For the 489 students in the class of 2004, graduation isn’t just larger than life. For a few hours on one humid Georgia morning, it is looking at what one’s life is and what it can become.

On each side of the graduation platform, a screen stretches from the stage floor to its roof, allowing spectators to see the procession wind its way from South Campus to the grassy knoll.

Journalists carrying cameras and video recorders scuttle about, trying to get the best shot. And as families jockey for the best seating, loading cameras of their own, the sun slips in and out of gray clouds that threaten a shower, but never deliver.

An overcast day can’t dampen the day’s felicitous mood. Sunday, May 16, 2004, the day of Morehouse College’s 120th Commencement, is composed of many moments of remembrance for the past and joy for what is to come.
ous Occasion

7:21 a.m. The long queue of graduates stretches out of Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel and ends where Willis B. Sheftall Jr. ’64, senior vice president for Academic Affairs, and the freshman and senior class deans—Alvin H. Darden ’72 and Sterling Hudson, respectively—will lead the Commencement procession to Century Campus. In front of them, the sound of nine men pounding on African drums begins.

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7:23 a.m. Marion Wooten, a Morehouse custodian, leans against the chapel wall as she watches the graduates jostle one another, filling the moments before graduation with chatter and laughter. Today, she must work, but it is her first Commencement here and the sight of black men going off to meet the world causes her to pause.

Wooten is impressed.

“This is nice,” she says, smiling as her mouth creases into the folds of her round cheeks and her eyes wander between the graduates and onlookers gathering along Westview Drive. She will go back to work while other onlookers will watch the class of 2004 walk across campus.

In the lobby, two seniors shake hands, making a loud, “clap!” as one palm meets the other. The two talk about the party they attended the night before.

“Man…,” one laugh, his voice trails off in acknowledgement of the fun of last night’s revelry.

7:27 a.m. Between the hallway of the Hall of Honor and stage right of King Chapel, business graduates wait for the procession to begin. Portraits of Maynard Holbrook Jackson Jr. ’56, Nelson Mandela, Mohandas K. Mahatma Gandhi and his wife, Kasturba Gandhi, hang here.

Graduate Anthony Woods, a marketing major, posts himself near the hallway door and creates a light mood as he tells jokes about everything from falling grade-point averages to how he spent the night before graduation. All of the jokes hit their mark as evidenced by the peals of laughter from his classmates. Woods is admittedly “relieved” about graduation.

Asked about his future, he flippantly answers with comic timing: “I’m a businessman, about to make a dollar…or a million.”

Michael Williams, a business management major, watched the Laker game the night before. “All I can think about is sleep,” he says.
7:30 a.m. The processional starts promptly. One late graduate rushes through the Chapel's side doors, honor cord in hand, graduation cap askew. Flashing a breathless smile, he runs to his place in line. The graduates begin to move out of the chapel, following the faculty marshals, honor guards and African drummers.

For the first time in Morehouse history, the audience gets to see the entire Commencement exercises—from the processional at King Chapel to the recessional—on large screens near the stage. It takes a production truck and seven cameras to make it happen.

7:39 a.m. Morehouse alumni are lined along Brown Street, which faces the Chapel and begins between John H. Wheeler and Benjamin G. Brawley halls. Alumni admit grads into the fold with applause as they walk through the gates. This year’s reunion is for alumni classes ending in four and nine from 1934 to 1999.

Farther up the street, near Kilgore Dining Hall and edging closer to Century Campus, the path grows silent as professors in graduation regalia quietly watch graduates walk past them. The journey between the two buildings is something of a rite of passage. Alumni represent the future; faculty, the past.

7:45 a.m. The alumni class of ’49 committed to a gift of $100,000 at this weekend’s alumni reunion. Meet three alumni from that class: Herman F. Bostic, Ph.D., Hon. George W. Haley, and The Rev. Dr. Samuel B. McKinney. The three have remained friends since their graduation 55 years ago.

McKinney, who has a bachelor’s in political science, lives in Seattle, where he retired in 1998 as the senior pastor of Mt. Zion Baptist Church—“the largest church in the city,” Haley interjects. Haley, who graduated with degrees in political science and history, is the former ambassador to the Republic of Gambia and the brother of the late Alex Haley, author of “Roots.” Alex traced his family’s lineage to Gambia. Bostic teaches graduate-level French and Spanish at Howard University and quickly proves his fluency in both.

Continued on next page
Marc J. Muneal
Valedictorian

Haley, 78, and McKinney, 77, were both in the Army Air Corps, now called the U.S. Air Force, during World War II. Both call the experience “rough.” From the seriousness on both their faces, “rough” seems to be an understatement.

They joke with one another as the graduates pass, claiming they’re too old to stand like everyone else.

McKinney says today’s graduation is especially significant. Watching the graduates make their way to Century Campus, he says it’s not everyday that you “see this many black men graduate. [Black men who are] not in jail. Not in the criminal justice system.”

8:10 a.m. 10,000 heads bowed. Dean Carter calls everyone to prayer for the evocation.

8:18 a.m. The Glee Club, led by director David E. Morrow ’80, sings the national anthem and the Negro national anthem. Yvette Humphries and her five-month-old son, Laurence Humphries II, view the sights and sounds. It is her third Morehouse graduation, her son’s first. Her husband, Laurence Humphries ’94, couldn’t attend the ceremony, but Humphries came. Morehouse is the school of her cousins and an uncle, and after today’s ceremony, her son.

8:21 a.m. The Rev. Dr. Otis Moss Jr. ’56, chair of the Morehouse Board of Trustees, welcomes graduation attendees. He addresses the parents first: “Thank you for releasing your beloved sons to us for a few years. They will never be the same.” Moss then implores the students to use their power, education and checkbooks to improve Morehouse and the world.

8:31 a.m. President Walter E. Massey ’58 gives Dr. Ingrid Coleman Chafee, a professor of French who is retiring at the end of the term, a plaque for her 17 years of service to the school. He also announces that Dr. John H. Hopp’s ’58, his friend, line brother and former roommate, died yesterday and requests a moment of silence. Hopp’s served as Morehouse provost and senior vice president for Academic Affairs from 1996 to 1999.

8:32 a.m. Massey makes presentations to Marc J. Muneal, valedictorian, and Jerry Robinson, salutatorian. Robinson is presented his award first and walks to the stage in a phalanx of cheers from his classmates. His honor cords fall as he walks to the podium. Willis B. Sheftall ’64, senior vice president for Academic Affairs, picks them up and returns them to Robinson’s shoulders. Muneal, who is from Trinidad, receives his award. Muneal graduates with a 3.99 grade-point average and Robinson with a 3.98.

8:37 a.m. Muneal begins the valedictory, which he says he wrote backward. He begins the address by examining a promising future and ends by giving profound advice for the present.

“Always respect yourself and others. Know that you have nothing more important than your voice and your freedom of expression ... Supplant the temptation to judge unjustly with the urge to love unconditionally.”

He ends by leading the graduates in the last part of a pledge they took as freshmen.

“And shout your name,” he commands. “I am a Morehouse Man!”

The graduates respond, smiles on their faces, some pumping their fists in the air, shouting their names in unison.
William “Bill” Cosby launches his address by unzipping his robe. Underneath he wears a “Morehouse Dad” T-shirt, sweatpants with “Morehouse College” written vertically up the side, white socks nestled in Birkenstocks, and a Morehouse cap with a tassel swinging next to the bill. In a speech filled with biblical references, Cosby talks about his college experience at Temple University and speaks to why HBCUs are under fire. But the most prolific statements he makes are his views on Morehouse and what its graduates should be doing to better themselves and others.

“I’ve never seen the friendship, camaraderie for African Americans and Africans like I have at Morehouse,” he tells the cheering crowd.

Cosby also talks about the importance of mentoring and changing the future of African Americans who lag behind in school and ambition. It’s our fault, he notes: “There’s something going on with our people. It’s not what they’re doing to us; it’s what we’re doing to them.”

His last words to the graduates, though, are a warm embrace. “You’re here and you’re delicious and you’re wonderful and you are loved.”

The degrees are conferred on the graduates. With fervent screams from families and friends, and a handshake or hug from a very jubilant Cosby, the conferring of the degrees is the longest part of the ceremony. It takes nearly an hour to call each graduate’s name.

“Prayer” is sung by the Glee Club, with alumni members filling the stage to join in. One of the alumni members swiftly making his way up the steps to the Glee Club riser is senior vice president Sheftall.

Massey gives a heartfelt charge to the graduates. “Thank you for what you will accomplish and what you will give to the world. You have to, indeed, fulfill that need.”

Every year, associate vice president Watts asks the parents and friends to allow graduates to leave Century Campus unhindered. “For the last time in his lifetime, he will march with his brothers in such numbers,” she booms into the microphone during recessional.

Graduation is officially over. In what can only be described as organized chaos, graduates wait in line as John K. Haynes ’64, dean of the Division of Science and Mathematics, hands diplomas to the Morehouse Men who have made the trek to a dim Archer Hall Gym. (Similar ceremony took place for the divisions of Business and Economics and Humanities and Social Sciences.) The sounds of congratulations ricochet from one wall to the next as moms and dads, aunts, uncles and girlfriends begin to trickle in.

Christopher Winfrey, who now holds a bachelor’s in computer science, sits in the Archer Hall gym munching a handful of cookies with his fellow graduates. He will attend Georgia Tech this fall to earn a master’s in electrical engineering and will work as a research assistant to help pay his way through school. Winfrey eventually wants to work at General Electric or General Motors as a product engineer.

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But today, as he fingers his degree, Winfrey is reminiscing on his Morehouse experience. "The hard times make the good times," he says between cookie bites.

The hard times: "Being in [school] for two weeks and I don’t have any classes. I need beyond a C-minus to get through [the class]. Have a test in a week and no one knows how to do the work." He smiles. “It’s hard, but they teach you a lot.”

The good times: “Weekend after a test has been completed and you did well on it. It’s always the day after: The calm after the storm.”

Winfrey graduated with a 2.9 grade-point average and is a step ahead of Cosby’s challenge for the newest Morehouse graduates to affect change in their communities. He worked for four years as a mentor at nearby F.L. Stanton Elementary School and was Stanton’s 2001 mentor of the year.

"Mentoring gave me the satisfaction of impacting a group of people for the better. [I] never helped anyone before. It’s hands-on,” he says.

And while he’s leaving Morehouse, rest assured, he won’t be leaving the community. “They’ll continue to see me.”
Pride, Pomp and Circumstance

BESIDES THE NUMBER OF MEN marching, there is only one major difference between Spring Commencement and Summer Commencement: the 95-degree heat that relentlessly pummels everything moving on Morehouse College’s campus. But every thing else is the same: the African drummers, the emotional serenade of Anne Watts, associate vice president for Academic Affairs, the issuing of hard-earned Morehouse degrees, and, most important, parents who are very proud of their sons—regardless of the season.

After walking from the Thomas Kilgore Jr. Campus Center and down Brown Street, the 53 men who graduated this summer would call the Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel’s climate downright comfortable—a welcome shelter from the summer’s punishing heat and the perfect place to mark their last moments as Morehouse students.

Currently in its second year, the number of summer graduates has swelled from 32 to 53 participants, and the main floor of the Chapel was nearly full with attendees.

Michael L. Lomax ’68, the graduation speaker and United Negro College Fund president, remembered his years at the College as a time of growth and a long exercise in becoming the man whom his mentors knew he could be.

“My best self urges me to meet the standard set by Dr. [Benjamin] Mays,” said Lomax of the College’s sixth president. Lomax credited Mays and Hugh Gloster as guides who set high standards and helped him reach them.

Timeless Moments

TWO RHODES MEET
Nima Warfield and Oluwabusayo “Tope” Folarin, Morehouse Rhodes Scholars in 1994 and 2004, respectively, share a rare moment during Commencement 2004. Warfield, Folarin and Christopher Elders ’02 are the College’s three Rhodes Scholars, making Morehouse one of only two Historically Black Colleges and Universities to produce three Rhodes Scholars.

MERCI, BEAUCOUP
Ingrid Coleman Chaffee, associate professor of French, is retiring after 17 years of service. President Walter E. Massey ’58 presents her with a plaque to show the College’s appreciation.