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Xavier University of Louisiana Celebrates Black History Month with Unveiling of a Statue of Distinguished Alumnus and Former University President Dr. Norman C. Francis

New Orleans, LA – For nearly 100 years, Xavier University of Louisiana has been a pioneer in higher education, accumulating top honors for its ability to secure upward and social mobility for African Americans throughout the decades, beginning at a time when such opportunities were scant for underserved communities. Now approaching its centennial, the university adds to its Black History Month festivities the unveiling of a statue on February 24 at 11:30 a.m. in Xavier’s Convocation Center, designed in honor of one of its most prominent and celebrated alumni, former president of the university, Dr. Norman C. Francis (‘52).

“Dr. Francis was a part of Xavier for over half of the century that Xavier has been serving the underserved. His unwavering commitment and courage in the pursuit of social justice led this university through countless adversity,” said **Reynold Verret, President of Xavier University of Louisiana**. “We are grateful that he built such a strong foundation that we continue to build upon as we enter the next chapter in Xavier’s great legacy.”

The unveiling ceremony will honor the legacy and contributions of Dr. Francis to Xavier, New Orleans, the State of Louisiana, and his work in advancing higher education nationally for all. A prominent fixture in Xavier’s decades at the forefront of change and progression, Dr. Francis has deftly upheld the institution’s founding mission to promote a more just and humane society by educating its students to become leaders in a global society, a mission bestowed by the university’s foundress, St. Katharine Drexel and her Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament.

As a Xavierite, Dr. Francis excelled as an honors student and class president for four years. He completed his studies at Xavier with a Bachelor of Science in 1952. He went on to become the first Black graduate of Loyola University New Orleans, earning his Juris Doctorate in 1955. Shortly thereafter, Dr. Francis returned to Xavier as its Dean of Men. He became a social justice icon, offering a haven to the Freedom Riders in Xavier’s St. Michael’s Residence Hall. His dedication to justice and equity was quickly noticed; on April 4, 1968, the same day Civil Rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, Dr. Francis accepted the offer to become the first Black and lay president of Xavier University of Louisiana, a position he held until 2015. During his dedicated service to his alma mater, Dr. Francis tripled university enrollment, expanded the campus, and weathered the extensive damage to Xavier in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. In 2006, during his presidential tenure, he was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by former United States President George W. Bush in recognition of his many decades of outstanding leadership and civic impact. Even in retirement, he still serves as its lauded President Emeritus, making himself available to uplift his beloved Xavier whenever possible.

“I am humbled beyond measure by the extraordinary work of art created by Russell Whiting to honor my legacy here at Xavier University. It is an honor that I could not have imagined as a seventeen-year-old boy in Lafayette, Louisiana, when my father put me on a segregated rail car to go study at my beloved Alma Mater,” **Dr. Francis** said. “Xavier is the place where I met the love of my life, Blanche MacDonald, and where we raised our six kids. Xavier is and will always be a place that we will love and will support. Thanks to everyone who helped make this day a reality. You have touched my heart in ways that will live forever.”

Held 10 years after Dr. Francis announced his retirement as Xavier’s president, the event will celebrate his significant contributions to the university’s impressive story, written in the culture of excellence that its students and faculty strive for. The nation’s only historically Black and Catholic institution, Xavier has a long history of producing Black and brown excellence through its students, many of whose achievements are lauded and recognized today. Xavier graduates have gone on to become university presidents, federal judges, doctors, professors, pharmacists, high-level officials in the military, Congress members, and even a U.S. Cabinet Secretary, and the U.S. Surgeon General, among many other impressive positions. Some make Black history with accolades such as MacArthur Genius grants and The U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom.

The celebration of Dr. Francis is only one of the many events the university will host during its extensive celebration of Black History Month.

To kick off the festivities, a performance by Xavier’s Department of Art and Performances called “Fish, Grits, and Other Southern Things” will occur February 8-9. The free show, which will feature song, poetry, and storytelling, is about the history of African American cuisine in the South and will highlight the importance of various cooking traditions in the Southern community and the prominent aspects of slavery and immigration that helped shape those iconic Southern dishes. Other events during February include the annual Youth Motivational Task Force (YMTF) event on February 19-20, the Rudy Lombard Symposium on Civil Rights lecture on February 19, the opening reception for the “Lighting the Path” art exhibition on February 19, the university’s annual Black History Month Convocation on February 20, and a faculty recital on February 22-23. Xavier invites everyone to join them in this month of celebrating Black history to show how far the university has come in the last 100 years and invigorate everyone for what will come in the next 100. [Click here](#) to see the full schedule of events.

To RSVP for the unveiling of the statue, please contact Nannette Smith, director of advancement operations at Xavier, at (504) 520-6784 or nsmith11@xula.edu.



Join Xavier in celebrating Black History Month, culminating in an unveiling & dedication ceremony of a bronze statue honoring

DR. NORMAN C. FRANCIS

President Emeritus of Xavier University of Louisiana

February 24, 2024 | 11:30 a.m.
Xavier University Convocation Center 2nd Floor
7900 Stroelitz St., New Orleans, LA 70125

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About Xavier University of Louisiana

Xavier University of Louisiana, America's only historically Black and Catholic University, is ranked among the top three HBCUs (historically Black colleges and universities) in the nation. Recognized as a national leader in STEM and health sciences, Xavier produces more African American students who graduate from medical schools each year than any other university in the United States. Additionally, Xavier's College of Pharmacy is also among the top producers of African American pharmacists in the country.

Established in 1925 by Saint Katharine Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament as a place for African Americans and Native Americans to receive quality education, Xavier has since expanded its programs in art, business, education, biological sciences, chemistry, pharmacy and political science. More recent additions in robotics, bioinformatics, engineering, data science, neuroscience and genetics, in addition to new STEM-based master's programs, have provided Xavier students (3,419 students) an unbeatable combination of traditional classroom study, hands-on research, service-learning opportunities and life experiences. Xavier students collaborate with world-renowned faculty, who are experts in their fields, to produce award-winning research and notable work. The winning Xavier formula provides students with a well-balanced curriculum and an environment that nurtures their intellect and feeds their souls, thereby facilitating a more just and humane society for all. For more information about Xavier University of Louisiana, visit us online at www.XULA.edu or contact Melissa Newell at (504) 520-5425 or XULANews@XULA.edu.