

It is an honor to have been awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. But as I have said on a number of occasions in the past, I'm never quite sure that I am worthy of such recognition.

When I look at the list of the Medal's previous recipients, I ask myself, how did my name come to be included with icons of the civil rights movement like Rosa Parks or people like Dr. Robert Coles who spent his life documenting the effects of poverty on children? I conclude the honor is not really about me.

It is about the things that Diane and I have believed in and fought for during our lives. It is about creating educational opportunity for all children. It is about trying to create equal justice under law, a promise that we, as a nation have not always kept.

It is about trying to be people of good character: being honest, telling the truth, saying what we mean and meaning what we say, treating others with respect and respecting ourselves all while trying to figure out the difference between right and wrong and then doing what is right.

It is about understanding that truth and honesty are inextricably intertwined with trust and that without trust we, as a people, have nothing.

It is about trying to fight invidious discrimination in all of its forms and treating people fairly, without regard to their immutable characteristics. It is about creating hope and opportunity for a better tomorrow for everyone.

It is also about leading an intentional life.

Whatever I have accomplished has been due in no small measure to those known and unknown, on whose shoulders I have been allowed to stand.

That includes those who came to this country in the belly of slave ships, some of whom were my ancestors and others whose labor was used to make the bricks used to construct the original White House.

It includes my parents and family members who loved me, nourished me, and taught me about empathy, compassion, the difference between right and wrong, and that the truth matters.

It includes James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, Viola Liuzzo, and the four young girls who died in the bombing of Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church and all of the other women, men, and children who fought injustice and sacrificed their futures to make mine possible and whose courage inspires me.

It includes Jim Marshall, Carl Eller, Gary Larson, Paul Dixon, Jim Finks, Ed Garvey, and a host of others from my football life who made it possible for me to achieve in the athletic arena. And it includes the Minnesota Vikings organization, which has generously supported the Page Education Foundation from its inception.

It includes more than 7,000 Page Scholars whose service is creating hope and changing the future and who are my heroes, as well as the children of Justice Page Middle School who give me hope for the future.

Most important, it includes Diane Sims Page, the love of my life and life partner, a woman whose quest for racial, gender, and social justice knew no bounds and who encouraged, lifted, and allowed me to become more than I might otherwise have been.

Mere words are inadequate to express the debt of gratitude I owe this group of people.

When I think about these people in the context of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, I am reminded of the first three words of the Preamble to the Constitution. Those words are "We The People." I am also reminded that the White House is the people's house. We live in a time when our passions cause us to spread more heat than light, I believe the voices of all of the people who have contributed to who I am deserve to be brought into the light and represented, heard, and seen in the people's house. It is on their behalf and in their honor that I accept the Presidential Medal of Freedom.