Professor Clyde Ruffin came to MU in the 1980s and is entering his 11th year as chair of the Department of Theatre. Early in his tenure, he established the internationally recognized World Theatre Workshop. Beginning as the Black Theatre Workshop, Ruffin’s productions explore issues of race and identity that needed discussion. The campus and wider community have embraced his work.

The caliber of his productions have been recognized as the best in the country by the American College Theatre Festival, and they have been performed in the Kennedy Center.

Not only does Professor Ruffin put actors in roles about social activism, but he personally engages in social activism on a daily basis. For the past eight years, he has served as a minister at the Second Baptist Church of Columbia, a church that was founded in 1866 by emancipated slaves and free people of color. Through his work with the church, he has supported the efforts to rescue citizens from poverty and oppression.

Professor Ruffin is president of the John William “Blind” Boone Heritage Foundation, dedicated to preserving the 1889 home of the late pianist. He also organized the James T. Scott Memorial Committee, which was established to raise awareness of the lynching of James Scott, to solicit donations to place an appropriate headstone on his unmarked grave and to humanize the tragedy of his death by engaging in systematic research to reconstruct and publish his life story.

One nominator wrote, “Professor Ruffin has not only celebrated King’s work but lived his life as an example of what King fought for—serving to uplift the community and create cultural and economic opportunities for growth.”