

****Good morning, everyone. ****

Mayor Wu, elected officials, distinguished guests, veterans, and friends...

Before delving into my notes, I want to take a moment to appreciate this weather we are blessed with today. The sun is shining and there is a gentle breeze... mother nature is definitely giving her stamp of approval for what we are doing today.

I am truly honored to be here today to welcome all of you to the unveiling of a statue and the dedication of this park in honor of Gen Edward Orval Gourdin and all black veterans. This is a fitting tribute to his life and legacy and the contributions of African American veterans who have served from the time of the American Revolution through today. We also celebrate the power of unity and shared purpose. This park stands as a testament to what can be accomplished when people come together to create something meaningful and lasting.

Let me tell you a little something about General Edward O. Gourdin. He was a black man who grew up in Boston. He was born in 1897. His career was exceptional. Saying that BG Gourdin was a trailblazer is an understatement. He was a scholar, an athlete, a soldier, a judge, an activist. Any one of those things would be commendable, however, he excelled in ALL of them.

- As a scholar.
 - valedictorian of his high-school class in 1916
 - A graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Law School,
- As a star athlete.
 - In 1921, he set a new collegiate long jump record with his leap of 24 feet 6 inches.
 - In both 1921 and 1922, he won the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) National Pentathlon Championship.
 - He was the first man in history to long jump 25 feet and
 - the first African American to win a silver medal in the 1924 Olympics in Paris in the long jump event.
- As a soldier's soldier.
 - Served in the MA ARNG from 1925-1951
 - He earned his commission as an Infantry officer, he quickly progressed through the ranks, was eventually promoted to Colonel and commander of the 372nd Infantry Regiment, and served during WW II... with distinction... in a segregated regiment until 1947.
 - He was the first Black BG in the MA ARNG and retired at that rank in 1959.
 - After WW II, BG Gourdin was given command of the 272nd Field Artillery. They were called to support active-duty forces during the Korean War.
- He was also a dedicated jurist and public servant,
 - In 1931 he was named as Assistant United States Attorney from Massachusetts. He held that position until 1951.
 - He served as justice on the Roxbury District Court from 1951 until 1958, when he was the first black person to be appointed a Massachusetts Superior Court judge.
 - He was also the first Black person appointed to the Massachusetts Supreme Court
 - a member of the Massachusetts Commission on Discrimination.

Statues and monuments can literally, figuratively, and spiritually change a landscape. Most importantly, they can turn a history of exclusion into one of inclusion. The true beauty of a statue or monument lies in what it says about who we are as a people and those we honor. BG Gourdin is represented by the bronze sculpture. The ten bas reliefs celebrate the service of black veterans in all wars beginning with the American Revolution. Sadly, there is a history of discrimination and inequality against Black service members that dates back to that American Revolution. Nevertheless, it gives me great pride knowing that our people fought in every war in this country even though they were not treated as full citizens. They rose above the inequities to fight for America. The vision of the park honors that service. It is a place where people of all backgrounds can come together to learn about BG Gourdin's story and to be inspired by his example.

Just last week Governor Healey signed a proclamation recognizing the 75th anniversary of the signing of executive order 9981 that integrated the United States military. It was a powerful moment at the state house with local history makers who stood on the shoulders of those who came before them like BG Gourdin. His story is a story of courage, determination, and service. He is just one example of those who served in the face of inequality and discrimination. He enlisted years before President Truman signed that executive order..., but he persevered, and achieved great things ... BG Gourdin laid the foundation and crashed through the ceiling that allowed me and many of you to be history makers in the academic world, the sports world, and the military. He paved the way for us. And those of us who benefitted from BG Gourdin's life, we have a responsibility to those who would come after us. He was a role model and inspiration for generations of Black Americans. It is imperative that we do the same. There is a saying, you push me, and I'll pull you. Let's Lead, mentor, and inspire.

It is also fitting that this dedication is happening at the conclusion of the NAACP's 114th National Convention. Last night, during their Armed Services & Veterans Affairs reception in honor of the 75th Anniversary of Executive Order 9981, we heard from:

- the Secretary of Veteran Affairs, Denis McDonough, He expressed the VA's commitment to "ensure that every veteran equitably receives the world class health care and benefits they have earned and so richly deserve". He discussed the establishment of an agency equity team, whose first order of business is to identify disparities in grant rates in black veterans, veterans of color and historically underserved veterans and then eliminate those disparities.
- We also heard from the president of the NAACP's Boston chapter, Tanisha Sullivan who expressed the NAACP's commitment to advancing public policy that is mindful of supporting members of the armed forces and veterans and ensuring that those black members who served receive their fair share.
- In addition, the NAACP presented their Distinguished Military Service award posthumously to BG Gourdin. Accepting the award in his honor was his great grandniece, Tanisha Sullivan.

I want to take a moment to appreciate the sheer magnitude of this moment. If you are currently serving or have served – please stand.

We salute you...

I stand here with immense pride, representing the Healey-Driscoll Administration, a team committed to fulfilling our promises to veterans and military families, and to promoting diversity, inclusion, and equality. This park stands as a testament to the administration's unwavering dedication to honoring our veterans and recognizing the invaluable contributions they have made. As we stand in this park today, we are reminded of the progress we have made, but we also recognize that there is much more to be done. The Gov and Lt Gov's commitment to veterans and military families is an ongoing promise, and we will continue to work tirelessly to address the needs and provide the support veterans deserve.

This occasion would not have been possible without the dedication and collaboration of the talented artists, who poured their hearts and souls into bringing this memorial and park to life. To The Veterans and Friends of Gourdin Memorial Park, thank you for your dedication and tireless efforts in making this project possible. It is your passion, unwavering support and commitment that made today a reality. The Friends worked closely with the City of Boston, many supporters, and the Urban Culture Institute to realize this wonderful community-initiated project! I extend my heartfelt appreciation to each and every one of you who played a part in making this dream a reality.

Finally, to all those present here today, thank you for joining us on this important occasion. We celebrate not just the completion of a park but the embodiment of our shared values and aspirations.

Thank you for allowing me to be a part of this historic occasion and thank you for your dedication to honoring the legacy of General Gourdin and the black veterans of the commonwealth. And as been said throughout this week at the convention, when we work together, we Thrive Together.

Thank you for your time and attention.