

**Announcer:** Ladies and gentlemen, please take your seats, the ceremony is about to begin.

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the president of Georgia State University, Dr. Mark Becker.

**President Becker:** Good afternoon! Good Afternoon! There we go! And welcome to Georgia State University's inaugural Groundbreaker Lecture. Shortly, Provost Wendy Hensel will share with you the genesis of this lecture series and take us into the introduction of our speaker, Dr. Maurice Daniels. Dr. Daniels, we're delighted to have you provide the inaugural Groundbreaker Lecture, thank you. Well, welcome to all Georgia State University students, staff and faculty in attendance, as well as guests to our university, whether this is your first ever visit to our campus, or a return visit. Today, we also have members of the Georgia general Assembly joining us today, and we thank you for your service to the state and are honored by your presence.

Most importantly, today we welcome Mrs. Myra Payne Elliott and the family of Barbara Pace Hunt. You're the reasons we're here today. And we're thrilled to have you with us. The lessons of history are frequently illuminating, and sometimes shocking and painful. Often, it is said that we must learn from history so as not to repeat it. While that is true, it is equally important to know our history so that we can recognize and appreciate our progress. And I am sorry that this university, Georgia State University, ever was a segregated institution, and I am sorry that the women we will honor this afternoon had to go through the trials and tribulations that our speaker will share with you.

They, however, have left a profound mark on Georgia State University, and thereby, changed the course, not only of this institution, but the course of history, and thereby for all of American higher education. There is no denying our troubled past. Just as there is no denying that, today, Georgia State University is a national model for leveling the unjust playing field that our honorees fought so hard to change. Today, Georgia State University, once segregated and forced to integrate by the U.S. Federal Courts, is the largest and most diverse university in the state of Georgia, one of the largest and most diverse universities in this nation, graduates more African-American bachelor degree students than anyone else in the nation, and perhaps, most importantly, has eliminated all disparities in graduation rates based on race, ethnicity or income. We were the first in the nation to do so, and by doing so our faculty, staff, and students have proven that the disparities that have for far too long been the status quo in American higher education, are not only unacceptable, but also can and must be eliminated, and that you can do so while also increasing access and rising to new levels of excellence. I am so proud of every member of this university community, and how far we have come and grown as a university.

And I thank Provost Wendy Hensel for her leadership in conceiving of and creating the Groundbreaker's Lecture Series, and for bringing us to this important launch moment. At this time, it gives me great pleasure to invite Provost Hensel to the podium to introduce the series to you.

**Provost Hensel:** Good afternoon! Thank you, President Becker, and thanks to everyone who came out on this beautiful day to witness this amazing moment in our history and share it with all of us. Back in October, President Becker and I first learned of the three brave women we will talk of today: Myra Payne Elliott, Barbara Pace Hunt, and Iris Mae Welch, who led the fight to integrate Georgia State University. Theirs is a story of courage, a story of hope, a story of tenacity in the face of tremendous opposition and sacrifice that came at a significant personal

cost. We knew we had to do something special to honor these women, and immediately started brainstorming how we might do that, especially recognizing that the legacy goes far beyond the university--it goes to the state and to higher education as a whole.

Today, I am thrilled to announce and launch this lecture series, The Groundbreaker's Lecture series, that's in your honor Mrs. Elliott, and the memories of the two other women as well. Groundbreakers among us are the trailblazers, they're the pioneers. They're the leaders who, through their courageous actions, have had a major impact on our society, bringing about significant, lasting and fundamental change. The women we honor today are absolutely deserving of that title, and this lecture series will forevermore honor their contributions, your contribution, by creating an ongoing opportunity on an annual basis to have important, often difficult, conversations about profoundly meaningful topics in our world.

So while you and your colleagues experience these events firsthand, today their story will come alive for the rest of us through the excellent and extensively researched book, *Ground Crew: The Fight to End Segregation at Georgia State*, authored by our speaker today, Dr. Maurice Daniels. Our own Dr. Maurice Hobson, associate professor of African-American studies, knows Dr. Daniels well, and I invite him up to the stage at this time to introduce our speaker.

**Dr. Hobson:** Good afternoon. On this afternoon, I have the honor and pleasure of introducing the keynote speaker for the inaugural Groundbreaker Lecture, Dr. Maurice Daniels. A native Georgian, Dr. Daniels grew up between Cordele and Rochelle, Georgia, where his parents were educators. His father served as principal of Excelsior High School. During his childhood, Dr. Daniels would hear his elders speak of civil rights giants, such as Attorney Donald Lee Hollowell, Attorney Austin Tomace Walden, Attorney and later Judge, Horace Ward, who challenged the state of Georgia by filing civil rights court cases to support civil and human rights for all Georgians. This greatly impacted his outlook on life.

The frigid nature of Cold War posturing between the Soviet Union and the United States greatly impacted his education. During his high school years, he, along with his older brother, attended a program at Indiana University, in Bloomington, Indiana, funded by the National Science Foundation, as a result of the Soviet Sputnik launch. This launch made it clear that it was necessary to produce more scientists and engineers. Because of the stench of segregation in the United States, in general, and the American South, in particular, black students from the American South were pipelined to large Northern and Midwestern universities in the generation prior to Dr. Daniels. The "Out-of-State Scholarship Program for Negroes" set the stage for a continuation of this pipeline, after the program ended in the 1950s.

Upon graduating from high school, Dr. Daniels enrolled as an undergraduate student at Indiana University. There he was active in campus organizations, such Omega Psi Phi fraternity. He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology, a master's degree in social work, and a doctorate in education--higher education and administration from Indiana University. He is the author of several award-winning manuscripts, including: *Saving the Soul of Georgia*, Donald Lee Hollowell and the struggle for civil rights, and Horace T. Ward's desegregation of the University of Georgia, Civil Rights advocacy, and juris prudence. He is also the senior researcher and executive producer of five public television documentaries. His research expands the literature surrounding the long civil rights movement. For eleven years, Dr. Daniels served as dean of the school of social work at the University of Georgia, where he advanced the interdisciplinary scholarship and social justice through the development of new degrees, endowed professorships, and a research center. On today, he will present his findings in his new

manuscript titled: "Ground Crew: The Fight to End Segregation at Georgia State." This book not only contributes to the social and legal histories that embodies what historians call the long civil rights movement. Dr. Daniels gives us a history that demonstrates the significance of the role of black women in the modern civil and human rights movement.

As a point of privilege, I'd like to tell you all something. I teach a course here on this campus titled the "History of African Americans in Georgia." And I was reader for this manuscript. After my initial reading, I realized that not only did I need to revamp the readings for this course, but Dr. Daniels scholarship has prompted me to create new courses in our department curriculum. In the Fall of 2020, I will present a proposal for a course titled "the Black Experience at Georgia State University," that will further chronicle and detail the experiences of African-descended faculty, staff and students at our beloved Georgia State University.

Dr. Maurice Daniels life's work has centered on giving a voice to those black people from the state of Georgia that the world has not heard. He is a true scholar and a gentleman. So, my Georgia State University family, we have a scholar and gentleman before us, let's welcome him with a big GSU Panther applause. Presenting to some and introducing to others, my friend and brother, Dr. Maurice Daniels.

**Dr. Daniels:** Thank you, thank you, thank you. I am a member of the Baptist church so, if you wanna keep standing I'm gonna pass around a collection tray. Thank you, Doctor. and Brother Hobson for your very generous introduction. To President Becker, Provost Hensel, faculty, staff and students, other distinguished guests: my deepest thanks to the president and the provost for creating this lecture series and inviting me to serve as the inaugural speaker. My thanks also to the sponsors, the department of African American studies, the Black Law Students Association, the Student Government Association, Spotlight Programs Board, and STEMulate.

I am honored to speak to you today about my research on the long and difficult struggle to end segregation at Georgia State University. This research is a part for the foot-soldier project for Civil Rights studies. And I hasten to say that this research could not have been completed without the invaluable support of a number of scholars and researchers and friends. I'm especially grateful to Dr. Diane Miller, Dr. Derrick Ullrich, Dr. Maurice Hobson, and especially to my graduate research associate, Mr. Christopher Strickland. I'm pleased to acknowledge the presence today of my foot-soldier colleagues, Dr. Cheryl Dozier and Dr. June Gary Hobs. I would also like to acknowledge the presence of my sister, Mrs. Patricia Murphy. Greetings also to my former UGA colleague, Dean Nancy Croft, Dr. Kevita Pandit, and my colleagues here in the Department of Social Work.

And if I may also, I'd like to acknowledge the presence of Marilyn Holmes. Marilyn is the spouse of Dr. Hamilton Holmes. Dr. Holmes joined Charlayne Hunter as the first two black students to desegregate the University of Georgia. Thank you for your presence, Marilyn. My thanks also--last but not least--to my wife Renee, and our four daughters: Corrin, Lauren, Nicole, and Maya, for their patience and for their grace as I burdened them with questions about this book over a period of years, especially the questions I asked them during our family vacation time.

But let me express my heartfelt thanks today for the presence of the 87 year-old-young Myra Elliott. Mrs. Elliott is one of the plaintiffs in the Hunt v. Arnold case. Mrs. Elliott is joined today by her daughters: June Harland, Johnson and Gleaton, Melissa Harland, and a host of other family members. I'm also grateful for the presence of the daughters of Barbara Hunt: Christa Freeman,

Alice Pruitt, Deborah Hunt, and other family members and friends. Barbara Hunt was the lead plaintiff in this case.

The third plaintiff is Mrs. Iris Mae Welch. The family members of Mrs. Welch are not present today, but we pause at this time to appreciate and recognize the contributions of Mrs. Welch to the cause of civil rights, here at Georgia State and in the state of Georgia. In the late 1990s, while conducting research for a book that chronicled the struggle of Horace T. Ward to desegregate the University of Georgia, I was privileged to interview the legendary Donnell Lee Hollowell, and federal judge Constance Baker Motley. They told me about this important and significant, yet little known case at Georgia State University, and they talked about how it was so important in the history of the desegregation of public colleges and universities in our state. Hollowell and Motley were two of the main lawyers who won this landmark case in federal court here in Atlanta. They credited *Hunt v. Arnold*, and an earlier lawsuit filed by Horace Ward, as building the foundation for overturning segregation in public higher education in our state.

Yet, despite the historical significance of this case and its impact on the desegregation of the university system of Georgia, *Hunt v. Arnold* has been largely omitted from scholarly histories chronicling the black freedom struggle in public colleges and universities. Even when the story is included, the narrative is, by and large, a mere footnote. So, I am deeply humbled to have had an opportunity to chronicle this important story. At the center of the case were three hidden figures of the civil rights movement; Barbara Hunt, Myra Elliott, and Iris Mae Welch. These pioneers were supported by courageous and skillful lawyers, who were determined to bring an end to Jim Crow in the state of Georgia.

In addition to Hollowell and Motley, Atlanta Civil Rights Lawyers attorney E.E. Moore, and Austin Thomas Walden--the Dean of Civil Rights Lawyers in the state of Georgia, played a central role in the legal effort to end segregation at Georgia State. The legendary Thurgood Marshall also collaborated with the local lawyers, litigating this case. The trailblazing Constance Baker Motley, a protege of Thurgood Marshall, made significant contributions to the case, and served as an important role model and great source of inspiration for the black women plaintiffs. This brilliant and dynamic lawyer went on to become the first black woman to argue before the United States Supreme Court. Of ten U.S. supreme court cases, Motley won nine of them. She became the first black female judge to serve on the federal bench. Donald Hollowell, likewise, made enormous contributions in this case, and he was Georgia's undisputed chief civil rights lawyer during the 1950s and 1960s.

Alongside these key figures, it is vitally important to note that this struggle was a community wide effort. The Atlanta branch of the NAACP, courageous community activists, black businesses and scholar activists from the Atlanta University Center were all integrally involved in the campaign to end segregation in Georgia. Heroic community activists and prominent business leaders included Atlanta Life President, Jessie Heel; NAACP Atlanta branch president, John Calhoun; Morehouse College professor and pastor of the Friendship Baptist Church, Reverend Samuel Williams. Morehouse president and civil rights leader, Dr. Benjamin Elijah Mays.

These leaders from the Atlanta Black Business community and its enclave of black colleges and universities were critical in undergirding and even financing and supporting the black applicants and plaintiffs. The applicants also received support from the intrepid Clarence Jordan. The University of Georgia alumnus manifested his commitment to racial equality through progressive social action. Jordan had the nerve, in 1942, to cofound Konomia farm, an interracial community

of Christian believers in southwest Georgia. Despite threats to his personal safety and threats to the safety of his family, Jordan displayed raw courage and determination in efforts to build this interracial community. He stood out as a white citizen who publicly and fearlessly spoke out against racial and human injustice.

To fully understand and appreciate the daunting struggle of this ground crew in their quest for equal justice at Georgia State, it's necessary to reflect on prior efforts to end segregation in public higher education in Georgia. The challenge of segregation in Georgia's public colleges and universities began as early as 1950, when Horace T. Ward tried to enter the University of Georgia School of Law. Georgia officials led by then governor Herman Talmadge were zealous in their resistance to block Ward's admission. Governor Talmadge deputized his personal attorney to represent the state in defending segregation, issuing a pointed order: "Keep that damn negro out of the University of Georgia as long as I am governor." He did not use the word "negro." Talmadge also issued a solemn promise: "As long as I am your governor, negros will not be admitted to white schools."

The acrimonious words of governor Talmadge and segregationist sentiments behind them set the stage for a watershed event. Despite Talmadge's promise, however, in September of 1950, Horace T. Ward submitted his application for admission to the University of Georgia Law School, merely seeking a legal education in his home state. He was from LaGrange, Georgia. He and his family paid taxes in LaGrange. It was the beginning of a tumultuous journey that wouldn't be decided until seven years later in federal court. Time will not permit me to delve into the full measure of the impediments state officials placed in Ward's path, so I will just share one example of their actions to obstruct his admission.

Shortly after Ward submitted his application, the law school faculty and dean, in collaboration with the board of Regents, adopted a policy stating that applicants must submit three certificates of good moral character signed by members of the all-white law school alumni. The fact that the law school and law faculty colluded with the Board of Regents to establish policies to expressly obstruct black student enrollment contradicted any... even pretense of academic integrity. The collusion was even more egregious because this was a law faculty demonstrating a blatant disregard for legal principles.

Incensed and disheartened by the layers of obstruction, with the help of the NAACP filed a federal lawsuit, contending that he had been denied admission based solely on his race and colors. After several attempts by the state to dismiss the case, Ward's case was scheduled for trial on October the 9th, 1953. But in an amazing and not-so-likely, or unlikely, coincidence, the Atlanta Draft Board drafted him on September 9th, 1953, precisely thirty days before his case was scheduled for federal trial. Despite this convenient coincidence, however, after serving two years of duty during the Korean War and an honorable discharge, Ward resumed his fight to enter the University of Georgia School of Law. After several legal maneuvers by the state to dismiss his case, Ward's case was eventually tried in federal court in December of 1956. However, a few months before his trial, Ward entered the Northwestern University Law School in Chicago. And federal judge, Frank Hooper, the judge in the case, ruled that Ward's enrollment at Northwestern provided technical ground to dismiss his case. Judge Hooper did not rule on the legality of the UGA's Law School's refusal to admit him. But as fate would have it, although he lost his case and was spurned by the law school in his home state, Ward earned a law degree from Northwestern University and returned to Georgia to practice law with the legendary Donell Lee Hollowell.

Ironically and perhaps providentially, Ward's first major case was a carbon copy of his own legal fight to enter the University of Georgia. Ward helped Donell Hollowell, Constance Baker Motley, and Vernon Jordan win the landmark case that led to the desegregation of the University of Georgia in 1961. He went on to become a prominent civil rights lawyer, state senator, and distinguished federal judge. Which brings us to the struggle to end segregation at Georgia State, which actually began shortly before Ward lost his bid to enroll in UGA's Law School. In the Spring of 1956, nine courageous black applicants tried to submit applications to enroll here at Georgia State. Since Ward had been denied admission to UGA, if admitted, these brave applicants would become the first black students to enroll in an all-white college or university in the state of Georgia. In addition to the applicants' passionate desire to further their education, they were also socially conscious, deeply committed to the struggle for civil rights. Most of the applicants, including Mrs. Elliott, who's here today, were members of the NAACP and actively involved in protests against segregation in public accommodations. In an interview with Mrs. Elliott, she said that Georgia State, at the time, was largely an evening school and since we worked full-time jobs during the day, Georgia State's program was ideal. It allowed us to keep our jobs and attend classes in the evenings.

However, they faced a massive wall of resistance. Led by high profile public officials including governor Marvin Griffin, attorney Eugene Cook and members of the Board of Regents. Enraged by the United States *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, and the activism of blacks to desegregate schools and colleges, white officials openly defied the court's order to abolish segregation. Around the time the applicants submitted their applications, governor Griffin presented an interposition resolution to a joint session of the general assembly. The resolution sought to deny the United States Supreme Court the authority to enforce the constitutional rights guaranteed to black citizens in the, and I quote, "sovereign state of Georgia."

The resolution called for the Georgia to interpose herself between the court and her public schools, and to declare that the supreme court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*, was null and void. The Georgia general assembly approved the resolution on March 9th, 1956, just two weeks before the nine black applicants sought admission to Georgia State. This defiant resolution, along with the 1956 southern manifesto, provides just a brief glimpse into the magnitude of resistance confronted by these applicants. The question has been posed as to whether this massive resistance resulted from the belief in the inferiority of black people. In the case of some public officials, such as governor Griffin and attorney general Cook, they stood out as public spokesman for white supremacy. Their many written narratives and public proclamations make it quite clear where they stood.

In the case of Georgia State officials, such as president George Sparks and admissions director George Blaire, in my research I found no examples of them making pernicious statements about the inferiority of black people. Instead they contended that they were simply abiding by the policies of the Board of Regents. And although we cannot know what's in their hearts, the historical records shows that they were no beacons of social justice. In fact, the record reveals that they readily enforced the policies of avowed white supremacists. And in reference to individuals whose actions do not reflect their purported beliefs, the literary genius James Baldwin simply but profoundly stated: "I cannot believe what you say, because I see what you do." In the same vein, the words of Bishop Desmond Tutu are instructive: "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor." And as advocates for social justice, we must remember the prophetic words and poignant lessons from Dr. King: "It may be well that we will have to repent in this generation, not merely for the vitriolic words and violent

actions of bad people, but for the appall and silence and indifference of good people who sit around and say wait your time."

Whether officials publicly espoused their segregationist views, or ascribed to the philosophy of wait on time, the behavior of state officials unquestionably inspired to sustain segregation. As an illustration, one of the outrageous policies the Board of Regents used to block the applicants to Georgia State was the "Alumni Certification Endorsement." The same so-called "good moral character" policy used to block the admission of Horace Ward. Needless to say, this arbitrary policy, as an element of the Georgia State admissions process, created an enormous hurdle for these applicants. The Regents also created, or enacted, an additional policy, requiring a superior court judge to guarantee the good moral character of applicants to Georgia State. Of course, there were no black judges in 1956. And although white judges routinely provided these certificates for white students, none of the nine black applicants to Georgia State were able to obtain a certificate of good moral character from the Fulton county judge. Equally disheartening to the black applicants, Georgia sent their applications to the Regents office for the "Out-of-State Scholarship Program for Negroes."

To maintain segregation in Georgia at the time, the Board of regents had created this program to send black students to colleges and universities outside of Georgia for programs of study that were not offered at the historically black colleges and universities in our state. And though the U.S. supreme court had ruled, in 1938, in the Gaines v. Canada case, that this was an unconstitutional practice. Georgia continued this program until the late 1950s. So, as a result of these and other obstructions placed in their path, these nine aspiring black applicants in September of 1956, Barbara Hunt, Myra Elliott, and Iris Mae Welch filed a federal lawsuit. With the help of local lawyers and Thurgood Marshall's team based in New York, this suit was filed, and they began a long process with the state creating barriers to obstruct or continue to obstruct their enrollment. But after a long and protractive struggle, the multiple attempts by the state to dismiss the case, in January 1959, these three trailblazers and their lawyers surmounted massive resistance to win the first case against segregated education in the state of Georgia.

In his landmark decision, a fair-minded and clear-sighted federal judge, William Boyd Sloan, ruled that the Regent's policy requiring black students to obtain certificates of good moral character from white alumni was unconstitutional. Cutting to the chase, judge Sloan said "there are no negro alumni, and it would be difficult, if not impossible, for black applicants to obtain recommendations from white alumni. Judge Sloan also declared that the Out-of-State Scholarship Program for Negroes did not meet the constitutional requirement of equal justice under law. In his historic ruling, judge Sloan went further. He declared that his order not only applied to Georgia State, but to the entire university system of Georgia. Judge Sloan's decision represented a major victory in the struggle to overturn segregation in Georgia's public colleges and universities. Although the plaintiffs won their case, state investigators had intrusively investigated their personal backgrounds, searching for any form of minutia to use as a subterfuge to deny their admission. Investigators discovered personal information about two of the plaintiffs, and the state used this information to evade the court order, vilify the plaintiffs and deny them admission. The state also concocted other measures to guarantee that none of the respective black applicants would be admitted to Georgia State. Perhaps most reprehensible in the string of disgraceful actions by our state was the "Age Limit Law," enacted by the Georgia general assembly. The law stated that no person over 21 could be admitted to any public college or undergraduate school in Georgia. Not so coincidentally, all of the prospective black applicants were over 21. Before the general assembly passed the bill, speaker pro-tim Joe Bagby, assured the general assembly that the bill would not discriminate against a single white

applicant, then crudely state that the bill was designed to "keep the negro out." He also did not use the word negro.

This "Age Limit Law" doomed the applicants chances of admission to Georgia State, but although none of the nine were ever admitted to Georgia State, the victory of Hunt and Elliott and Welch and their courageous lawyers played a pivotal role in desegregating the University of Georgia and other public colleges and universities. Just two years later, the *Holmes v. Danner* landmark victory relied heavily on legal precedence established by judge Sloan, in the *Hunt v. Arnold* case. Holmes' victory ended 175 years of segregation at the University of Georgia, led to the admission of Hamilton Earl Holmes and Charlayne Alberta Hunt. *Hunt v. Arnold* was also established important legal precedence in desegregating colleges and universities in other states, including the University of Mississippi. And it is important to point out that the *Hunt v. Arnold* victory was not only a prelude to the desegregation of the University of Georgia in 1961, but it was also a prelude to the desegregation of the University of Mississippi in 1962 and the University of Alabama in 1963.

Also standing on the shoulders of Hunt, Elliott, Welch and their comrades, in 1962 the first two black students enrolled at Georgia State University. On June 12th, Enette Lucia Hall, a Spelman College and Atlanta University graduate became the first African American student to enroll at Georgia State. A few months later, Marybell Reynolds Warner enrolled as Georgia State's first full-time black student, and in 1965, Joseph Howard McClure earned a Bachelor of Business Administration degree, becoming Georgia State's inaugural black graduate. Building on the demand for freedom by these pioneers, in 2018 Georgia State had the highest percentage of African American students among traditionally white institutions in Georgia, and one of the highest, if not the highest, population of African American students in the nation among traditionally white colleges and universities.

So, the impact of the Georgia state ground crew has been profound and far-reaching. These courageous women and their skillful lawyers laid the foundation not only for the desegregation of public colleges and universities, but also for Georgia State's phenomenal progress on the rail to social justice. The question has been posed more than once: "Well, why is this expose-facto research important?" More than 60 years after the fact, my answer is summarized in the prophetic words of the towering intellectual and scholar Dr. Carter G. Woodson. Dr. Woodson observed that those who have no records of what their forebearers' have accomplished lose the inspiration from the teaching of history and biography.

In this ongoing quest for social justice, this is a story of great historical significance. Provost Hensel said, and I agree, it's also a story of encouragement, it's a story of hope. The courage and labor and sacrifice of these hidden figures offer just a great and tremendous source of inspiration. The humility of these pioneers is also deeply inspiring. Despite winning this landmark federal court case, none of them ever sought any recognition for their victory. Even among their families and close friends, they down played the significance of the victory, and also downplayed the extent of their struggle, their sacrifice, and even their pain. The great Fanny Lou Hamer said that "there are two things we should always care about. Never forget from whence we come, and always praise the bridges that carry us over."

Today as we move forward in the continuous struggle for social justice, we must be firmly rooted in who we are and from whence we come. The story of Barbara Hunt, Myra Elliott, Iris Welch, Donell Hollowell, Constance Baker Motley, Reverend Samuel Williams and Dr. Benjamin Elijah Mays, John Calhoun, and others. Their story is our story. We are here today in this diverse and

racially inclusive, multiethnic environment, standing on the shoulders of Mrs. Elliott, Mrs. Hunt, Mrs. Welch, Donell Hollowell, Constance Motley and so many others.

On December 10th, 1964, in his Nobel peace prize acceptance speech, Dr. Martin Luther King said, "every time I take a flight, I am always mindful of the many people who make a successful journey possible. The known pilots and the unknown ground crew, without whose labor and sacrifices the jet flights to freedom could never have left the Earth. We come to this hallowed call today, on the campus of Georgia State University, to commemorate the ground crew. We come to express our gratitude for their courage, their labor, and their sacrifice. And, we come to learn from them, to immolate them in our actions towards social justice today. It is important to point out that these three women and their lawyers waged a courageous battle against the president of Georgia State University, against the chancellor of the university system of Georgia, against the Board of Regents, against the attorney general, against the general assembly, and against the governor. And they were victorious.

As we confront social justice or injustice today, we can draw great strength from their story, and the story of this epic battle for freedom and justice. We can learn vital lessons from how these community activists galvanized the black community, and how these skillful lawyers strategize to win the first federal court victory against segregated education in the state of Georgia. And we must apply those lessons to help us find a way forward in our continuous struggle in social and human justice. Dr. King eloquently said, "we know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor. It must be demanded by the oppressed."

In closing, as we reflect on their struggle, their sacrifice, and indeed their legacy. We learn yet another important lesson, a lesson about being on the right side of history, standing up for truth and justice and righteousness. It may have taken sixty long years, but the truth of these pioneers as evidenced by this audience today, is on the rise. The American poet William Cullen Bryant was right. "Truth crushed to the Earth shall rise again." The poet James Russell Lo, as was often echoed by Dr. King, was also right. "Truth forever on the sky. Wrong forever on the throne. Yet that scaffold sways the future. Behind the dim unknown standeth God within the shadow keeping watch above his very own." Likewise, Dr. King reminds us that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice. So today, we honor the Georgia State ground crew and their skillful lawyers. It was a formidable team. And in the words of the imminent civil rights leader, Vernon E. Jordan, these pioneers and lawyers helped to bend the arc of the moral universe towards justice. These pioneers are the personification of dignity and humility and grace and courage, with a passionate desire for social justice. They are the founders of a New South, one that makes real the promise of democracy. And they are the embodiment of that old Jeffersonian ideal; we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men and women are created equal and endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Thank you very much.

**Provost Hensel:** I can't stop you, one more time. Please, give a round of applause.

Thank you Dr. Daniels, that was amazing to hear your insights about our history and the compelling stories not only of our university but of all universities around the South. Your work does ensure that we will remember and honor our past while working together for a brighter future, and as a token of our gratitude, we'd like to give you a gift.

I wasn't going to make him carry it down, but... I will tell you that the rest of the people I call up, no need to hurt yourself. We will get the gifts to you afterwards. Well, I'm thrilled to hear that

history and turn to the part of our event and honor Georgia State's ground crew. And we begin with a tribute film created by the faculty and students of our school of film, media and theatre. There were many people involved in the making of this film and I'll just tell you quickly that I was speaking to Dr. Susan Sojourner Collier and she said, "I want to make a film about this." It involved her colleagues Phil Lewis, Aggie Pizzaz, and several other professors in the school as well as numerous students to create this mini documentary. I think you'll find it very moving. Let's watch.

### ***Documentary plays.***

Alright, I can't be the only one who's a little teary eyed at this point, right? That was absolutely amazing. What an incredible tribute to the families and these women and their courage--so very proud of all of us for being here. So, as you all know, we have the feisty Mrs. Elliott with us here today, along with her family and the family of the late Mrs. Barbara Pace Hunt. Unfortunately, we were not able to find the family of Mrs. Welch, but we did not ignore her contribution, she was a pioneer just as the other two, and we recognize her today as well. We have heard from Dr. Daniels and from your families of the adversity that you faced and your courage and refusing to back down when confronted by something more than just opposition. We have given voice, I hope you can see, to our extraordinary deep gratitude for your actions in this amazing film created by our professors and students, and I hope it is not lost on you that many of the folks who created that video would not have been allowed to enroll in this institution at the time you were not allowed to enroll.

The true legacy, though, and I think this has been pointed out already, but it is worth saying again. The true legacy and impact of what you did and what your mother did is reflected in this room. Look around you. There are 850 people who signed up for this lecture today. This may be... this is one of the largest turnouts I've ever seen. And the excitement in the room and the feelings I think are palpable to those of us who were here. You've heard repeatedly that we are extraordinarily proud that we graduate more African Americans in this institution than any other in the country. That is an incredible achievement. Perhaps even more importantly is the absolute passion with which we embrace diversity as a key strength of this institution, not a weakness. We celebrate our differences and we recognize that every student, not just black students, every student, benefits from a classroom and from a society that represents the full tapestry of human achievement and experience. It should surprise no one in this room that the impact of your legacy extends far beyond the walls of this institution, and I am here to tell you we have another proclamation to add to the one for Mrs. Hunt that you already saw--in fact, we have two of them. One from the House of Representatives of the state of Georgia, and one from the Senate of the state of Georgia, and I will give you all copies later on to take home and cherish, but I do want to share at least one part of what is written there for the audience. It says: "The Senate of the state of Georgia and the House of Representatives, recognizes and commends Barbara Pace Hunt, Myra Payne Elliott, and Iris Mae Welch for their courageous actions and their struggle against systemic oppression and injustice for the purpose of granting access to public higher education in Georgia, thereby enriching the lives of countless citizens of this state. Mrs. Elliott, if you would join me on the stage. Mrs. Elliott we have actually a representative from the House of Representatives here to give you the actual declaration, and also on behalf of an extraordinarily grateful faculty, staff, alumni and students at Georgia State University, please accept the gift that we will bring down to you later. Thank you very much.

**Myra Payne Elliott:** Well, what do y'all want me to say? I am overjoyed to be here and the college to recognize me and invite me for this special day... I feel so special today. You have

really come a long way! The day that you said I couldn't come, well it hurt my feelings. Well, it did! But you've come a long way. And thanks for whoever's idea this was, it was an excellent idea! And I am... happy.

**Provost Hensel:** We are pleased to have with us, from House district 55, representative Marie Metz, to deliver the proclamation.

**Marie Metz:** Wow, what a day. The ground crew. The Georgia State ground crew. And I asked a few days ago, when they said, you know, we'd like for you to carry this resolution for me, I said, why me? They said, well, first of all you're a graduate of Georgia State University. Somebody said, wait a minute, she went to University of Georgia. I said, no, I only spent one year at the University of Georgia, but I was working at Marsh Brown college, and traveling back and forth (this was years ago), it got to be a bit much. So, I transferred to Georgia State where I received my PhD degree.

But Dr. Daniels, powerful. Powerful, 60 long years, powerful. We're gonna do even more. I was told today that March, and I think the date is, March 3rd, I'm not too sure, I need to clear it with you. But we're going to do something special under the gold dome. Something special, under the gold dome. We will talk about it, okay? But this is house resolution 1113, by representative, I am the author, and there are others. When the rest of my colleagues found out about it, they said, "my god, we wanna sign off on it." Because on this resolution, you see, there's a picture of the house of representatives, and on the right-hand sign is the what? The actual resolution. And when other learned about it, bipartisan republicans and democrats, they said, "we wanna sign it." It is now in the clerk's office. The number is 1113. This is really for the representatives and senators, and they're signing, so I would imagine that 60 to 70, I don't know, the names will be there, because this is history. This is absolutely history. Now let me get to the resolution.

Recognizing and commending Barbara Pace Hunt, Myra Payne Elliott, and Iris Mae Welch, and for other purposes whereas Barbara Pace Hunt, Myra Payne Elliott, and Iris Mae Welch all resided in Atlanta, Georgia in 1956 excelled academically and aspired to earn a college degree and whereas these women applied and were qualified for admission to the newly formed Georgia State college of business administration. And whereas on June 14th, 1956, their applications along with six other applications were denied because of their race and whereas Barbara Pace Hunt, Myra Payne Elliott, and Iris Mae Welch successfully sued the state of Georgia and the Board of Regents on September 18th 1956, on the grounds that they were unfairly discriminated against and denied equal protection under the law, and, whereas, that court decision (Hunt v. Arnold), although it did not grant Barbara Pace Hunt, Myra Payne Elliott or Iris Mae Welch immediate admission was a significant move that contributed to dismantling racial discrimination in public higher education in Georgia and, whereas, these sacrifices and efforts have resulted in future generations of minority students attending Georgia State University, which now awards more undergraduate degrees to African Americans than any other university in the country, and, whereas, the courageous actions of these remarkable individuals should be appropriately recognized, including their persistence in pursuing an education, ad, whereas, the journey of these young women is chronicle in a new book: "Ground Crew" by Maurice C. Daniels, Dean Emeritus of the University of Georgia's school of social work who will be the inaugural speaker for the Groundbreaker's lecture series at Georgia State University. Now, therefore, be it resolved by the House of Representatives that the members of this body recognize and commend Barbara Pace Hunt, Myra Payne Elliott and Iris Mae Welch for their struggle against systemic oppression and ajustice and injustice for the purpose of granting access to public higher education in Georgia, thereby enriching the lives of countless citizens of

this great state. Be it further resolved that the clerk of the House of Representative is authorized and directed to make appropriate copies of this resolution available for distribution to Myra Payne Elliott, and the families of Barbara Pace Hunt and Iris Mae Welch. In the House, read and adopted, February 18th, 2020. And it is signed by the clerk.

**Provost Hensel:** It wouldn't be a homecoming without pictures, I'm sorry. Would the family of Mrs. Hunt please join us up here? Once again, on behalf of an enormously grateful staff, faculty, students and alumni of Georgia State University, please accept this small gift from us as a token of our appreciation. You can put it back; we'll bring it out to you.

**Alyce Pruitt:** Well, I, being the eldest daughter, would just like to say thank you for recognizing our mom. My middle sister, Deborah, had to leave, she got sick. But my mother would be amazed, just like Mrs. Myra is, at the reception and the recognition of what they fought for. Because at the time, they never felt the recognition of it, because they never got to enter the school. But thank you, Georgia State University for recognizing that and giving them what they rightfully deserved.

**Provost Hensel:** I think this has been a good day. I feel pretty good. Well, there's been lots of quotes today that have been pretty moving, and I'll end with one that I find particularly moving, who once said: "History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived. But if faced with courage, need not be lived again." It has been an absolute privilege for all of us to be with you today and share in this moment. And also, I hope that everyone in here, like me, will leave feeling inspired and hopefully about our future and the work we have left to do together in these important spaces. There are so many people that I cannot thank them individually that made today happen, including all of the wonderful people who put on this event and put on the film and getting people here. Please read in your program, we actually have a list of thank you's, those people deserve recognition. Thank you to all of you for coming despite the weather, it means a lot to all of us that you showed up. Please join us in the lobby, we will have a book signing, we will have lots of handshaking, I suspect, and warm congratulations. Thank you very much for coming.