

**A Tribute to Harry Dolan  
Remarks for  
The Black Caucus of California Student Association of Community Colleges  
6th Annual Leadership Conference,  
"Revolutionalized Leadership: Preparing for Effective Community Advocacy"  
February 13, 2004**



**Martha J. Kanter, Chancellor  
Foothill-De Anza Community College District  
12345 El Monte Road  
Los Altos Hills, CA 94022  
650.949.6100**

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Remarks of Martha J. Kanter, Chancellor  
Foothill-De Anza Community College District  
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Thank you for inviting me to speak with you this afternoon. As the new chancellor of the Foothill-De Anza Community College District, I was delighted to receive the invitation from Louis Robinson and Don Dorsey to join you at your conference today. I was especially impressed when I saw the title of your conference, “Revolutionalized Leadership.”

When I began to prepare the outline of my remarks, my computer underlined in red the word “revolutionalized.” It told me that this “revolutionized” wasn’t in the dictionary. I stared at it on my computer screen and I said to my computer: “Maybe it isn’t in the dictionary but it should be.” I knew what this conference was about. Like Don Dorsey, I lived through one of the most significant revolutions of our time: the Civil Rights movement. That movement lives today, for you are those who will carry forward the values and goals of social justice that in those times we were compelled to put into our laws and customs. Our challenge is to ensure that our civil and human rights are never compromised as we move into the future. “Revolutionized leadership” will make this possible.

The title of my talk today is “A Tribute to Harry Dolan.” Who was this man and why do I want to tell you about him? The story is personal. Harry was a famous playwright in Los Angeles, but I first met him in 1955 when I was six years old, a long time ago, way before most of you were born. My father and mother had both grown up and lived through the Depression in the late 1920s. Both my parents were the only ones in their family to go to college. They didn’t know each other at the time, but they both had scholarships and graduated.

In the 1940s, like hundreds of Americans, they did their part in World War II. On Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, my mother was in her first semester of college and saw her friend Barbara Bird running through the halls screaming that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. Barbara’s brother was stationed on a ship there. The next thing my

mother knew, most of the young men at the college were drafted and left as soldiers of World War II.

Among the thousands of men across the country who left for war was my dad, who became a captain in the Army's Medical Corps. After the war, he returned from France to work as a medical resident at the veteran's hospital in Bedford, Massachusetts. About that time, my mother returned to Massachusetts from Washington, D.C. They met and married in 1947, and I was born two years later. They struggled economically in the early years of their marriage, but as a doctor, my dad earned finally enough money to qualify for a loan and bought a small apartment building. By then, I had three younger brothers. My dad moved my grandmother into the first floor, the six of us lived on the second floor, and my aunt, uncle and cousin moved into the third floor. It was then, in 1955, that Harry Dolan came into our lives. He became the apartment manager and a second father to me. He was a dynamic African American man who had also returned from the war and quickly became part of our extended family. I didn't know this until many years later, but he used to tell my mother that he wanted to be a writer. She would simply tell him: "Write, Harry. That's the only way to become a writer." I think that in 1959, Harry may have heard the following words of Dr. Martin Luther King:

Whatever career you may choose for yourself—doctor, lawyer, teacher—let me propose an avocation to be pursued along with it. Become a dedicated fighter for civil rights. Make it a central part of your life. It will make you a better doctor, a better lawyer, a better teacher. It will enrich your spirit as nothing else possibly can. It will give you that rare sense of nobility that can only spring from love and selflessly helping your fellow man. Make a career of humanity. Commit yourself to the noble struggle for human rights. You will make a greater person of yourself, a greater nation of your country, and a finer world to live in.

Soon after, Harry left our area and made his way to Los Angeles. Over the decades, he became a well-known playwright in Hollywood. I found some information about Harry on the Internet in a story called "Black is the Color of TV's Newest Stars," written for the *Saturday Evening Post* by Richard Lemon in November 1968, right after the passage of the Civil Rights Act. He wrote:

Harry Dolan recently had a script rejected because it was "too black," and whites wouldn't identify with it. The black actors are crying 'We need black writers,'" he says. "But if a black writer writes something realistic, nobody's going to produce it until a black producer comes along who's willing to risk the money." There are only a couple of Negro families on TV shows, and hardly any TV Negroes have romances.

That was written 35 years ago. Harry, in his own way and in his own words, was fighting for civil rights. Many might say that his words ring true today. In the years that followed, Harry Dolan did become a well-known Hollywood screenwriter. He died in the late 1990s, but he remains an inspiration to me because he achieved his lifelong dream. I never would have known all of this were it not for a newspaper article that I received many years later in which he remembered my mother and that simple conversation they had many times over in the tiny three-story apartment building where I grew up.

I wanted to tell you this story because it is a story of leadership, a story of determination and persistence, a story of challenge and a story of hope. These are the values that each of us has inside us, values that bring all of us here today to think about "revolutionized leadership" and develop some important plans for the future.

For myself, after spending more than 25 years as a community college leader, whether I was a teacher, a student or now today a chancellor, I know that to get anything worthwhile done, you have to step up and lead. You have to advocate for what's right to do and you have to do what's right. In addition to Dr. King, hundreds of leaders throughout our history have spoken these words in many different ways. In fact, Don Dorsey spoke these words to us a couple of weeks ago here in this room.

For me, it comes down to focus—the need to focus on the right things to do, and then to do them well. As chancellor, at any one time, I always have about three core goals that I work on, for which I hold myself accountable. The first of these is to deliver our primary mission to you, to provide you with an outstanding education that enables you to transfer to the university and to make a good living. Your education is a right. It is also a privilege. But today your rights and privileges are being threatened because we're in an economic crisis in California. That's why I have second goal that I am working on: to assure that in this budget crisis, the right and privilege of higher education is maintained.

For example, there are not enough black students ready to transfer from our community colleges to the University of California. We have not done enough. We have so many more doors to open for our students. All of us together must make sure that our 109 community colleges across California remain open, affordable and accessible to the thousands of students who need a community college education in order to transfer to the university or enter the workforce or both! All of the studies I've seen show that over a lifetime, a community college degree or higher will double or triple your income. That's important to know, of course. But more importantly, taking advantage of higher education allows you to become a leader who doesn't just have information, but a leader who has knowledge—knowledge that is critical for focusing on the right things to do in your life, and to do them well.

We know that community college students do as well as or better than their university counterparts after they transfer to UC or CSU. Community college students also make up a huge part of the workforce in California and the rest of America. For example, just at Foothill College and De Anza College, we have educated over a million students since we opened our doors in 1957. Add the other community college students to that across the state and remember there are only 35 million Californians here. We are literally the door to California's future.

During the Civil Rights struggle in the 1960s, Dr. King said many things to inspire us and keep us focused on doing what was right. On March 14, 1964, he said:

It is precisely because education is the road to equality and citizenship, that it has been made more elusive for Negroes than many other rights. The walling off of Negroes from equal education is part of the historical design to submerge him in second class status. Therefore, as Negroes have struggled to be free, they have had to fight for the opportunity for a decent education.

Four years later, on January 7, 1968, Dr. King told us:

I said to my children, 'I'm going to work and do everything that I can do to see that you get a good education. I don't ever want you to forget that there are millions of God's children who will not and cannot get a good education, and I

don't want you feeling that you are better than they are. For you will never be what you ought to be until they are what they ought to be.'

After spending so much of my time in Sacramento over the past six months, I say we have accomplished so much for so few and there are so many more people in California who need a community college education. Then I say we have accomplished so little so far. So it's truly a paradox.

When I consider all of these issues and questions, I return to the words of Dr. Clayborne Carson of Stanford University, who has spent the last 19 years editing Dr. King's works. Dr. Carson believes that "We are further from realizing Dr. King's dream today than we were the day he died. The day he died, it was national policy to eliminate poverty. Today, it's hard to find a mainstream politician speaking up on this issue, and fewer still working on it." He also said that he's often asked that, if the civil rights movement is still happening, and that if Dr. King was just one player in it, who might be the new cultural icon of the struggle for social justice? He answered: 'Look in the mirror. It could be you.'

It is you. It is us. Dr. Carson is right. That is why you are here at this conference, "revolutionizing" leadership. If Dr. King were with us, he might be looking at each one of us in this room and asking us: "Show me the right things that you are doing and show me that you are doing them well."

Of course, he would have said those words far better than I could ever imagine. But in my own words, here are a few ideas about leadership that I can offer you, tips that I have learned over the years:

First, prepare yourself before you speak. A mentor of mine used to say: If you cannot improve upon the silence, do not speak.

Second, don't fight and don't run away. Put those options aside and get to the issue.

Third, bring others with you; teach them. We have a responsibility to bring others along.

Fourth, stay in the middle of the conflict and work things through.

Fifth, think about the limits and consequences of leadership before you lead.

And sixth, let the perfect combination of logic and emotion drive your decisions.

In closing, thank you for being the leader that you are, thank you for being the revolutionary that you are, and thank you for giving us hope for the future.