



## **FOR WHAT PURPOSE HAVE YOU BEEN DELIVERED TO THIS PLACE?**

### **Opening Convocation Address, September 17, 2009**

To the members of the board of trustees, faculty, staff, alumni, friends and our most cherished resource—the students of Morehouse College—good morning! To my wife, Cheryl Franklin, I offer thanks for your ongoing support.

And please allow me to offer a special word of appreciation to our guest, Dr. Richard Long, who you will meet later in the program.

Welcome all to the 126<sup>th</sup> Opening Convocation of Morehouse College.

Even as we celebrate this special day in the life of the College, there is also cause for sadness. We mourn the loss of Jasmine Lynn, our Spelman College sister who was felled by gun violence on September 3. I ask that you join with me in a moment of silence in honor of her life and memory.

Thank you.

Senseless violence erodes our sense of security. But I assure you that it is the College's priority to heighten existing measures and institute new ones that will ensure safety on the Morehouse campus and in the Atlanta University Center community.

There is literature available in the Chapel lobby that speaks to what students, staff and faculty can do to safeguard themselves. Please take one and be an aware and active participant in the campaign for safety.

I'd like to make a special appeal. Ms. Lynn has now passed into eternity, leaving many loving memories behind. However, those responsible for this horrific crime remain free. I want to ask you to share any information you might have so that justice may be done.

And I'd like to make one additional statement. I don't know the details of her situation on the street that night. But I have seen many young women leaving our campus at night walking alone to Spelman and CAU. Brothers, this is not acceptable. If you have company, you should walk the sister home to ensure her safety. If you cannot be man enough to look after your sisters, you are not man enough to enjoy the friendship and company of those women.

At this time, I wish to welcome our new faculty and staff members who joined Morehouse this year; I'd like them to stand and be recognized. We celebrate new faculty and staff especially for the new energy and creativity that they bring.

And we acknowledge and affirm with great appreciation those faculty and staff who have invested many years in the Morehouse mission. Will faculty from the three divisions stand?

Now, will all staff please stand?

We take great pride in the accomplishments of our esteemed faculty and want to take just a moment to share a few recent recognitions and achievements.

- Dr. John Williams, interim senior vice president for Academic Affairs, was recently appointed to the Board of Directors of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business – International.
- Dr. Harold Bennett, program unit chair for the section on Biblical Theology for the International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature was a presenter and presided over its international meeting in Rome, Italy.
- Drs. Hendrickson and Valerie Haftel, along with Dr. Errol Archibold, also were awarded a generous grant from the National Institute of Health, National Institute of General Medicine, as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.
- Psychology professor David Wall Rice presented “Identity Orchestration, Positioning Visibility Through the Psychology of Hip-Hop Narratives” at the Chautauqua Institution. A book related to the presentation will be released by Dr. Rice and his lab in 2010.
- Leadership studies professor Melvinia King published the book, *The African American Moral Tradition as a Resource for Leadership Education: Developing Ethical Leaders for America*.
- Spanish professor Gloria da Cunha has been invited to lecture at the University of Lisbon in a seminar on Philosophy and Literature in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Spain, Portugal, and Latin America.
- Professors Sinead Young, Wallace Sharif, Bryant Marks, and Ulrica Wilson participated in the Quality Enhancement Education for Minorities Network's Leadership Development Institute in Washington, D.C.

Congratulations to each and every one of the staff and faculty members who continue to elevate yourselves—and Morehouse. And thank you to those who shared your accomplishments. They are many and varied such that time prevents me from mentioning all of them.

My staff, however, has compiled an exhaustive list of accomplishments that were provided to us. I encourage everyone in attendance to pick one up in the Chapel lobby. You, too, will be proud of the evidence of the greatness among us.

I also would like to issue a special appeal to students who are attending class but have not yet settled your financial responsibilities. Many of you have heard that the Coca-Cola Company recently made a major gift to all of the schools in the AUC to assist students who are academically accomplished and in acute financial need. We cannot assist you if you do not come into the business office.

And now, to the Class of 2013 on your first Morehouse convocation. You are a diverse and talented group of young men: alarmingly talented and scary smart, the best and the brightest, diamonds in the rough ready to be forged and polished. Welcome to the ‘House, and

- **Bienvenido al Renacimiento**
- **Accueillir à la Renaissance**

Spanish and French, respectively, for “Welcome to the Renaissance!”

I am pleased to observe the evolution of the Renaissance at Morehouse. You have become the talk of the nation. You are defying stereotypes of what African American young men can achieve. Morehouse has become more than a college name: it is now a symbol of excellence. My hope is that each of you will do everything that you can to uphold that symbol.

Each of you should know that our Renaissance initiatives are part of a well-honed accreditation plan—sanctioned by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools—that directs our academic agenda.

I am pleased to reiterate publicly that Morehouse’s accreditation was recently reaffirmed for the next 10 years. It is a major accomplishment that provides the public with assurance that we are exercising good stewardship of our resources and provides us with a strategic plan to guide student learning each step along the way.

A required and very exciting part of the reaffirmation process is the development of a Quality Enhancement Plan. In other words, in addition to all of the other things that make us distinctive—a commitment to ethical leadership, community service, academic excellence, and the cultivation of substance, style and spirituality—we will now concentrate on enhancing your global awareness and competence.

We want to be sure that every student will have the ability to understand, communicate and act responsibly in relation to at least one other country or region—particularly with respect to its historical, political, economic, social, cultural, religious, demographic and environmental profile.

Fortunately, a growing number of America’s colleges and universities are determining how they will engage the broad and daunting topic of globalization and the imperative to

internationalize our domestic institutions. These efforts are especially important at a time when the president of the United States is declaring that America is now ready to listen to the world and to lead in the world once again.

Two simple pieces of data should provide some sense of the challenges ahead.

- Today, only 1% of American college students study abroad.
- Only 3% of American college student populations are comprised of international students.

With respect to globalism, I find the example of Morehouse to be inspiring. When the times might have focused the energies of Morehouse faculty and administrators solely upon regional and domestic issues, earlier presidents like John Hope, Benjamin Mays, Hugh Gloster, and Walter Massey insisted that Morehouse men become globalists during their college years. That is why young Martin Luther King Jr. while a student at Morehouse had already begun to conceptualize his life and vocation in a global context. And it is that global outlook of my predecessors that has paved the way for my vision for Morehouse to become a **global resource for educated and ethical leaders**.

I charge you to embrace this vision of the Morehouse Man as a global visionary and activist. And the foundation for this global perspective is the Five Wells of our renaissance.

In addition to your being well-read, well-spoken, well-traveled and well-balanced, your appearance is important. As a prestigious college that produces leaders, we have an obligation to inform and guide you regarding how best to present yourselves in public. We want you to make the right first impression. To that end, in the near future, the Office of Student Services will assemble student focus groups to address appropriate attire on campus.

Ethical Morehouse students—those adhering to the Five Wells—will have an easier time of becoming global ethical leaders. Our sixth president, Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, noted that true education involves the building of knowledge plus character. He knew this fact more than half a century ago, and it is even more true today.

Since the election of President Obama last November, a new message and spirit have emerged in our communities. Morehouse students expressed it well in two simple words, “No excuses.” I hear the phrase over and over again on campus, and it suggests to me that you recognize that you are responsible for your own destiny. So exercise good judgment and act with integrity now. The habits and many of the actions you take now will follow you for years to come.

Morehouse students recognize that if an African American man can be elected as the 44<sup>th</sup> president of the United States, there really are no excuses for failure.

Now, I am not suggesting that there will not be barriers on the road to success and, indeed, to your destiny. Without a doubt, there will be.

What I am sure of, however, is that the strongest among us are those who turned our stumbling blocks into stepping stones. The most successful among us know that there are no excuses for mediocrity. There are no excuses for doing less than your best. There are no excuses for perpetuating the circumstances that attempt to derail your progress.

On Saturday, October 17, we at Morehouse College will demonstrate our commitment to service and the Atlanta community with a student-led march through the community, sharing information on no-cost services that we and our AUC peer institutions provide to families with children, senior adults and others. This college-wide outreach is the first of many ongoing initiatives we will undertake to heal the surrounding village.

As you begin this new academic year, remember why you ventured to Mother Morehouse. Remember that you are **HERE** for a reason and a very brief season. Use your time well by focusing on the purpose for which you have been delivered to the Morehouse village.

During our recent NSO Parents' Parting Ceremony and for the first time in recent memory, the ceremony was nearly rained out. Buckets of rain poured, quickly hiding the mixed emotions and tears of mothers and fathers who were placing their sons in the care of dear old Morehouse. Indeed, it rained rivers of water that eventually seemed to be part of the evening ritual—a baptismal rite leading to Morehouse conversion, I suppose.

There is an extraordinary passage in the Hebrew Bible, the book of Exodus 1:22. It declares that Pharaoh commanded that every boy that is born to the Hebrews shall be thrown into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live. In this narrative, we step into a world that—much like our current society—was hostile for young boys trying to become men. The political, economic, cultural, educational and criminal justice systems were aligned against the life prospects of the boys. The empire felt that if the boys became men, they would threaten the systems of oppression and injustice.

But one day, a boy was born. His mother decided to practice civil disobedience. Instead of conforming to an unjust policy, she hid her baby boy and placed him into a basket. She set him upon the Nile. The same Nile that was a place of death for other boys became a place of refuge for this boy. This boy had a mother who cared and a village who kept their watchful eyes on him.

In time, that boy was rescued, and he became a child in the house of his opponent. He ate at the table and went to school with the children of his former adversary. And he was determined to use his education to uplift the oppressed.

Moses had been set on the Nile River by a mother who, like many of yours, knew that she could no longer hide him under her wings. She used the Nile to deliver him to Egypt's premier leadership training institute. There, Moses would have an opportunity for a better life, royal instruction and upward mobility. Moses, the Hebrew Deliverer himself, had been delivered to the citadel of higher education of his time to perform great things.

In time, that boy became Moses, the one who delivered his people out of bondage. Moses, whose name in Hebrew is Mosheh, derived from the verb *masha*, means “he who draws

out.” Not he who is drawn out. The one who was protected would in turn draw out those who were victims of the empire.

I present this passage for a reason.

I would submit that you, too, have been delivered. You have been delivered to Morehouse for a purpose. A lot of love and sacrifice placed you in the basket and brought you here.

You, men of Morehouse, have not only been spared, but delivered. You have been delivered here even in these perilous times. I ask you, for what purpose have you been delivered to this place?

We know that the Morehouse goals for you are lofty and, to some, intimidating. But know that the most legendary Morehouse Men sat in similar seats—some, no doubt, unclear about their life’s purpose or what contributions they would ultimately make. While the world assumes that their callings were issued by a strong, clear voice, it is likely that the converse is true. Many of them, I am sure, first heard what Dr. Mays would call a “faint whisper of the mighty winds.” So move forward, being persistent, being unafraid and receptive to the still, small voice that will guide you toward your life’s work and passion—your purpose.

Intellectual growth and achievement require that you break out of your molds and take the risk of stretching and growing—learning who you are truly destined to be.

Dr. Mays challenged us to live our purpose. And in order to do so, you must first—to quote the French philosopher Rene Descartes—“know thyself.” And getting to know oneself may involve risk:

- Risk stepping out of your comfort zone to learn the perspectives of others.
- Risk feeding your intellectual curiosity. Renaissance Men are conversant in the classic texts and pride themselves in having knowledge in a variety of disciplines.
- Risk expanding your cultural horizons through travel. You will learn more about yourselves and learn that all citizens of the world are more similar than dissimilar.

Risks are not new. They span our history. Noted surgeon and author Ben Carson, in his book, *Take the Risk*, speaks of the calculated risks good physicians must take. But I believe that his lessons are easily generalized. If—because of failure, shame, or embarrassment—our forebearers had shied away from the risk of following our dreams and seeking our purpose, we would still be reading and writing by candlelight; African American people would still be disenfranchised; space exploration would be a fantasy; and Morehouse College would simply be a nice but passing thought in the minds of a few good men.

This is the time to which you have been delivered. Find your purpose and seek it. Be bold in your pursuit and know that, at Morehouse, your success is in your hands.

The success for which you are destined will uplift communities throughout the globe—communities that been ravaged by time and neglect and bypassed by opportunity.

Let this be a year of discovering your purpose and your destiny.

Goethe said, “At the moment of commitment, the entire universe conspires for your success.”