FOUNDERS’ DAY
CONVOCATION
LAWLESS MEMORIAL CHAPEL
THE SIXTEENTH OF OCTOBER
TWO THOUSAND AND TWENTY TWO
THREE O’CLOCK IN THE AFTERNOON
A Brief History Of Dillard University

Dating back to 1869, Dillard University was born from the union of two institutions that served as equity-building engines in the South. Those two institutions, New Orleans University and Straight University, met the demand to provide higher education for the influx of formerly enslaved people into New Orleans following the Civil War. Straight University was founded in 1869 with support from the American Missionary Association of the Congregational Church (now the United Church of Christ). Although New Orleans University was founded in 1873, its roots go back to Thompson Biblical Institute—founded in 1866—which later became a biblical department within Union Normal School in 1889, which was run by the Freedmen’s Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church (now the United Methodist Church), established to train African American teachers, providing a significant need throughout the South.

Straight quickly drew the attention of students from other parts of the southern United States, particularly because of their law and medical schools. The university withstood a wealth of adversity, including the main campus building being set ablaze and relocation, before becoming Straight College in 1905. However, so August was Straight’s academic programming that it produced such luminaries as: P.B.S. Pinchback, the first African American governor of Louisiana; social justice activists, Louis A. Martinet, Rodolphe L. Desdunes and Alice Dunbar Nelson; educators Fannie C. Williams and Valena C. Jones; and physician James W. Ames who founded the first hospital for African Americans in Detroit.

New Orleans University was part of an ecosystem of institutions designed to educate and support African Americans. A significant part of that ecosystem was Flint Medical College, founded in 1889 to meet the demand for trained African American nurses. Later, New Orleans University absorbed Phyllis Wheatley Sanitarium. The sanitarium was renamed Sara Goodridge Nurse Training School which later joined Flint Medical College to become Flint-Goodridge Hospital in 1916.

Among other institutions that were part of this network was Gilbert Academy which was later incorporated into New Orleans University in 1919. Among New Orleans University’s notable alumni was Rev. John W.E. Bowen Sr., one of the first African Americans in the U.S. to earn a Ph.D.

A combination of the rise of Jim Crow and World War I proved to be significant challenges for New Orleans University and Straight College, however. The boards of New Orleans University and Straight College agreed to continue the work of creating more African Americans leaders by consolidating. On June 6, 1930, the newly formed board of trustees proposed a charter for a new institution.

The new University would be named for James Hardy Dillard, an educational reformer who promoted racial harmony. Opening its doors in 1935, Dillard began to write its legacy with impressive leadership and faculty. Will W. Alexander served as the University’s first acting president (1935-1936). Under his leadership, noted scholars filled the classrooms. Among them was S. Randolph Edmonds, regarded by many as the “dean of Black academic theater” and whose work led to the establishment of the first degree-granting theater program at an HBCU.

In 1936, William Stuart Nelson was appointed president, and his leadership laid the foundation for a tradition at Dillard that extends to the present day. He was instrumental in the implementation of a major arts festival which created a venue for local artists and national figures to enjoy and debate the nature of African American art, past, present and future. Nelson also worked with music instructor Frederick Douglass Hall to write the University’s alma mater, “Fair Dillard.”

In 1941, Albert W. Dent was named Dillard’s second president and his legendary tenure lasted until 1969. Having served as the superintendent of Flint-Goodridge Hospital, Dent guided Dillard through turbulent decades. Still, he made remarkable strides. Having declared that “a nursing program in Dillard University should develop better persons as well as better nurses,” the University became the first institution of higher learning in Louisiana to establish an accredited baccalaureate program in nursing. Dent was also responsible for Dillard becoming a founding member of the United Negro College Fund in 1944.

Under Dent, Dillard’s national and international profile as a liberal arts institution grew. Dillard also came to play a role as one of New Orleans’ critical civic anchors. Behind the scenes, Dent played a part in negotiating race relations throughout the city. He worked with Mayor deLesseps S. Morrison on desegregating New Orleans’ public services while promoting University events that spoke to Black identity and pride. Most notable of those events was Dillard’s 1968 Festival of Afro-American Arts.

Dr. Brodus N. Butler’s appointment in 1969 as Dillard’s third president marked, for the University, a renewed commitment to the liberal arts. Butler’s most important contribution is considered to be the implementation of the Scholars-Statesman Lecture Series which was housed in the Division of Social Sciences. The series was designed to “bring to the presence of Dillard University students and the New Orleans community a series of men and women who have made distinctive achievements in their own lives and who are themselves living models of the kind of excellence to which our students aspire and which our community should always respect.” The lecture series brought to campus key figures such as Benjamin Elijah Mays, Etta Moten Barnett, Aaron Douglas and Arna Bontemps. However, with the board of trustees’ desire to transform the University’s curriculum to meet the changing student body, Butler made the decision to resign in November 1973.
In 1974, Dillard would see another leader begin a legendary tenure. Dr. Samuel DuBois Cook became the University’s fourth president, strengthening and expanding the curriculum, increasing the percentage of faculty members holding doctoral degrees, raising the requirements for admission and eventually increasing student enrollment by 50 percent. During that time, in 1979, Dillard became the first university in Louisiana to offer a bachelor’s degree in public health. Cook’s leadership also led to an expansion of student services and an increase in fundraising to improve the campus and facilities. In 1989, he created the Dillard University National Conference on Black-Jewish Relations from which sprang the Dillard University National Center for Black-Jewish Relations. With a desire to expand students’ global view, the University added a Japanese studies program in 1990, the first of its kind at an HBCU. Most notably, Dillard’s endowment grew from $5 million to more than $40 million under Cook’s leadership.

Following Cook’s historic run, Dr. Michael L. Lomax became Dillard University’s fifth president. A noted scholar, administrator, political leader and entrepreneur, Lomax undertook the challenge to transform the University into one of the finest liberal arts colleges in the nation. He led a $60 million campus renovation program to focus on students’ living and learning environments. Enrollment increased 49 percent, reaching more than 2,200 students from the U.S., the Caribbean and Africa. Having also tripled alumni, individual, corporate and foundation giving, Lomax helped Dillard reach a U.S. News & World Report ranking of 20th in the top tier of colleges and universities in the South by 2002. In 2004, Lomax decided that it was time to move on to a new assignment, accepting the position of CEO and president of UNCF.

On July 1, 2005, Dr. Marvalene Hughes began her tenure as the sixth and first woman to serve as president of Dillard University. Barely allowed to settle in at Dillard, Hughes was faced with the threat of Hurricane Katrina just over a month after beginning her tenure. Amid the well-documented destruction that Katrina caused, Hughes facilitated, with unwavering determination, the rebuilding of Dillard’s historic, 55-acre campus. In the first year of Hughes’ tenure, and again in 2006, the University raised more than $34 million in public and private gifts and grants, far exceeding any previous annual total in Dillard’s history.

In 2008, Dillard launched its first capital campaign, Advantage Dillard!, with a goal of raising $70 million for six priority areas: increasing student scholarships; enhancing teaching, learning, and campus facilities; introducing cutting-edge technology; enhancing the library; strengthening general program support; and securing Dillard’s future through general endowment. Following the Class of 2010’s commencement exercises, Hughes cut the ribbons for two exciting new facilities, the Professional Schools and Sciences Building and the Student Union and Health and Wellness Center. With tremendous service having been rendered to Dillard University, Hughes transitioned from the presidency in 2011.

On July 1, 2012, Dr. Walter Kimbrough became Dillard’s seventh president. Having earned the moniker “The Hip Hop Prez” during his tenure as the president of Philander Smith College, Kimbrough’s dynamic presence played a role in raising the profile of Dillard as it continued to recover from Hurricane Katrina. One of his most significant accomplishments was having a $160 million Hurricane Katrina loan from the federal government forgiven in 2018. That paved the way for the University’s endowment to grow from $48 million to $105 million. Also impressive was the alumni giving rate reaching 23 percent.

Academically, Kimbrough turned his attention to several programs. In 2012, the University introduced its film studies program, a response to the number of “Hollywood South” film and television productions in Louisiana. By 2018, Dillard’s physics program had become known for being a top producer of African American physics graduates. The University also began to experience success in its pre-law program. In 2021, 93 percent of the pre-law students who applied for law schools had been accepted.

Kimbrough’s work also left a significant fundraising mark on Dillard. The University received its largest single alumni gift—$1 million from Jimmie Edwards. Dillard also received its single largest private gift when philanthropist MacKenzie Scott donated $5 million in 2020. A year later, alumnus and board of trustees chair, Michael D. Jones facilitated a $5 million gift to the University’s National Center for Racial Justice with the help of the law firm Kirkland and Ellis. Even further leveraging the power and influence of social media, Dillard utilized GivingTuesday as a fundraising opportunity, going from more than $64,000 in gifts in 2016 to more than $1.3 million in 2021. Feeling that his work at Dillard had been done, Kimbrough announced in August of 2021 that he would hand off the “leadership baton.”

Dr. Rochelle L. Ford, the highly energetic dean of Elon University’s School of Communications, became Dillard’s eighth president on July 1, 2022. Ford has immediately gotten to work under the theme “Activating Our Commitment.” Driven by the University’s mission to “cultivate leaders who live ethically, think and communicate precisely, and act courageously to make the world a better place,” Ford has set her sights squarely on three areas where Dillard will thrive: Facilities That Withstand the Forecast, Faculty and Staff Fortification and Financing the Future.
C.J. Bland is a native of New Orleans, a lifelong Saints fan and a proud graduate of Dillard University. Mr. Bland is a happily married husband and father who resides in metro Atlanta with his lovely and supportive wife, Shelley, and their two young children, Caleb and Skylar.

After being abandoned by his father at age five, Mr. Bland was reared in the Fischer housing development in Algiers along with five siblings by their loving, devoted, inspirational and sacrificing mother of unwavering faith, Olivia Walker Bland, who passed away in late 2021. Inspired by his mother and motivated by his surroundings, Mr. Bland overcame early life poverty and personal tragedies to earn three college degrees: a Bachelor of Science in physics from Fair Dillard, a Bachelor of Science in electrical engineering from Southern University and A&M College and his Master of Business Administration from the University of Houston-Clear Lake.

After college, Mr. Bland subsequently held director-level, management, consulting or contributor roles in engineering, information technology, sales, e-commerce and professional services at AT&T, Bell Labs/Lucent Technologies, Home Depot, Johnson Controls, NASA, NCR and Verizon Wireless.

In 2001, Mr. Bland became the co-founder and CEO of Minority Professional Network Inc. (MPN), a proven DE&I human capital and consulting solutions firm as well as a NMSDC-certified MBE. MPN’s core offerings include a leading diversity jobs site, mpnDiversityJobs.com, as well as placement, executive search and staffing solutions (mpnDiversityRecruiters.com). Other client-requested services rendered by MPN have included digital marketing, recruiting events, marketing, IT consulting and DE&I retention, strategy, cultural, bias and leadership speaking, training and facilitation.

Under Mr. Bland’s savvy and visionary leadership, MPN has attracted more than 2,500 DE&I employers, clients and partners from 46 U.S. states and other countries, including the ACLU, CIA, City of Portland, Colgate, FBI, FDIC, Feeding America, Gates Foundation, Georgia-Pacific, Harvard University, Hewlett Packard, the John F. Kennedy Center, JWT, Novartis, Pinkerton, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Southern Company, Travelers, United Way, the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, Walmart, Yale University and many others. MPN has reached millions of ethnically diverse job seekers, site users, consumers, subscribers and social media contacts based in more than 50 countries.

Mr. Bland’s extensive nonprofit, public service, mentoring, volunteerism or community service honors, awards or affiliations have included: a three-term board member of ARC, president of the Atlanta chapter of the Nation Black MBA Association (NBMBAA), INROADS Facilitator of the Year, UNCF fund development and membership with the Atlanta Public Schools Adopt-a-Student advisory board.

Mr. Bland is also a former leadership and professional development adjunct college professor at the Clark Atlanta University School of Business. Mr. Bland’s vast slate of speaking and training clients, engagements and media interviews have included: 11Alive TV in Atlanta, The Atlanta Journal Constitution, American Express, AT&T, BET.com, Black Collegian, CNN, El Observador, Ebony Man, Emory University, the Hispanic Public Relations Association, MBN USA, National Association of African Americans in Human Resources, NBMBAA, North Highland, the National Society of Black Engineers, The Philadelphia Tribune, Rolling Out, SMX Next (by Microsoft), the U.S. Department of State, VoyageATL, Walmart and others.
Mablene Krueger, M.B.A.
Interim Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs
PRESIDING

PROCESIONAL
“Eternal Father, Strong to Save”
S. Carver Davenport, University Organist

INVOCATION
Rev. Herbert Brisbon III
University Chaplain

MUSICAL SELECTION
“Lift Every Voice and Sing”
Dillard University Choir
S. Carver Davenport, Director
Hezekiah Brinson, Accompanist

GREETING
Amanda Winfield-Buford ’08
University Director of Alumni Relations

OCCASION
Tyler Finley ‘24
Student Government Association
Vice-President

MUSICAL SELECTION
“Elijah Rock”
Ladies of the Choir

DRAMATIC SELECTION
Dillard University Theatre

INTRODUCTION OF SPEAKER
Jerika M. Edwards ’23
87th Miss Dillard University

KEYNOTE ADDRESS
C.J. Bland ‘86, M.B.A.
CEO, Minority Professional Network Inc.

CLOSING REMARKS
Rochelle L. Ford, Ph.D., APR
University President

ALMA MATER
S. Carver Davenport
Hezekiah Brinson, Accompanist

BENEDICTION
“Lord, Make Me More Holy”
Dillard University Choir

RECESIONAL
“God of Our Fathers”
S. Carver Davenport, University Organist
Board of Trustees

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Orim Graves
Dr. Michael Griffin ’94
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Vincent Hudson ’93
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Chelsea B. Robinson, Esq. ’17
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R. King Milling
Dr. Joyce M. Roché, ’70
Edward M. Swan, CFA

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President

Constance Cannon Frazier, M.B.A.
Chief of Staff and Special Assistant to the President

Linda Bell, D.B.A.
Director of Athletics

Marion Bracy ’84, APPA
Vice President for Facilities Management and Real Estate Planning

Wanda Brooks, CPA, CGMA, CICA
Internal Auditor

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Vice President for Student Success

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Interim Vice President for Institutional Advancement

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Director of Communications and Marketing

Brendan M. Greene, J.D.
General Counsel

Ralph W. Johnson, M.B.A.
Vice President for Business and Finance and Chief Financial Officer

Mablene Krueger, M.B.A.
Interim Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs
University Deans

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College of Arts and Sciences

Sharon Hutchinson, Ph.D., Dean
College of Nursing

Eartha Lee Johnson ’80, Ed.D., Dean
Faculty and Student Academic Services

Kimberly Moorehead ’04, Ed.D., Dean
University College

Dorian Williams, Ph.D., Dean
College of Business

Professor Emeriti

Sylvia Ballard-Huete, Ph.D.
Henry C. Lacey ’65, Ph.D.
Nchor B. Okorn, Ph.D.
Dorothy V. Smith, Ph.D.

Ceremonial Marshals

**PLATFORM MARSHALS**

Lana Chambliss ’88, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Psychology

Hong Dai, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Mathematics

Abdalla Darwish, Ph.D.
Professor of Physics
Presidential Professor

Mona Lisa Saloy, Ph.D.
Professor of English
Louisiana Poet Laureate

**FACULTY MARSHALS**

Keith Alan Morris, M.F.A.
Associate Professor of Film

Casey Schreiber, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Urban Studies and Public Policy

**STUDENT MARSHALS**

Courtney E. Williams, Ed.D.
Assistant Dean of Students
Director, Student Engagement & Leadership

Dawn Williams, Ph.D.
Academic Counselor
Fair Dillard,
Gleaming white and spacious green,
   We love thy every blade and tree;
We love thy breathless days, thy nights serene,
   Thy halls where men are men and free.
Arise, O sons and daughters, hail thy queen,
   And pledge for aye thy loyalty.

Fair Dillard,
Flaming love and learning's light,
   Teach us each day, each passing hour.
A deep'ning love for beauty, truth, and right.
Source of all nobleness and pow'r.
And through the joyous day, the dreaded night,
   Forever guide, Alma Mater!
   Forever guide, Alma Mater!