



'Representation matters'

Meet Thair Brown '20, winner of Boston College's 2019 Martin Luther King Jr. Scholarship

2019 Martin Luther King Jr. Scholarship winner Thair Brown '20 with his parents, Glenroy Brown and Sharlene Chunnu-Brown. Photos by Christopher Huang

For Thair Brown '20, it was one of those moments you really wish you could have back again.

He had just greeted a group of Boston College students who were staying at his Jesuit high school, St. George's College, as part of the Jamaica Magis service immersion trip organized by BC Campus Ministry. Since BC was high on his list of possible colleges—if you attended a Jesuit high school, you were bound to hear about BC, plus his cousin was an undergraduate there—he had been invited to speak to the BC contingent and perhaps make some potentially valuable contacts.

But Brown had stumbled and stuttered through his introduction. He felt as if he'd made a fool of himself.

Then came a surprising reaction.

"They applauded and came up to embrace me," recalled Brown, who was born in Miami but spent most of his childhood in Jamaica. "Everyone was so warm and welcoming, with smiles as bright as the Caribbean sun. They were funny, charming, selfless, caring, genuine people who enjoyed the work that they were called to do. It was at this moment I realized that I wanted to come to this school. I believe my exact words were, 'If BC has people like this, then I have to go there'—I would be so

excited to go to school each day, just so that I could be around them. When they left, it felt as if a piece of me left with them. In short, the Jamaica Magis trip was a huge reason why I chose to become an Eagle.”

Since enrolling at BC, Brown has gone on the Jamaica Magis trip twice; this year, he’ll be one of the trip’s student leaders. And he’ll have an additional distinction, as winner of the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Scholarship, which recognizes a BC junior demonstrating superior academic achievement, extracurricular leadership, community service, and involvement with the African American community and African American issues. An economics major with minors in computer science and African and African Diaspora Studies, Brown was presented with the honor at last month’s annual MLK Scholarship Banquet.

“Everyone was so warm and welcoming, with smiles as bright as the Caribbean sun. They were funny, charming, selfless, caring, genuine people who enjoyed the work that they were called to do.

It was at this moment I realized that I wanted to come to this school. I believe my exact words were, ‘If BC has people like this, then I have to go there’—I would be so excited to go to school each day, just so that I could be around them. When they left, it felt as if a piece of me left with them. In short, the Jamaica Magis trip was a huge reason why I chose to become an Eagle.”

Four other finalists were considered for this year’s scholarship: Sydney Boyd, Nwamaka Nnaeto, Michael Osaghae, and Omonosagiagbon Owens.

Days after receiving the award, Brown expressed his gratitude to the MLK Scholarship Committee while admitting to being in “a mild state of disbelief.”



with Thea Bowman Center Director Michael Davidson, S.J.

“However, as I begin to return from my brief sojourn amongst the clouds, I realize that the phrase ‘to whom much is given, much is expected’ comes into play. I have some big shoes to fill, but believe me when I say that I am ready and willing to do whatever it takes to live up to these expectations.”

Among his other activities at BC, Brown has served as president of the Caribbean Culture Club, student advisor of the Bowman AHANA and Intercultural Center Student Advisory Board, and a member of the AHANA+ Leadership Council, and Dedicated Intellectuals of the People, a group of AHANA male students who gather to talk about social, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth. He also was a winner of a book award named for the late Karen Campbell Severin '80 and presented annually to BC students who exemplify

her service to the University community as an undergraduate and alumna.

Brown said the most valuable aspects of his BC leadership experiences “have been the safe spaces created within each organization. A priority for me has always been to create events which cater to under-represented communities, so that they, too, may feel like they have found a home at BC.”

“Within each of these spaces,” he added, “I truly believe that minority students are given the ability to leave their facade at the door, and show their true selves to a community, which either looks like them, or shares some of their ideals. A safe space can truly serve as a healing mechanism, for within those boundaries, individuals no longer have to expend energy on pretending.”

Still, the Jamaica Magis trip is what resonates the most throughout Brown’s time at BC. “It’s always a fulfilling experience, because my connection to the island extends beyond face value. I always go back to a particular moment in which a small student ran up to me and asked if I also attended Boston College. After I responded, he immediately turned to Father Michael [Davidson, campus minister and the trip leader] and said ‘I want to go to BC, too.’ I carry that small interaction with me, because it revealed to me that my presence within that space, while

holding the BC title, was able to inspire so many underprivileged youths.

“Representation matters, and within those inner-city communities, all the students see are instances of violence and loss, but Magis provides a slight escape from that. When students actually see someone from Jamaica attend such a prestigious university, it inspires them to dream beyond their current reality. Indeed, I believe this is the biggest impact of me doing Jamaica Magis. The simple effect of representation can shatter mental barriers, and seeing this take place is my favorite aspect of Jamaica Magis.”

Representation also figures prominently in Brown’s chosen career path, which he envisions as finance, or a related field in which he can also utilize his computer science background. “I hope to utilize these disciplines to enter the corporate side of America. I believe this niche group is often overlooked by students of color, as they believe that they may not be good enough to enter such fields—or they simply do not see anyone that looks like them within this realm. It is my personal aspiration that once I am within this field, I can be able to open doors for other students of color who wish to join this niche group as well.”

Brown notes that his studies at BC also have involved personal formation and growth, especially through the African

and African Diaspora Studies minor.

“Learning about the individuals whose revolutionary work and movements we stand on today, is truly a humbling and inspiring experience. I could not have been more drawn to this field, because I am literally learning about my own identity.”

“Representation matters, and within those inner-city communities, all the students see are instances of violence and loss, but Magis provides a slight escape from that. When students actually see someone from Jamaica attend such a prestigious university, it inspires them to dream beyond their current reality. Indeed, I believe this is the biggest impact of me doing Jamaica Magis. The simple effect of representation can shatter mental barriers, and seeing this take place is my favorite aspect of Jamaica Magis.”

The other finalists for the 2019 Martin Luther King Jr. Scholarship:

Sydney Boyd, Broward County, Fla.

Major: International Studies and communication; minor in Global Cultural Studies

As co-director of policy in the AHANA+ Leadership Council, Boyd has worked with Boston College administrators on policy initiatives to help students assimilate into its culturally diverse environment. She received the Silver Knight Award for the racial history program she teaches; her goal is to expand the program, reflecting her belief that young people who understand their history can develop stronger identities. A Benjamin Gilman International Scholarship recipient, she has worked as a Bowman Advocate and as an event coordinator and freshman representative for Black Student Forum. Her future plans include attending law school to pursue of a career in cyber security and intellectual property law.

Nwamaka Nnaeto, Morristown, NJ

Major: Computer science; minors in Chinese and philosophy

While manager of diversity and inclusion programming for the Undergraduate Government of Boston College, Nnaeto planned and implemented programs on campus for communities in pursuit of social, academic, and institutional inclusion. She also has been a member of the African Students Organization, the Bowman AHANA and Intercultural Center Advisory Board, and the Diversity EDU 2019 Planning Task Force. Her other activities have included participating in the Jamaica Magis service trip and the Forbes Under 30 Summit in 2017 and 2018; she also studied artificial intelligence as a TavTech 2018 Fellow.

Michael Osaghae, Washington, DC

Major: Political science; minor in African and African Diaspora Studies

In his role as chair of the AHANA + Leadership Council, Osaghae helped advocate for an environment of inclusivity and action. He also has served as vice president of the Student Advisory Board as well as on committees for the MLK Gathering, Black History Month, and the Campus Climate Survey. Osaghae worked as a mentor for the Center for Student Formation's Compass Mentoring Program and has participated in the Jamaica Magis service trip and Mississippi Delta Volunteer Corps. After graduating BC, he plans to attend law school.

Omonosagiagbon Owens, Randolph, Mass.

Major: Communication; minor in management and leadership

Owens cites the Magis Civil Rights Immersion Trip, during which he and other students crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge—site of the March 1965 “Bloody Sunday” incident—as a formative experience. He also has participated in the Carroll School of Management's summer Catalyst Program, which aided him in getting an internship at Ernst & Young. As an executive board member of the African Students Organization, Owens organized information sessions between Ernst & Young recruiters and ASO general members. After graduation, he plans to continue being a representative voice and presence in the corporate world and in society.

Sean Smith | University Communications | March 2019 | Material provided by the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Scholarship Committee was used for this article.

