

I am so very overwhelmed by this moment - to be the recipient of the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce's Austinite of the Year award for the Year of 2022. I am humbled, I am honored, I feel loved, appreciated, and I feel heard.

Seven years ago, when I arrived at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport with a life-size statue of Barbara Jordan meeting me at the baggage claim and hot Texas sun, I unknowingly embarked upon a magical journey that would forever change my life in the most marvelous and unimaginable ways. Here in Austin, I have made lifelong friends, devoured the most delectable dishes, all the while having a front seat to our City's warm embrace of Huston-Tillotson University.

I thank the Austin Area Chamber of Commerce for gifting me an evening I will remember for the rest of my life. Thank you, Madame President & CEO Laura Huffman, and your entire team for making it so. Thank you, Nikki Graham, for this incredible honor. Ever since Nikki called me to share the extraordinary news, I've struggled to wrap my mind around it. I still don't think I have.

I see this recognition as a symbol of Austin's steady march to building a beloved community — a journey to create a better Austin – one no longer plagued by persistent and profound disparities.

My name is on the award – but I have a whole tribe of people lifting, pushing, pulling, doing the work necessary to serve the genius generation daily. I'd like to ask my students and members of my team to please stand. It is your passion for what we do with education as the great equalizer that inspires me.

My Band – can we please give them another round of applause – outstanding members of the genius generation.

There are SOOOOO many people I need to thank in this community – you know who you are. Even my college roommate from Ohio State is here from Ohio – a friend for 47 years. Debbie Hubbard Johnson. Thank you all for being here and celebrating with me.

A special thank you to my Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Mr. Wayne Knox, and my Provost Dr. Archibald Vanderpuye. Those two gentlemen were by my side helping me to navigate the university through a global pandemic successfully with no layoffs and no furloughs. I am very proud of that and forever indebted to both of them for their commitment to our mission and student success.

Then there are the people who love me, encourage me, and believe in me more than I do - with all of my moles and warts – they share my bright spots in my life and the pain points in my life - they love me unconditionally. My family! My sister Julie, my brother-in-law Jonathan, and my nephew Tanner are all here to celebrate with me. Please stand.

And then there is my shero and my hero – the people I aspire to be like when I grow up. My greatest blessings. My son Daarel and my daughter Daana. Please stand.

In the few minutes I have remaining – I would like to leave you with some thoughts to ponder. I am blessed that my personal passions for equity and social justice and my professional passion for education as the great equalizer intersect – I get to do what I love – it is rewarding work - but it is also complicated and hard work. With that comes is a front-row seat to the devastating and compounding impacts of institutional racism and systemic inequities baked into our pillars of society – particularly education – and I see the compounding effects because of the interrelationships of all of the major sectors - real estate and housing; health; finance, banking, and industry; and civil and criminal justice. Every area of our society that each of you represents here today.

I love Austin. It is such a beautiful and magical city. I want to quickly share something that we wrote about in the Report of the [Mayors Task Force on Institutional Racism and Systemic Inequities](#): According to the Austin History Center, as early as 1890, local residents referred to Austin as the City of the Violet Crown. The title is a nod to an atmospheric phenomenon creating beautiful violet and red horizontal bands visible before sunrise or shortly after sunset. In 1938, then Congressman Lyndon Baines Johnson, who orchestrated the construction of water dams to usher in a wave of manufacturing and he helped pass legislation to bring the first public housing in the US to Austin, delivered a radio address entitled: Tarnish of the Violet Crown. The address was focused on the existence of inadequate housing and poverty in Austin. During that nationwide radio address, he posed contrasting ideas that demonstrated his pride in Austin as well as a deep disappointment when he witnessed the plight of many living in Austin:

I would like to quote then-Congressman LBJ he said - "Why some may ask, should one who is elected to represent this district (District 10) take note of such unattractive spots when our City has so much to be proud of? To those people, I will answer that no one is more proud of the beauty and attainments of the City of Austin than I. But for that very reason, I am unwilling to close my eyes to needless suffering and deprivation, which is not only a curse to the people immediately concerned, but is also a cancerous blight on the whole community."

Congressman Johnson recognized the pitfalls of a tale of two cities. A truly great city leaves no one behind. Combating poverty and giving even the poor a sense of fairness, respect and dignity would need to be an—essential piece of his plan to improve Austin. Today, 84 years later – 16 years short of a century, we find ourselves similarly situated, appreciating Austin's prosperity — while simultaneously experiencing deep discontent with persistent racial disparities.

We are at a tipping point in our society, one wrought with opportunity – a sort of reckoning, recognizing the stain of racism and an opportunity to be courageous, having the will to lead our City in learning how to identify, understand, address, and dismantle institutional racism and systemic inequities.

I am very proud of the forward momentum I have seen, witnessed, experienced, and felt.

BUT the data tells the story – the evident story that we still have a very long way to go.

Institutional racism and systemic inequities are not myths. They are real. We may choose to pretend like they are not there – to talk about diversity, equity, and inclusion ad nauseum but then take our children to daycares that don't accept vouchers, say that the word equity is overused and overrated, unable to find resources in our school districts for proven initiatives to lift our children of color. We live in a country that started a whole new arm of the federal government (Homeland Security) out of fear after 9-11, a country that finds billions for weaponry - but can't find dollars for the poor to attend post-secondary institutions without taking on tremendous debt. We honor John Lewis in death but can't pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Act. We still have people saying they can't find anyone of color to hire or don't understand what they can do – yet they have never been on the campus of Huston-Tillotson University nor read any of the concise task force report - 70 pages with over 200 recommendations for our community.

As a black woman leading the black college - I, unfortunately, have experienced and know what intentional, purposeful, and courageous doesn't look like.

But what gives me great hope is that I've also experienced and know what intentional & purposeful looks like building a beloved community. I have seen it in things like HT's relationship with Apple supporting our African American male teacher initiative and other scholars. I have seen it in Austin Community's Foundation embracing taking a hard look at their grantmaking progress and implementing changes for the better. I have seen it when Bank of America put HT on a national level receiving funding for transformational change. I have seen it from the Spurs organization's uncompromising relationship-building with our students. I have seen it when DivInc lifts hundreds of entrepreneurs of color. I have seen it in Indeed's intentional and indefatigable partnership building with our academic units. I saw it when Leadership Austin took on the Beyond Diversity: Courageous Conversation training thousands of members of our community. I saw it when Waterloo Greenway was intentional and successfully diversified its Board. I have seen it when elected officials, and other public servants spend hours on my campus pouring into my students about public service and encouraging their civic engagement. I could go on and on where I've seen what intentional & purposeful looks like.

BUT – do not rest. There is a long way to go, and the heart work is a continuum. You may not see immediate results – but the more shoulders we get to push, the faster we can bend the moral arc towards justice. Fast alone – farther together.

So why are we still having the same conversation 84 years later after LBJ's radio address? I believe that we, on individual levels, aren't brave enough, purposeful, or intentional. We all are too busy or just don't want to or just haven't

- Leaped and learned how to be comfortable being uncomfortable
- Engaged in personal soul searching;
- Worked through our discomfort to learn how to have courageous conversations about race;
- Really know our neighbors
- Developed a deeper consciousness and more expansive literacy about the impact of race in our personal life; read and learn about ALL of our country's history.
- We stop coming to meetings or disappear when the work of implementation begins when the will is required, or heaven forbid resources of time and treasure
- And finally, very little commitment to act as agent of change to de-institutionalize racism and eliminate racial disparities in Austin;

And this brings me to my call to action.

Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King said, "Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without Power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is Power correcting everything that stands against love."

There is a lot of Power in this room. Power to correct what stands against love. Power to make Austin a beloved community – a community that does not accept injustice. Instead, a community committed to equity in access, participation, and opportunities for prosperity for everyone.

And Dr. King wasn't talking about the beloved community of the future – nor was Congressman LBJ. It is the community of now - Comprehensive healthcare, fair criminal justice, affordable housing, nutritious food, strong schools, access to jobs, and meaningful employment are all components for the beloved community.

It is challenging work – but so are many other things we do in our lives. We find time and resources for what we genuinely care about.

It is the work of everyday citizens like you and me to be committed for this racial equity work to be transformational and sustainable.

Tonight, my Austin community, do the heart work, the personal work. I ask you – to continue to believe in Huston-Tillotson University, continue to work in tandem together with Huston-Tillotson University, and continue to invest in Austin's oldest institution of higher learning and only HBCU, Huston-Tillotson University!

Austin please continue to support your only HBCU and oldest institution of higher learning. You can start by marking your calendars for June 4<sup>th</sup>, when we will be raising funds for an endowment in my parents' name and celebrating the next chapter of the University as it approaches its 150th anniversary.

I love Austin, and I am encouraged by the momentum building in our community. Momentum for Austin to become yet another center of excellence – the desirable place to be – all because we become a center of excellence for equity – a true Violet Crown.

Thank you, Austin Chamber of Commerce, for this phenomenal recognition – I have simply been a vessel for a purpose much greater and grander than myself.

Thank you again for this honor and this moment in my life – I will cherish my journey and this moment for forever and ever.