

# Wharton addresses early MLK event

**BY:** Jane Roberts

**POSTED:** 8:43 PM, Jan 13, 2015

**UPDATED:** 9:27 PM, Jan 13, 2015

**TAG:** [politics \(/topic/politics\)](#)

Days before the nation remembers Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on the national holiday Monday, Waller Lansden Dortch & Davis and the Anti-Defamation League paused at the National Civil Rights Museum to honor the legacy, and add Memphis Mayor A C Wharton to the list of civil rights advocates who have spoken at the annual luncheon.

“It’s really easy to give people a day off and observe the holiday that way,” said Matt Burnstein, chairman of Waller, the largest law firm in Nashville. “But we don’t really think that bears witness to the legacy in a meaningful way.”

Wharton asked the crowd to remember the sanitation workers in Memphis in 1968 not as garbage men but people with convictions and dreams.

“They were made of jewels, out of precious things. People who were yearning and believing, ‘There is something else inside of me. I am a man.’ I did not say I am a white man, a rich man or a poor man, but simply I am a man,” Wharton said.

“What is it you don’t understand about that? What is it the world does not understand about those simple words, these days?” Wharton asked, remarking on the devastation in Paris last week and atrocities in Nigeria and the mountains of Syria.

“The ugly head of bias and prejudice is alive and well in every corner of God’s great earth,” said Wharton, the first African-American professor at the University of Mississippi’s School of Law.

The best place to put King’s memory, he said “is to put it to work. That is the best place; that is the best museum.”

The lunch was in Memphis for the first time this year. As part of the ceremony, Waller also honored Memphian NyKedra Jackson, this year's recipient of its Diversity Endowed Scholarship, and three KIPP Memphis Academy Middle students, Terrion Brown, Kaylee Hale and DeMonterrius Hunt, winners of a school-wide diversity essay contest.

Past speakers at the luncheon have included civil rights leaders Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga.; Diane Nash; Ernest Rip Patton Jr.; Rev. James Lawson; and Francis Guess, former member of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

### **King Holiday events**

The city of Memphis is sponsoring a youth empowerment session, noon to 3 p.m. Saturday at the Cannon Center. It is designed to prepare youth for summer jobs. To register, go to: [bethedreammemphis.com](http://bethedreammemphis.com).

Monday, the public is invited to a MLK Commemorative Celebration at Mason Temple, 9-10:30 a.m. Also on Monday, the Memphis Chapter of the LeMoyne-Owen College Alumni Association will host its annual MLK prayer breakfast at 8 a.m., Holiday Inn Memphis Airport, 2240 Airport Road.

National Civil Rights Museum is offering a day of events Monday, including service opportunities, entertainment and \$5 tickets to the museum; \$3 for people who bring canned goods for food drive. The museum is also hosting a blood drive, will serve as a voter registration site and will have representatives from Enroll America to help people sign up for health insurance. Museum open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Copyright 2015 Scripps Media, Inc. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed.