordan spoke as part of the Patuxent River Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebration, held here Jan. 12, where she echoed King's message of liberty and peace — and dreams of inclusion and diversity — on the eve of a new presidential administration.

"We have been in a crisis mode, although at times barely perceptible, for at least a decade now," she said. "Prolonged and sustained crisis leads to stress and eventual uprising."



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We're in the midst of an uprising."

She cited the Black Lives Matter activist movement, wealth disparity and increasing unrest on college campuses as examples of why she believes Americans are at a tipping point.

"The masses have lost their patience with business as usual. The masses grow weary, yet they continue to work hard, because they drank the Kool-Aid and sincerely believe in the American dream and in the 'melting pot' theory," she explained. "They believe in Dr. King's dream that they, in this period of the 21st century, will be judged by the content of their character, not the color of their skin."

Unfortunately, she reflected, there is still work to be done to ensure everyone is treated fairly and equitably. "How do we lift every voice?" Jordan asked the audience. She listed a few ways:

- Infuse a culture of acceptance and support. "If you are diverse, but not welcoming, people will not thrive," she said.
- Become comfortable with discomfort, and ask questions about the unknown.
- Respect differences as a necessity, not a nicety.
- Engage in continuous learning.
- Increase pathways to college and the workforce for minority students and find ways to retain them effectively.
- Establish clear policies and procedures. Lead by example and hold people accountable.
- Ensure diversity does not fade on the way up the corporate ladder.
- Think in terms of relationships, not just events and activities.

The reason to be diverse and inclusive, she explained, is to spark creativity and innovation. "We know the heterogeneous populations are stronger and more resilient than homogenous populations," she said.

Naval Air Systems Command Commander Vice Adm. Paul Grosklags agreed and challenged employees to live out King's message not just on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, but all year round.

"We have an obligation — a strategic imperative — to make our workforce and workplace more diverse and inclusive. We need all of you to help us do that," he said. "My challenge to you all is to do something different — introduce yourself to someone, include someone in your lunch plans — because Dr. King showed, through his actions, that one person can indeed make a difference."

The event, which was hosted by the Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division's Human Resources/Equal Employment Opportunity Office, also included the reading of a proclamation on behalf of Sen. Ben Cardin of Maryland.



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