



## **PRESS RELEASE**

**May 3, 2021**

### **Michael Eric Dyson, Bestselling Author, Scholar and News Commentator to Serve as 2021 Spring Commencement Speaker**

Pine Bluff, AR — The University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB) will host its 163<sup>rd</sup> commencement ceremony on Saturday, May 8, 2021 at 9:00 a.m. at Simmons Bank Field in front of a limited audience and will livestream the ceremony via [YouTube](#) and [Facebook](#). The processional will begin promptly at 8:45 a.m. Spring 2021 graduates will participate alongside 2020 graduates from both fall and spring, whose commencement exercises were virtual in December. Full details about commencement attendance and COVID-19 protocols are available at [UAPB.edu/commencement.aspx](https://uapb.edu/commencement.aspx). Dr. Michael Eric Dyson, a globally renowned scholar of race, religion and contemporary culture, will serve as commencement speaker.

Dyson is one of America's premier public intellectuals and author of more than 20 books, including seven *New York Times* bestsellers. A contributing opinion writer for the *New York Times* and political analyst for MSNBC, Dyson is a recipient of two NAACP Image Awards for *Why I Love Black Women* and *Is Bill Cosby Right*, an American Book Award for *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster* and the 2020 Langston Hughes Festival Medallion. His newest book is *Long Time Coming: Reckoning with Race in America*. Dyson is the Centennial Chair and University Distinguished Professor of African American and Diaspora Studies in the College of Arts & Science and University Distinguished Professor of Ethics and Society in the Divinity School at Vanderbilt University. Dyson received his PhD in religion from Princeton University and is also an ordained Baptist minister. Former President Barack Obama has noted, "Everybody who speaks after Michael Eric Dyson pales in comparison."

Commencement will include the commissioning of five Army officers, and several graduates will be awarded the Chancellor's Medallion, an honor bestowed on graduates with the highest cumulative grade point average from each of the University's five academic schools of study.



To mitigate COVID-19, UAPB will follow guidance from the Arkansas Department of Health, which states that any graduate, faculty, staff or guest who tests positive for COVID-19 or has been notified within the 7-day window before the commencement rehearsal and/or commencement cannot attend the commencement rehearsal or exercises. Full protocol details are available at [uapb.edu/commencement.aspx](http://uapb.edu/commencement.aspx). This is a ticketed event, and graduates who confirmed their attendance will receive their tickets during cap and gown pickup. Seats will be grouped in sets of eight, and guests are encouraged to sit with groups for their respective graduates. Seats are available on a first come/first serve basis. While guests may see many empty seats as a result of the required physical spacing, guests should not sit in restricted areas. The Stadium will open to guests approximately 60 minutes prior to the start of the commencement exercises, and the [clear bag policy](#) will also be enforced.

In the event of forecasted inclement weather, a change of venue will be announced Thursday, May 6. For inclement weather, commencement plans include two ceremonies—10am and 3pm at the Pine Bluff Convention Center. Students in the School of Agriculture, Fisheries and Human Sciences, the School of Business and Management, the School of Education, and University College should attend the 10am ceremony. Students graduating from the School of Arts and Sciences should attend the 3pm ceremony. Doors will open approximately 90 minutes before the start of each ceremony.

For more information about commencement exercises, contact the registrar, Ms. Jeanese Outlaw, at 870.575.8491 or [outlawj@uapb.edu](mailto:outlawj@uapb.edu).

#### **About the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff**

The University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (UAPB) is an 1890 Land-Grant HBCU with a diverse student population, competitive degree offerings and stellar faculty. For more than 140 years, UAPB has worked to create an environment that inculcates learning, growth and productivity while affording a basic need to its students: a chance to advance. UAPB offers certificate and associate degree programs, more than 30 undergraduate and master's degree programs and a doctorate program in Aquaculture/Fisheries. Students are active in more than 100 organizations, including an internationally renowned Vesper Choir, Marching Band, concert Bands, wind Symphony, a nationally recognized debate team and an accomplished athletic program.

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