

(MEC) State of College Address



MEDGAR EVERS COLLEGE

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

STATE OF THE COLLEGE ADDRESS

On the Occasion of the

GROUND BREAKING CEREMONY FOR THE NEW MEDGAR EVERS COLLEGE CAMPUS

Dr. Jay Carrington Chunn, II, President

March 16, 1984

TRANSCRIPTION

STATE OF THE COLLEGE ADDRESS

Given by: Dr. Jay Carrington Chunn, II, President

Thank you Chancellor Murphy for the gracious introduction. To the distinguished guests on the dais, to the head of the Board of Trustees and the Search Committee, to my colleagues, to all assembled here today, allow me to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your coming today. We have standing room only at this ceremony and I want to thank all of you for having the faith and the foresight to participate today in what we see as the building of a predominately black institution here at Medgar Evers College.

Let us understand what that means in Central Brooklyn. Let us understand what it means in the world. I would like to express a special appreciation to my fellow students here today. This is the second anniversary of the student initiated strike here at Medgar Evers. If you understood the process of change, you would understand that in order to make wrong right, you have to "hit the bricks" sometimes and pay the price. We are indebted to you for your efforts and we're indebted to you for helping to liberate this great, great college within this great institution of The City University of New York. To my faculty colleagues who walked along with you and fought along with you, I would also like to express my special appreciation, for they are all here, at least those who have not "burned out" in the struggle.

Let me thank my faculty colleagues also for your forbearance, for your hopes, for your dreams, for your love and for the great welcoming reception you have given me in this college. To my alumni and to all of you from the community and all of you from the Chancellor's office, all of you from different parts of Brooklyn and the rest of this great metropolis, you have my ever ending love and the gratitude of my family, especially my wife and

children, as I assume the awesome task of leadership in this college.

You've had a chance to meet my new leadership team and I won't take the time to reintroduce them, But I want you to know that most of them came here on faith. Each of them came here on faith. Andy Coleman for example, my Executive Assistant, came to me on the night of the announcement of my appointment. He said to me, "If you go, I go." I said, "Do you know where we are going?" He said, "I don't care." His wife was with him and said, "I'm going too." Others came on faith also without ever having seen the place. They had no idea what Medgar Evers College was like. I said to them, "...there are some rough edges right now." I said, "It's a jewel in the rough. It's an uncut diamond." They said, "We are going to help you cut it. We're going to help you polish it." And to them, my thanks for their faith. Let that faith they show be symbolic of their faith in our struggle as a people. They do have faith in the advancement of our people. They have faith in the ultimate liberation of people of color and third world people all over the world. My leadership team and I are here to assist you, we are here to act as your servants and your guides. We are going to move this college to new heights of achievement.

This college has the potential for greatness and it will be the flagship institution of the City University system in 5 years. We have to cut the stone and polish the diamond. It will be a collective process. We're about building community here. We're about building an infra-structure here. We're about building an instrument of liberation here, as well as an instrument of education.

We're about having a flagship to move the oppressed out of oppression. We're here collectively, in this room, to say to the world that we have the power to achieve our destiny, that we collectively have the skill, we collectively

have the capacity to change this uncut jewel into something beautiful, not only for black people or people of color, but also for all people who come to our door. We are about the business of change.

When I say we, I mean myself, my staff, my family, my students, our faculty, the community, all the components that make up this great college. Let us understand that we are about the process of change. The members of the Board of Trustees, the elected officials, the community residents, let the word go forth that we're about the business of liberation. We're about the business of education. We're about the business of excellence here at Medgar Evers College from this day forth. Let the world understand that. Let that be our theology of hope. If we believe and if we hope hard enough; if we work hard enough, our theology of hope will well evolve into a theology of excellence. A theology of excellence that will build a belief system that will alter the attitudes and behaviors of those who are doubters, of those who are the enemy, of those who are distractors of this great college, from within and from without. We will evolve, at the same time, through a dialectical socratic discourse, into a place of enormous potential. People will have a place to be and a place to become. That's the agenda here at Medgar Evers College as we move into this new leadership role.

Let us understand that the future is now. Let us understand that all of us in this room, in the name of Bobby Seale, must, as he said, "Seize The Time" and constructively deal with the process of the reality reinforcement of our people and alter the state of being of all of us. For if we believe strong enough, we will be whatever we want to be. Developing the methodology for our theology of excellence is a very critical process. Let us understand the state of the college so that we can move forward into developing this

methodology for our theology of excellence collectively. Let us note the following realities on our present state of being.

Academically, we have come a long, long way. I'm very proud to see the graduates of this college, for example, that are second to none on this earth with a Bachelor's degree, able to compete in any corporation, within any graduate school, within any college in this land. I'm very proud of that and you should be proud of that reality.

Before I came here from Washington D.C., you know I'm from Howard University, a little ole school down there in Washington D.C., where they have everything in the right place, supposedly. Don't misunderstand me, I love Howard, but I love this place more. As I was about to leave campus, the Dean of the Medical School called me. His name is Dr. Russell Miller, he is a friend of mine, about my age, in his early 40's. Russell said, "Jay, I understand you're going to Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn." I said, "Yes, I am." I thought he was going to be another "doubting Thomas" and say to me "Have you heard that place is in a mess." I have told all of them, "And so was Howard University until Dr. Cheek got here. You also put your president out in 1969 as we did at Medgar Evers College, so watch what you say to me." Anyway, he called and he said, "Jay, four of the top students in my medical school are graduates of Medgar Evers College." They do not play at Howard's Medical School. They play hard ball. Our surgeons are first rate. By the way, if you ever get shot, get shot near Howard Medical School, and you will be in good shape. Russell Miller said that they lead the scores in biology and in zoology and anatomy. He said that our students are leaders of the pack. "They have had a sound grounding," Dr. Miller continued, "Can you send me some more of them." And I said, "You bet your bottom dollar." I said, "You'll have many more of them." They graduated from Medgar Evers College's honors biology program.

I have heard some others say, "Your student X, Y, or Z, is now one of the sub officers or assistant vice presidents or about to be the vice president of our corporation. When I met with the people from the corporate world at the career day Medgar Evers sponsored recently, there were about 50 or 60 corporations present, and about 20 people in that room representing those corporations were graduates of where? Medgar Evers College. Do not be fooled about our graduates. A young man walked over to me, he said, "Hello." I said, "Hello, you are from the Class of 1982." He stepped back startled and said, "How did you know?" I said, "Because you have that look about you. You have that Medgar Evers College look." If you could have seen him, you would understand what I saw. I could multiply him across this room. He had the look of success. He had the look of fearlessness. He had the look of hope. He had the look of courage. He had the look, importantly, of competence. He had the look of being able to move the world if he had to.

He's got a big job to do in that corporation. He knows he's just a token black there. He knows that the corporations come trooping over here to get black people to primarily market their products in the black community. We all read, Blacks in Corporate America: Swimming in the Mainstream, so we know that having a black in the corporation is a trend sometimes. Yet, we have our survivors in there, don't we? We have our people "spookin'" by the door, don't we? They're spookin' by the door and they're bringing in more Medgar Evers people to do more spookin'. Before you know it, all the spooks are going to converge and establish a power base within the company. I know many of you don't remember the first spook. That was before your time. Those of us who come from the South understand that the spookin' process which goes on is very, very important. We must educate our youth to understand their role in the corporate structure and in corporate America. Bill Howard, our

Master of Ceremonies today, understands that role at Equitable. Others who have survived in those systems understand their role in change.

I wish that I could say that the excellence reflected in our graduates in the corporate sector and the medical school and in some of the other areas of endeavor is even across the board, but you know that I cannot say that. But the time will come when we will say the same about every academic area, because we're going to build a theology of excellence here at Medgar Evers College. We're going to evolve the methodology for the theology of excellence of academe within this institution. My transition teams composed of faculty, students, alumni and community people are about that business. I have an external team chaired by Dr. Andrew Billingsley, former President of Morgan State College, coming here the first weeks of April to deal with that. On that team will be some of the best black scholars this country has ever known. They're going to deal with the very simple, but yet very complicated charge to give us a prescription for excellence. A prescription of academic excellence to use right here at Medgar Evers College. We've got to drop our buckets where we are. Booker T. Washington said that.

Clearly the future is now. We've got to drop our buckets where we are. About the faculty-staff and student relationships, what we have at the college are the survivors. Now think about that. What we have here are the survivors of a very difficult struggle. There are those who stayed because of faith. We have those who prospered from the struggle because of faith. We have those who said, "Lord, if I had to do it again, I'd do it the same way, even though he didn't promise me no crystal stair. It's been hard and it's been difficult here, but I wouldn't go anywhere else. I want my children to come here, that's why I stayed." That is a critical reality.

At Howard University, I educated 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th generation Howardites. A young woman coming through the receiving line last graduation,

introduced me to her daughter. Her name was Ideyemi Yoma (she'd changed her name). I made the mistake of saying to her mother, "You must be very proud having your first graduate from Howard's Medical School." She said, "No, no, young man. She is the 4th medical school graduate. Her daddy graduated from Howard, her granddaddy and her great granddaddy graduated from Howard Medical School in 1904." Four generations have come back! She'll send her children back! They would not think of going anywhere else. They will be raised that way from the day they're born and given a Howard jersey with the big "H" in their cribs. When I spoke down in Houston, Texas a few years ago I met the first black architect in Houston. He invited me to his home. This was just two years ago. I walked into his living room and this almost 70 year old man ran down the steps with a Howard Freshman beanie on singing the freshman song. Now, that's pride in your school! And he was serious, for he knew every verse and every word, he had not forgotten the words to his freshman song.

Let's evolve the same ethos here and the same sense of community. The same sense of caring, the same process that will bring your children and your children's children here to Medgar Evers College. They will know that regardless of who the President is; regardless of who the deans are; regardless of who the faculty are; the ethos of this place will be so strong when they graduate out of here, they're going to be educated to do the Lord's work. They will know that from the time they are born. That's the same ethos, the same spirit, the same forbearance we have to breed here. That will be done within our academe and with academic excellence. It will transmit itself from generation to generation. It will address faculty, staff and student relationships in the process. The entire area of student and student services needs strengthening, as you all know. We're about that business as well. I have new deans in that area who are in the process of setting up a college

counselling service for the first time. I believe this will move us into new heights. It will give us support for our youngsters and for our older adults coming back to college. It will be good to develop a wide spectrum of student support services in this college.

Our faculty developmental needs are great as you know. We're about that business also. They will be about that business of closing some of the gaps, as well as recognizing and realizing some of their own potential. I am very, very proud to recognize that we have just received through Dr. Wakatama and through his work, a very distinguished award called the Herskovits Award, which is given to the top work on Africa produced by a black scholar within University Press. That's academic excellence. That is faculty development. Dr. Suzine Nicolescu is in Korea doing research. She is a Fulbright Scholar from this faculty. That is faculty development, as well as academic excellence. Let us understand what that means. Let us understand that as we move toward having 90% earned doctorates, and 95% earned doctorates, like some of the other CUNY institutions, we are moving toward the ethos of academic excellence in this college.

Let me switch just for a brief second or two to the area of black studies. That is an area which has been, "...blood on the rug," for quite a long time. Allow me to dialectally dissect it for just a moment. Black studies was an issue which evolved at black colleges in the late 1960's and early 1970's. I am the process and product of that revolution. I was out in the street organizing and running agencies. One day the Dean of Western Reserve University's School of Applied Social Sciences came to me and said, "Young man, if you know as much as you say about change, why don't you come here and show us by teaching a course called Blacks in Urban America: Politics and Economics." He said, "Jay, that is a black course." I did pretty well with that course. The students loved me. They had signed a petition to get me there, and they

signed another one to bring me back. I was the only black in the classroom. That was in 1967.

The Dean called me back in. He wanted me to teach a course called "Methodologies of Social Intervention." He said to me, "Jay, that is not a black course." Dialectically, I began to deal with that! I had the same students, they had the same set of needs. I had the same challenge before me. However, I had to switch gears and teach a white course. I said, "Dean, that will be difficult for me to do. You see, I have been black all my life. So if you want me to teach a white course, an Irish course, a Jewish course or the like, you will have to get yourself someone else. I have to teach in the perspective from which I come from." Yet, at the time, I was an eager beaver fresh out of graduate school. I thought about it and decided, "O.K., I'll do it for the challenge." I found myself teaching on three different levels every day that semester. When I hit the door, I would search out the five or six black students. We had a code. They would laugh and we would have a communication going. The rest of the students would sit there and look. Then I would seek out the Jewish students, I had a code for them. You see, I grew up part of my youth in a Jewish neighborhood....my mother wanted to do good by us, so we integrated for a while. I also had a group of gentiles and a code for them, which made the others look at me very funny. At the end of the semester, after I had pulled it off, with undue hardship to myself and for the students, I said, "I am going to find a black college to teach in so that I only have to deal with one message."

On the way there, I stopped off at the University of the District of Columbia and several other predominately black institutions where I didn't have to code anymore. What I discovered in the process was that the white students and the Jewish students did not expect me to code and decode messages

because they understood why they were there in a predominately black college. They understood that they were coming to a black institution to learn about black people and to get out and do their work in their own way on our behalf. I began to understand the process of integration of content into the curriculum for one has to teach what one knows. We have to reject the European mindset we have developed. We have to get back to our roots, to our ancestry and to our knowledge of self. We have to do that right away or to our own selves we will not be true.

I was there when the revolution in academe kicked off. I was there when the young black "militants" insisted on setting up black studies curriculum. So we set up the black studies curriculum and the black perspective at Howard. We had Black studies I, II, III and IV. We put everybody in the school in Black Studies I. By the time we got to Black Studies II, only one half of the people were enrolled. When we got to III only 20 people were enrolled, and by the time we got to IV, only three people were left in the class. I said, "Oh, oh, something must have gone wrong." So we did it again. We had all students in the first class. Half the people in the second class. Ten in the third class and three people met in the professor's office for the fourth class. Again, I said, as Chairman of the Curriculum Committee, "Something is wrong." This time I said, "Let us do it another way." Let's tie it into methodology. Let's tie it into history, politics and economics. Let's tie it into mathematics and science. Let's tie it into statistics and everything we teach so it can be understood that everything we do and teach is from the black perspective. We were in a black institution and that is important to understand. You cannot graft a kidney into a non-relative. You cannot transplant an arm onto a foreign body. Within your institution you have to have an understanding of what you teach based on who you are and your mission as a college. Who are we here at Medgar Evers? Let us begin to understand where we are and who we are.

With the help of my students, "I've done a survey here at Medgar Evers. I asked them, "Where are you from?" I received a list of where our students are from. They are not just from Brooklyn. They are from the motherland Africa; our students are from Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, Zambia, Ghana, Ethiopia, Guinea, South Africa, Tanzania, Libya, Liberia, Sierre Leone, the Belgium Congo, Cameroon, Zimbawe, and that's just Africa. The Caribbean; Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad, Panama, Barbados, St. Kitt, Grenada, St. Lucia, Bermuda, the Bahamas, and on and on. They are from Central America; Ecuador, Brazil, Venezuela, Mexico, Bali, Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua. They are from Asia, India, Pakistan, Iran, Malaysia, Hong Kong, China, Syria, Taiwan, Phillipines, Bangaladesh, Japan----all right here in this room at Medgar Evers College. Think about that. Understand that 2/3 of the world's people are people of color and are represented right here in this room, right here at this college, we are the majority. We are not the minority and I never want to hear "minority" again in this college. We are the majority people.

Let us understand the reality of our being. A head of state from Africa sat in my office two days ago; he said, "Mr. President, we need help. Black America has turned away from us in Africa. People from Israel send money home to help every year. Our Black Americans do not give money and invest in Africa and we need this help. What can we do to solidify our relations with Black America? What can we do to bring people home? What can we do to help people understand who they are? Who we are?"

I had a young African student enrolled in my school at Howard University. She is now back home in Gambia. Her name was Segar Sarr, and she and I became very close. Segar tried to understand certain things about Black America. I tried to understand certain things about Africa. It is important that we

all understand who we are. You recall that Alex Haley went back to his homeland, Africa. He found the village of his ancestors in Gambia. It was the same village Segar was from. I asked her, "Segar, weren't you excited when Alex Haley walked into the village?" She said, "No." I said, "What?" What do you mean? He found you. He found his roots." She said, "No. No. No. Dean, No. We always knew where he was. He did not know where we were." It is important that we understand what that means. Do you know where you are? Do you know where you were historically? Do you know where you are going? You have to go home, Brothers and Sisters. This is not just idle talk. We need to establish a curriculum of African Studies and then perhaps Caribbean studies. The process is parallel so that we can get away from the schisms of Afro-American, Afrocentric American, Caribbean American and the like. We are an African people!

I remember John Henrik Clarke told a story about a little boy who set out in search of Negroland. He didn't find it. He then searched for Blackland and Coloredland. He didn't find them either. What he found was what? (Audience: Africa!) Right, Africa! Then he understood his history and his heritage. We are about that business, as well as the process of bringing that discovery about. Therefore, our mission must be reexamined and re-tooled. Listen closely to what I have said. We are no longer educating just Central Brooklyn. We must serve Central Brooklyn and serve Central Brooklyn well. However, we are now educating for the world.

Our Community Affairs area needs strengthening. We are in the process of adding additional manpower there. We are preparing to restructure and reorganize our Community Council and there are many in this room who will be instrumental in that area. Our public image and improved perception of the college will follow as well as our senior college status. That has to be returned. I said to the Chancellor just two weeks ago that it was time that

we had our Senior College status back. Let us understand what that means.

Senior College status was taken away in a cruel, mean and exploitive way. We were denied the growth of this college. We were denied the youth of this community. Let us understand that. The Chancellor, Dr. Joseph Murphy, being a rational man and a good friend, has encouraged me in the process of restoring the Senior College status. I want all of you in this audience to know that. The night I was appointed President, the Chairman of the Board, James Murphy, drove me to the airport. In the car, I said to him, ".....Mr. Chairman, I am not coming up here to preside over a disaster. I am very comfortable in Washington, D.C. I am coming up here to do the business of revitalizing this college. Are you going to help me?" He pledged his full support and I believe him. We will have our Senior College status..

We are on a fast track.... We are doing the paperwork now to re-submit to the Board of Trustees for September. When we go down for the hearing, I want everyone in this room to be in that room. I want the hallways filled. I want the streets filled with our supporters. We will not be denied. We must have our Senior status again.

Now let us look at the realities of what we are dealing with here. The entire question of development as a predominately Black college means we must deal with the questions of people of color throughout the world. Together we make up a very strong block. Senior College status is what we deserve. We should have the budget. We should have the facilities. We should have the money and everything that goes along with Senior College status. Let the word go forth that when we get to the Board, all the details will be in place, and, they will be tight. We are coming to address the previous issue which is that Senior College status should have never been taken away from us in the first place. We are not begging; we are not buying, we are saying that -it is ours and we want it back!

Let all of us move to the higher ground. Let us move away from the jangling discord, disarray and distrust which have plagued this college. Let us move to a symphony of togetherness, love, caring, trust and respect. If we can do that, we will be on our way. Let us understand the symbolism we are representing here today. The 20 million dollar new building we are here to break ground on is great. We are really grateful, but it is the crumbs from the leavings of the table. There is a 135 million dollar tower at Hunter College. There is a 135 million dollar new Academic North Building at City College. I was in it just the other day. There is an 185 million dollar science building somewhere else on another campus. I have been through the entire administrative building budget for CUNY. Twenty million dollars are the crumbs from the table. Now, when we get the 130 million more to build our new campus we will be most pleased.

I talked to Mrs. Evers this morning. She said,..... "Jay, what do you want me to do?" I said, "I want you to help me beg." I beg well. There is nothing wrong with begging if you do it with dignity. We are going to deal in the State House. We are going to deal in the White House. We are going to deal in the "Outhouse" and everywhere else until we get our money appropriated to build our new campus. A new campus is what we are calling for. We will take what we have in the new building for we are not ungrateful. Please do not misunderstand me. We are grateful, but we are also impatient. We still haven't received our forty acres and a mule, so I know you can understand my and our impatience.

We want the technology to be there. We are going to teach the youth in this community to think analytically and to compute. We are going to teach them to deal with the process of analytical processing. People will stop saying to us, "...don't get emotional." Our students will not be emotional

because they will be dealing with the process of logic and dialectic materialism. Let us also understand the question of teaching math and science in the city schools. We must prepare our children, our youth, our young people for the twenty-first century. We must demystify science and interface science with hi-touch to avoid our young people becoming the new oppressors in the next generation.

We have a vision for this college. You share that vision. This time, this place, these people and these circumstances have converged at this moment in time at this ground breaking. Let the word go forth. Let the theology of hope and the theology of excellence spread out from this college; we are now ready for Prime Time. We will no longer exist on the crumbs from the leavings of the table. We will no longer deal with the process of going through the back door and the side door and apologizing for what we need. We will ask like men and women. We will seek like men and women. We will achieve like men and women and take our rightful place in the sun.

Let us understand what we are talking about here. We are talking about empowerment. We are talking about building an infra-structure. We are talking about cooperation with the Board of Trustees, the State Assembly and Senate and the Chancellor's Office. We want the community to grow. We want this college to grow. Chancellor Murphy said something very interesting the other day at a meeting which he had at his home for the leaders of the Jewish education community. He said that the Jewish community, through CUNY, had developed their capacity for leadership. A lot of that was based on Jewish people enrolling in the college and getting degrees from CUNY. City College educated the young of the Jewish community, nourished their hopes; brought them a very long way from oppression. Then I heard the Chancellor say, "...Now other groups must have their turn."

Now, Mr. Chancellor, I hope that by the other groups you meant us. Now it is our turn! Let us understand that it does not mean that we are militant or radical, it means that it is just and right. It is our turn to sit at the table. It is our turn to sit at the head of the table. We must move ahead to develop our capacities. We must educate our young. The process is very critical. I have been told since I arrived here, "...Well, Mr. President, some people are tired now. They were all burned out in the struggle. We are rather weary. It was a long hard struggle." I hear community people say, "Well, I helped you out about ten years ago. Once all that foolishness started...well, I can't be bothered. I have other things to do. I don't have time." Well, I've been in the struggle a long time, too. I understand that we all get weary sometime. I also understand that the process of being weary is a process which those outside of our ranks want us to feel. They want us to be worn down.

You must know, Brothers and Sisters, that we must "drop our buckets where we are." We must educate 90% of the black population and people of color, not just the talented tenth as Dubois spoke of years ago. We have to reach down. We have to reach back and hold on. We have to go to the ultimate power source for strength. You know what that ultimate power source is about. Let us turn to Isaiah for understanding the ultimate power source:

Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the Father, the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not; Neither is He weary. There is no searching of his understanding, He giveth power to the faint and to them who have no might, he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall not faint and be weary; And, the young men shall utterly fall. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

Remember, the meek shall not inherit the earth, and that the first shall be last and the last shall be first!