

January 16, 2012

THE MEASURE OF A MAN

**ALPHA PHI ALPHA FRATERNITY
MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY MARCH**

DR. DAVID HALL, PRESIDENT
UNIVERSITY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

“THE MEASURE OF A MAN”

I want to thank the men of Alpha Phi Alpha for inviting me to speak at this historic march on this historic day. As a fraternity, you should feel proud that one of our greatest leaders in this country and the world was a member of your fraternity. This event brings together strong personal connections for me. Though I was not an Alpha man, my son joined your fraternity in college, and it provided him with a sense of brotherhood and meaning which has lasted him a life time. Second, having grown up in Savannah, Georgia, a four hour drive from Atlanta, where Dr. King served as minister, leader and civil rights icon, I grew up being inspired by him and feeling a deep connection between his life and what existed all around me. So this day gives me an opportunity to give back to a man and an organization that have given so much to me.

Dr. King should serve as an inspiration to all men of this fraternity, because Dr. King was not a man of symbols but a man of substance. This march and the other activities of your organization are consistent with the life, mission and legacy of Dr. King. I applaud you for your consistent service to this community.

There are so many topics and themes that one could use that captures the essence and philosophy of Dr. Martin Luther King. However, there is a not so famous quote by him that I would like to use as the basis for my remarks today. I would like to speak to you from the topic, “The Measure of a Man.” As a fraternity that is focused on the development of men within this territory and this nation, I think it is important for us to

pause on this day and reflect upon what it truly means to be a man. With so many of our young men dropping out of school, and dropping into crime and violence, it is essential that we understand how each of us can make a difference in reversing these patterns.

In one of his numerous speeches, Dr. King challenged us to rethink our understanding and definition of manhood. He stated, "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands in times of challenge and controversy."

Implicit in this statement is the belief that manhood is not defined by outward manifestations of our maleness, but by the inward development of our character. All of us can be men if we are not challenged and if everything in our lives were perfect. The true test, according to Dr. King is how we react and respond to the challenges in our own lives, and the challenges that exist around us.

The reason we can accept this quote and challenge from Dr. King is because he was not just a man of words, but he practiced what he preached. He devoted his life, and ultimately gave his life because he would not accept the injustice, suffering, and inhumanity that existed around him. He was not just a man in his home; he was a man in his community, this nation and the world. He saw the suffering around him and tried to stop it. He witnessed injustice and he took a stand. While others remained silent in the midst of segregation and discrimination, he spoke out. While some were consumed by hatred for black people, he offered them love.

Today, as we gaze upon the landscape of the Virgin Islands, we are faced with that same test that Dr. King passed. We have a crisis of violence that is threatening the safety of this beloved community. We have children who are not reaching their full potential in school and in life. We have an energy challenge that is absorbing the resources of families and businesses so they have to make difficult choices about how they will spend their scarce resources.

So we must ask ourselves, *What are we doing to address these present day challenges? Are we taking a stand or are we remaining silent? Are we complaining to our friends, but not reaching out to make a difference? Are we consumed by fear, and not stepping out on faith?*

One of the answers grows out of the life of Dr. King. He deeply believed that our greatest and highest obligation was our service to others. He did not see service as an act of subjugation, but a testament of our divinity.

This is best captured in his sober reflection about his own funeral. He stated a few months before he died:

“Every now and then I guess we all think realistically about that day when we will be victimized with what is life's final common denominator — that something we call death. We all think about it. And every now and then I think about my own death, and I think about my own funeral. And I don't think of it in a morbid sense. Every now and then I ask myself, "What is it that I would want said?" and I leave the word to you this morning.

If any of you are around when I have to meet my day, I don't want a long funeral. And if you get somebody to deliver the eulogy, tell them not to talk too long. Every now and then I wonder what I want them to say. Tell them not to mention that I have a Nobel peace prize, that isn't important. Tell them not to mention that I have three or four hundred

other awards; that's not important. Tell him not to mention where I went to school.

I'd like somebody to mention that day, that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to give his life **servicing others**. I'd like for somebody to say that day, that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to love somebody. I want you to say that day, that I tried to be right on the war question. I want you to be able to say that day that I did try to feed the hungry. I want you to be able to say that day that I did try in my life to clothe those who were naked. I want you to say, on that day, that I did try, in my life, to visit those who were in prison. I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity.

Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice; say that I was a drum major for peace; I was a drum major for righteousness. And all of the other shallow things will not matter. I won't have any money to leave behind. I won't have the fine and luxurious things of life to leave behind. But I just want to leave a committed life behind."

Thus his challenge to us today, is that we must be committed to serving others.

We must be committed to serving the youth of this community with all the power, energy and love that we have. If we want to honor Dr. King then we must not only honor him in words we must honor him through our service.

So the true test for the men of this fraternity, the men of this community is not whether we get rich, but whether we can enrich the lives, education and character of those around us.

The true measure of manhood is not our outward strength, but our inner resolve to do what is right, even when those around us are doing the wrong thing.

The true test is not our biological ability to have children, but our emotional and spiritual ability to nurture, inspire and be present in their lives in a consistent and authentic manner.

The ultimate test of our individual and collective lives will not be what is written on our headstones, but the story we write each day by how we conduct ourselves and the difficult choices we make in our service to family, community and the world.

So again I thank you for this opportunity to share a few words, and I pray God's blessings upon Alpha Phi Alpha and this community. Though the focus of my remarks has been on the *Measure of a Man*, these principles and values apply to all of us. For the true measure of our worth is not our gender, but our humanity.

Let the next march have thousands of participants, and let us all be drum majors. In the words of Dr. King, let us be drum majors for justice, peace and righteousness. Then we will "March on 'til victory is won."