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**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT 30TH ANNUAL
BROOKLYN TRIBUTE TO DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Good morning, everyone.

Audience: Good morning.

Mayor: It is wonderful and joyous to be with you here at BAM today, because this is a [inaudible]. This is people gathered together in common cause and common hope, remembering, as Chirlane said so well, lessons that are in some ways more urgent today than when they were first taught. And I want to start by thanking my wife, because she learned the lessons of Dr. King [inaudible]. And as Dr. King reminded us, we take on challenges that are supposed to be intractable. We take on issues that no one wants to talk about. We have to defy the stigma if we're going to make fundamental change. It doesn't work if you first don't identify the fact that we aren't even talking about the real problem.

[Applause]

Who understood that more than Dr. King? So, this good woman has decided she is going to de-stigmatize mental health challenges in this city, one way or another –

[Applause]

– One step at a time. And I know our first lady's work is going to reach every neighborhood, and change lives, and help us reduce violence, and strive so to help stop losing people that could have been saved. Join with me in thanking Chirlane McCray for the work she's doing.

[Applause]

That gave me an excuse to kiss her again.

[Laughter]

I want to thank – I want to thank a powerhouse, who you heard earlier – and I'm so happy that Laurie Cumbo is the chair of the women's issues committee, because the women of the city have a powerful advocate. Let's thank her for all she does.

[Applause]

Now, I'm going to try and be brief, but to the point. If Dr. King was standing here, we would all be blessed – we would all be blessed. And maybe a lot of things would have changed that didn't if his leadership had remained at the fore of [inaudible], but we lost him to an assassin's bullet. And if he were standing here today,

but the same exact trajectory of history had occurred, and he were judging us, he would know that everyone in this room has been fighting the good fight, he would know that the fire burns strong, but he would also say how on earth are we going backwards on voting rights? How is that happening in America today?

[Applause]

How is the economic condition of African-Americans worse in many ways today than it was in 1968?

[Applause]

How are education disparities so intense? Why are so many young black men in prison? He would say, we have not gotten the point as a nation.

[Applause]

He would look at – as we look once again with trepidation towards our U.S. Supreme Court – he would wonder about the future of our labor unions. And no one understood the power of labor unions more than Dr. King. In fact, he died at the defense of a labor union that day in Memphis.

[Applause]

He would wonder how are we going backwards on the rights of working people? So, Dr. King, if he would here, of course, would urge us forward, but he'd also scold us. He'd say, why was my legacy not followed through on more fully? And we have to remember that, and we have to accept that as now our chance to make change.

Now, that is, I think, a fundamental truth, but it does not discourage me – it saddens me, but it doesn't discourage me. I want to point the three areas where I think there would be a smile on Dr. King's face, and there would be a sense that the dream is being acted upon – and great hope, going forward. And I think I can find not only where he started in his extraordinary work, but where he ended, because, remember, this is a man [inaudible] constant growth and evolution. One thing that we note – and Chirlane and I were absolutely children of this era – two extraordinary American leaders, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, we're also two people –

[Applause]

– Were also two people who evolved, and became stronger, and more visionary before our eyes, and they told us openly of their own journey, of their own realization. They found more bravery and courage – you know, some people age and become more conservative? Dr. King and Malcolm X reached for higher heights, spoke tougher truths with every passing year. And, in fact, there's a lesson-plus.

[Applause]

So, Dr. King, we think of first in terms of civil rights, but he increasingly focused on economic rights and he focused on ending war, because he knew war was hurting all Americans, and particularly young men of color.

[Applause]

So, I'm just going to take [inaudible] of those three. On civil rights – still a long way to go, but because of the people of this city, bringing a change a few years ago, we have a city that now is both safer and fairer, and those are both parts of the civil rights equation, because our communities need safety and our communities need fairness. Our young men need safety. Our young men need fairness. Our communities are still faced with [inaudible] challenges. And we will fight against every form of crime and violence, but major crime is going down, and stop and frisk is down 93 percent.

[Applause]

Safety and fairness can walk hand-in-hand. Only when police and community are in partnership, not division, can we become as safe as we are meant to be.

[Applause]

We're thinking differently as a country because the people are speaking, because of so many movements, so many people – and look at the movement against mass incarceration, and look at the Black Lives Matter movement – look at what those two movements have done to change the American dialog to change our minds, to open up the possibilities [inaudible]

[Applause]

Dr. King would be shocked it took so long. Dr. King would remind us, if in 2015, we – or 2016, now, we have to even say the self-evident words black lives matter – that we have not gone far enough as a nation. He would tell us that, but I think he would admire that these movements are gathered in strength and that they're changing the accountability the government is held to. All those cellphone videos are creating a more accountable government, a more accountable police force.

[Applause]

But we will not depend on cellphone videos – we will put body cameras on our officers so that accountability for all will become a norm in our society.

[Applause]

So, when it comes to civil rights, 2015 was a year where there was some real progress. It doesn't for a moment negate the fact that there's these horrible challenges, again, particularly on voting rights, but let us take heart that some things started to move in a serious way in 2015. And now, we take that forward into 2016 – a momentous year of decision for our nation.

Second, economic rights – well, here's an area where I think Dr. King would once again say what took you so long? But he would be so proud of the Fight for \$15 – \$15 dollar minimum wage that used to be called impossible just a year or two ago – now, on the lips of every presidential candidate, on the lips of people all over the country – the demand that has now become national and urgent to give people a decent standard of living – at minimum, \$15 dollars an hour.

[Applause]

He would be encouraged to see New York City, and so many other cities, bring paid sick leave to our people. He would be encouraged by the paid parental leave that we're so proud to have extended to city workers – and we intend to reach more and more city workers with paid parental leave all the time. He would see those kinds of things as the kind of progress he was talking about almost 50 years ago, and he would recognize that if people can't afford housing, then we don't have economic justice. That's why we are focused every day on creating affordable housing for the people of this city.

[Applause]

He would say, if parent's can't afford pre-k, if they can't give their children a strong enough start to be all they can be – that's a profound economic injustice that doesn't just only make people economically poorer, it takes

away the opportunity to give their children what their children deserve. And I think he was a – full-day pre-k for all for free is exactly what he was talking about.

[Applause]

Finally, Dr. King – he ruffled a lot of feathers. Laurie is right, we sometimes air brush history – we make it a little too [inaudible] and beautiful. Dr. King was never afraid to righteously call out power that was being used the wrong way. He was never afraid to call out a policy that was hurting people.

[Applause]

And you will remember, when he went from civil rights to economic rights, that ruffled lots of feathers. But when he started talking about the need to end the Vietnam war, remember what [inaudible], remember – [inaudible] was treated as a traitor, even though he was saying the most loyal and patriotic thing that this country needed to hear.

[Applause]

Well, you can say that [inaudible], because, let me tell you something – I think Dr. King would not only smile – that he would be beaming [inaudible]. Just in the last week, the president of the United States – oh, by the way, an African-American –

[Applause]

[inaudible] The president of the United States, in what I thought was a beautiful and powerful speech, calling us to the next level of action. He said something I don't think we've heard a president say in quite the same way before. He recounted our mistakes in Iraq. He recounted the times that we sent out young men and women into harms way for the wrong reasons. He talked about the need for the Congress to actually approve military action. And he said a simple phrase – he said we need to learn the lessons of Vietnam – and he said it from the front of the Congress, with the nation watching. He said what Dr. King was trying to say almost half a century ago. But until this president came along, we didn't learn the lessons of Vietnam. So, let's remember, Dr. King's legacy rings our ears. It moves our heart. And we're learning from it. And we're still acting on it.

2015 was a year of unprecedented change – it still hasn't been fully accounted for. The grassroots spoke more loudly in 2015 than many years. The change on the ground started more deeply in 2015 than many years. We're now into this year, 2016 – we have an opportunity to make so many changes. And then, two years later, is the 50th anniversary of the loss of Dr. King.

I end with this – we've got 2016, 2017, into 2018 – we should not walk to the anniversary. We should race to that anniversary, and make the changes Dr. King called upon us to make.

[Applause]

We should honor him with a new and fairer country, and a new and fairer city. When we gather here in 2018, let's be ready to say that we did all we could, and show Dr. King that we've earned it.

Thank you, and God bless you.

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