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Author Bryan Stevenson Challenges UM Freshmen, First-Year Students

Annual Fall Convocation features medallion presentation, Creed and book signings

AUGUST 23, 2017 BY EDWIN SMITH

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Author and attorney Bryan Stevenson (right) greets UM students as he signs copies of his bestseller 'Just Mercy' following his Fall Convocation keynote address in The Pavilion at Ole Miss. Photo by Kevin Bain/Ole Miss Communication

OXFORD, Miss. – Sharing moving true stories and stunning statistics, best-selling author and social justice activist Bryan Stevenson challenged **University of Mississippi** students Tuesday (Aug. 22) to change the world around them.

The author of the prize-winning nonfiction "Just Mercy" delivered the keynote address during the university's annual Fall Convocation in The Pavilion at Ole Miss. Founder of the Equal Justice Initiative, a legal practice dedicated to defending the poor, the wrongly condemned and those trapped in the furthest reaches of the

criminal justice system, the celebrated attorney enthusiastically called on incoming freshmen and transfer students to pursue more than college degrees and successful careers.

"I believe that you have the capacity to change the world," Stevenson said. "I believe it with all of my heart. So as I talk to you tonight, I want to talk about solutions, not just the problems."

The author shared four keys he believes are essential to becoming world changers.

"First, you have to commit to causes that you really care about," Stevenson said. "You cannot change the world from a distance. You must get into proximity and get involved in finding solutions to the conditions."

Highlighting memories of growing up poor in rural Delaware and various legal cases he has handled, Stevenson said the second key is to change some of the narratives that surround us.

"Many people will encourage you to believe false narratives about others, which promote fear and anger, but if you tolerate these then you become complicit to the ills of our society," he said. "You must be courageous and talk about the things that no one else wants to address. Liberation will come, but only as you change the narratives."

Third, Stevenson said the students must remain hopeful. "It will give you courage and keep you motivated."

Lastly, the speaker said that listeners must be willing to do uncomfortable things.

"Change only happens when good people decide to do uncomfortable things," Stevenson said. "You will receive some bruises and wounds along the path to change. Wear the scars from those as medals of honor."

Following the address, students received a limited-edition commemorative coin as part of the ceremony.

"I have the privilege of presenting these coins each year, and it is one of the highlights of the year for me," said Brandi Hephner LaBanc, vice chancellor for student affairs. "The coins signify the importance of their transition into the UM community, but is a physical reminder of their responsibility to work, every day, toward graduation day."

Others on the program included Chancellor Jeffrey S. Vitter; Noel Wilkin, interim provost and executive vice chancellor for academic affairs; Melinda Sutton-Noss, assistant vice chancellor for student affairs and dean of students; and Associated Student Body President Dion Kevin III. Kevin, a senior public policy leadership and pre-med major from Oxford, led the assembly in reading the UM Creed aloud.

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Students Learn 'Real Politics' in Washington, D.C., Winter Session

OXFORD, Miss. – Eleven University of Mississippi students spent their winter break learning about the people who work behind the scenes of the American government in Washington, D.C. Lead by Jonathan Klingler, assistant professor of political science, the students of Pol 391: Applied Politics met not with candidates, but with the people who make candidates'

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Young Alumna Gives Back to School of Accountancy

OXFORD, Miss. – Stephanie Jennings Teague, of Chicago, sees her commitment of \$100,000 to the Patterson School of Accountancy's new building at the University of Mississippi as a means of saying "thank you." "It is a way to show a small token of my appreciation to Ole Miss, the faculty and staff, and the accounting

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Ole Miss In the News

Reuters: Keep an Eye on the Money Supply

U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK – The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to abate. The Federal Reserve's



UM freshmen and transfer students smile as they receive their commemorative medallions during the university's 2017 Fall Convocation. Photo by Kevin Bain/Ole Miss Communications

"The tenets of the Creed highlight our shared values within the Ole Miss community," he said. "Students, faculty and staff alike should value the Creed because of the inherent value of its basis."

Over the summer, incoming students received a copy of "Just Mercy," which was selected earlier this year as the 2017 Common Reading Experience.

The book tells how Stevenson handled the case of Walter McMillian, a young man sentenced to die for a notorious murder he didn't commit. The

case drew the young lawyer into a tangle of conspiracy, political machination and legal brinkmanship, transforming his understanding of mercy and justice forever.

Vitter encouraged the Class of 2021 to keep their eyes and ears open.

"A big part of your college experience will be learning how to listen to and empathize with others," Vitter said. "I look forward to getting to know many of you personally. Welcome to Ole Miss."

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