



## Honoring The Trailblazer Dr. Norman C. Francis

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(NUL) - "We've got to have people who believe that education belongs to everybody. The future is education for our kids, starting early. Let them know about Blacks who made history and did it from their own belief in themselves, and belief in that we have to make a change." - Dr. Norman C. Francis

There are times in history when we are called to meet the moment. During the Civil Rights Movement, the murder of Martin Luther King Jr. dimmed a lot in the eyes of many who had exalted him for courage in the face of violence and racism. For Dr. Norman C. Francis, who began his presidency at Xavier University of Louisiana on the day of Dr. King's assassination, it was a call to build something greater.

It was a call he answered for nearly five decades.

Dr. Francis did not simply lead a university; he opened doors to higher education and professional advancement that were systematically closed to Black Americans. He widened them and then insisted they remain open.

Under his leadership, Xavier became a national model of excellence, particularly in science and pre-medical education, producing generations of doctors, pharmacists, and scientists who now serve communities across this nation.

But the impact of that work cannot be measured solely in numbers or rankings. Dr. Francis understood something fundamental: health equity is not a niche issue. It is a national imperative. By investing in STEM education long before it was fashionable and by building world-class programs at a historically Black

university, he not only expanded opportunities for Black students but also strengthened America's health infrastructure.

The physicians trained at Xavier treat patients of every race, in rural towns and urban centers, in community clinics and major hospitals. The path he paved has improved outcomes not just for one community, but for all Americans.

That clarity of vision did not emerge by accident. Raised in a segregated New Orleans, educated

in Catholic schools, and formed by service in the U.S. Army and at Loyola University Law School, Dr. Francis understood both the cruelty of exclusion and the power of institutions to transform lives. He chose education as his battlefield and excellence as his strategy. He believed deeply that when you prepare people to lead in medicine, science, business, and civic life, you are advancing justice in its most practical form.

He also understood that leadership requires steadiness. For nearly half a century at the helm of Xavier, through economic downturns and the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, he modeled disciplined, values-driven stewardship. His singular intellect and devotion to service were matched by humility and humanity.

Today, as we face an adversarial government and renewed threats to equity, opportunity, and truth itself, Dr. Francis's example feels less like history and more like instruction. We are once again called to meet the moment. The forces that would roll back progress are organized and emboldened.

As this administration and its supporters continue their assault on access to health care, voting rights,

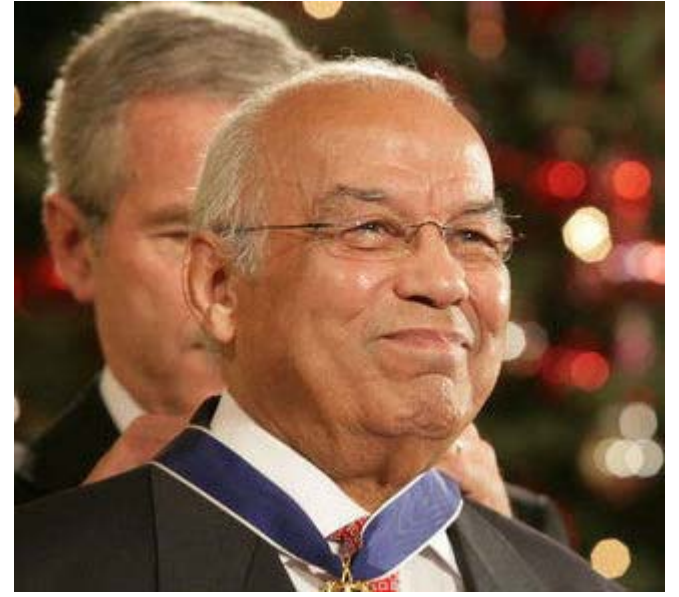
educational opportunity, and economic mobility, we need courage. We need leaders who understand that building institutions is one of the most powerful forms of resistance.

Dr. Francis showed us what that looks like.

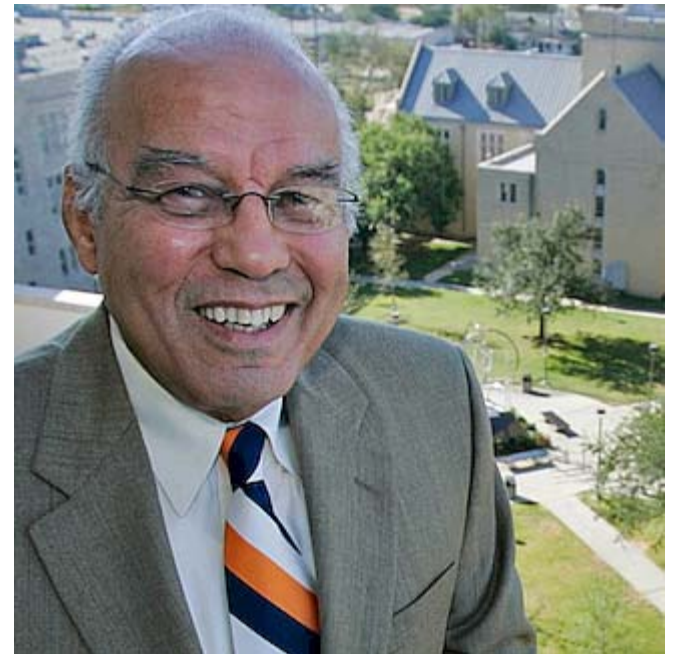
He demonstrated that fighting for equity does not always mean shouting the loudest. Sometimes it means preparing the next generation so thoroughly that they cannot be denied. Sometimes it means constructing pipelines where none existed. Sometimes it means holding steady when others falter.

The Urban League movement honors Dr. Norman C. Francis not only for what he accomplished, but for

how he accomplished it, with integrity, foresight, and an unwavering commitment to service. As the National Urban League rightly observed, his impact will resonate for generations.



Norman C. Francis, the former president of Xavier University of Louisiana, was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President George W. Bush in 2006.



Xavier President Norman Francis poses for a photograph at the the university in New Orleans, La., Tuesday, Nov. 18, 2008. Francis was celebrating 40 years as president of the prestigious predominately black university. (AP Photo/Bill Haber)

That resonance is our responsibility now.

We will honor his legacy the only way that truly matters: by fighting for what is right. By defending access to quality education. By advancing health equity. By insisting that opportunity in this country is not the privilege of a few, but the birthright of all.

Dr. Francis answered the call on one of the darkest days in modern American history and spent a lifetime building light. In this moment of challenge and uncertainty, may we find the courage to do the same.



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