



A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT ROBERT MICHAEL FRANKLIN '75

MAY 2008

Commencement 2008 will illumine the Morehouse brand for months to come. Joshua Packwood '08 made history as our first Caucasian valedictorian—and Morehouse made a statement that reverberated across the media landscape. We are all very proud of this Morehouse man as we are of the entire graduating class of 2008.

This historical milestone gives occasion to reflect on words written by W.E.B. DuBois, who noted that black colleges and churches have always been nondiscriminatory institutions and have always offered high-quality personal development goods (education, inspiration). The news is that the world has now discovered this and, now that we have everyone's attention, we will seize the opportunity to maximize and leverage it for the abiding glory of Morehouse.

Rites of Passage

Baccalaureate and Commencement are wonderful rituals that mark development, achievement and the blessing of the elders as the youth process forward. Baccalaureate was breathtaking as our world-class Morehouse College Glee Club electrified the audience. Our speaker, the Rev. Dr. H. Beecher Hicks Jr., shook the foundation of the chapel as he reminded the graduates that they had now been "Signed, Sealed and Delivered."

Commencement was an amazing day framed by weather that invoked our College seal: clouds, rising sun and radiating sunrays. We saw them all that morning as our 520 men crossed the stage. Our speaker, Dr. Emmett Carson '81, delivered a memorable and thought-provoking address on the mega shifts that will define the world of these graduates. I have commended the staff and faculty, including Commencement coordinator Dr. Anne W. Watts,

associate vice president for Academic Affairs, who produced this world-class Commencement.

I would like to highlight one ritual that has not received the attention it deserves: the Friday afternoon alumni-led "Rite of Passage" ceremony. Marked by inspiring charges and pledges—including an extraordinary video charge from President Benjamin Mays—the pinnacle of the service occurred when one of our oldest living alumni, in this instance Dr. Asa G. Yancey '37, lit his one candle from a veritable primordial flame on center stage that was passed along to light a thousand other candles in the chapel. It is spectacular and visually powerful beyond the reach of words.

Next year, I am expecting every able Morehouse man to be here to participate in this ceremony,

along with the families of all the graduates. My appreciation to Alumni Association President Phillip McCall '69 and his team for continuing the Rite of Passage founded during the tenure of former Alumni Association President Lonnie King '69.

Alumni Come Home

The Reunion classes of this Renaissance year were on grand display. We had a great weekend of fun and memories highlighted by the gathering of the Golden Tigers, whose 50-year reunion included our beloved President Emeritus Walter E. Massey '58. No one can 'party hearty' and the next day present the austere dignity of black male achievement like Morehouse Men. But, the achievement that commanded respect was the amount raised by the combined Reunion classes announced by alumni director Henry Goodgame '84 on Saturday evening: an all-time record of \$1, 140,000.

Gentlemen of the House, I salute you! And our students who earnestly seek help and hope reverence your generosity.

Faculty and Staff News

As I announced at Commencement, Dr. Alvin Thornton '71 has been appointed provost and senior vice president. He will join us on July 1st. Also, we welcomed back to the House, Joseph T. Dixon '86 as our first vice president for Information Technology. I join the College community in welcoming them and look forward to a long and productive relationship with both brothers.

I am also proud to report that eight faculty members were promoted and/or awarded tenure at the April board meeting. The Morehouse faculty is our most critical investment and these colleagues who have demonstrated excellence in research, teaching and

public service deserve all of the commendation that this high and prestigious honor commands. I ask you to join me in congratulating the following colleagues: **Dr. Michael Hodge**, tenure in Sociology at the rank of associate professor; **Dr. Terry Mills**, tenure in Sociology at the rank of professor; **Dr. Willie Rockward**, promotion to associate professor and tenure in Physics; **Dr. Glenwood Ross, II**, promotion to associate professor in Economics; **Dr. Robert Tanner, II**, promotion to associate professor and tenure in Music; **Dr. Cassandra Wells**, promotion to associate professor tenure in Business; **Dr. Belinda White**, promotion to associate professor and tenure in Business; and **Dr. Roger Williams**, tenure in Economics at the rank of associate professor.

There is an abundance of talent and genius among our faculty; however, only one faculty member is selected the "Teacher of the Year," an honor made even more distinguished because the recipient is selected by his or her peers. I commend Dr. Cynthia Hewitt, assistant professor of sociology, as the 2008 recipient of this honor. Dr. Hewitt is a tireless and talented teacher, much beloved by her students and respected by peers. We are a better college because of her gifts.

On May 23rd, the entire Morehouse staff gathered for a staff appreciation luncheon. It was a memorable affair with excellent food, music and awards for faithful and long-time service to the College. There were a few colleagues: **Jessie Smith**, team member in Campus Operations; **Valerie Weems**, accounts payable specialist; **Phyllis Bentley**, director of Academic Operations; and **Daniel Pambi**, curator/instructor, who have crossed the 25-year mark of service to Morehouse. We are all proud of them. There is no better testament to the fact that Morehouse is a good place to work than their years of devotion to the College.

Final Notes

In July, the City of Los Angeles' March of Dimes will honor Robert C. Davidson Jr. '67, vice chairman of the Morehouse College Board of Trustees as "Father of the Year." Our congratulations go to Bob and his wife, Faye. We will be forever grateful to the Davidsons for sending their sons to Morehouse and for their boundless generosity to the College.

As we look forward to our summer Commencement (July 19, 2008, at 10 a.m.) please join us for another inspiring occasion as our speaker, Newark Mayor Cory Booker, will challenge our graduates, and our distinguished alumnus, Dr. Ronald Lee Carter '71, who has been appointed president of Johnson C. Smith University, will receive a presidential citation.

Meditations on the Media

I opened by talking about our amazing media week. I'd like to commend Toni Mosley and Elise Durham of the Communications team for rising to the occasion and managing a torrent of media requests, as well as Add Seymour Jr. for helping me prep for a national television audience. As you undoubtedly know, most of the attention focused on our valedictorian, Joshua Packwood '08. However, a recent *L.A. Times* article about the climate of acceptance regarding homosexuality at Morehouse also generated interest and discussion.

We should regard our participation in this conversation as evidence of our commitment to embrace diversity and as a compliment to our strength and stature as the nation turns to us to see how we face this often difficult topic. As an institution devoted to producing leaders with a social conscience—leaders who will chart courses in a complicated, pluralistic global community—we have the unique opportunity, indeed an urgent obligation, to allow such issues to emerge as teachable moments. In true Morehouse tradition, we will grow stronger, better and wiser with each complex challenge we face directly.

Finally, ever mindful of the power of publicity in bolstering our mission, one concrete way you can help us to reinforce the public's positive impression of our Morehouse brand is to wear your Morehouse insignia clothes and pins. One reason the world knows our Ivy League cousins so well is that their alumni and other community members proudly display their names. If you need more Morehouse T-shirts, golf shirts, caps, etc. for the summer, go to our website and support the cause.

In the June House Report, I'll share some end of the year reflections and a note from Interim Provost Willis "Butch" Sheftall. Until then, have a good summer.

*"The best leaders are barely noticed. The second best are loved and admired.
The next best are feared and respected.
The worst are despised and obeyed."
Anonymous*



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