How could something like this happen at Morehouse? Of the many questions that swirled around the November 3, 2002, incident in which one Morehouse student was alleged to have assaulted another with a baseball bat, this question, perhaps more than any other, was on the minds of members of the campus community, as well as those outside the College who know Morehouse only for its reputation for academic excellence.

First, there was the issue of such a violent act occurring at an institution whose most prominent alumnus, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., was an icon for nonviolence. Then, there were the speculations that the assault had been motivated by homophobia – another irony for an institution that arguably has contributed more than any other to the civil and human rights movements in this country.

Other questions, including exactly what happened during the incident and what would be the ultimate legal disposition of the hate crime case, would be left to the courts to decide. But as to whether Morehouse is intolerant, or even hostile, to homosexuals – as some gay and lesbian organizations, human rights groups, students and alumni charged – it would be Morehouse President Walter E. Massey who would take the lead in finding the answer.

Morehouse Faces Charges of Homophobia and Intolerance on Its Campus

Compiled by staff with contribution by Ray Metoyer

‘So To Bind Each Son the Other...’

Continued on page 46
“My position is unambiguous: We simply do not condone violence at Morehouse – regardless of its motivation,” said Massey. “Our creed of brotherhood, civility, and respect extends to everyone in our community. Morehouse is a model for how men can be educated for leadership, and we acknowledge that men can have different sexual orientations and still be men and brothers. These are issues we will address and discuss – straightforwardly and openly.”

To facilitate discussions about homosexuality and homophobia at Morehouse, Massey established the Task Force on Tolerance and Diversity – a two-tiered structure that includes a National Advisory Committee comprised of experts on violence prevention, diversity, gender development, and religion, and a Local Advisory Committee comprised of students, faculty, staff and alumni with interests and skills in diversity programming (see sidebar).

The Task Force is chaired by Dr. Walter Earl Fluker, executive director of the Leadership Center, which was established in 1995 to incorporate a focus on ethical leadership into the College curriculum. Fluker leads the group, which is charged with assessing the attitudes of the Morehouse community toward homosexuality, identifying best practices for addressing homophobia on college campuses, and making policy recommendations for creating a safe and supportive living and learning environment for everyone – both gay and straight.

“The members of the Task Force are among the nation’s best thinkers on the issues of tolerance and diversity,” said Fluker. “Our mission is to help Morehouse actualize the values that are integral to membership in this community of diverse scholars. To that end, we will draw on the College’s historic values and traditions to guide us in becoming what Morehouse alumni Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King Jr. called the “beloved community” – a place where everyone is valued and supported in becoming his or her best self.”

Tackling a National Issue
Creating academic communities where gay and straight students feel welcome and comfortable is a challenge faced by institutions of higher education across the country. According to the Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, which earlier this year surveyed a diverse group of students, faculty and staff at 14 colleges and universities, more than one-third of the students who identified themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender reported having experienced verbal or other harassment on their campuses.

At Wabash College in Crawfordsville, Indiana, one of the three other all-male colleges in the United States, criticism of the school’s reticence to deal openly with gay issues and lifestyles was the focus of a November 2001 cover story in the campus newspaper. “I don’t think [Wabash] wants to be perceived as being gay-friendly publicly,” the paper quoted Mike Laudick, a 1982 alumnus. “It’s more conservative than liberal and more scared than proactive.”

Dr. Paul J. Burgett, vice president, general secretary, and senior advisor to the president at the University of Rochester and a member of the National Advisory Committee, helped put the challenge in perspective: “Morehouse is not alone in dealing with homophobia on its campus,” he said. “All colleges and universities struggle with this issue.”

Burgett, who previously served as dean of students at...
Rochester, suggested that, as an educational institution, Morehouse should deal with homophobia in the context of the three things colleges and universities do best: research, teaching, and service. “Ask the right questions and get the best answers,” he said, “then figure out how to teach and serve based on that.”

In fact, members of the Local Advisory Committee had already begun their research by gathering information about community attitudes toward homosexuality. In November, Eddie Gaffney ’70, dean of student services, led his office in administering to students the Wright Adams Bernat Homophobia Scale developed by the University of Georgia, and a climate assessment survey developed at Morehouse.

In March, the Local Advisory Committee sponsored and facilitated a series of focus group sessions for faculty and staff, during which they were asked to share their recommendations for creating a better environment for the diverse community at Morehouse. Then, in April, the local committee distributed a 27-question survey, which included students, faculty, staff and alumni. Some gay and lesbian groups criticized the survey instrument for its focus on heterosexual attitudes and inclusion of some questions they perceived as insensitive.

“We certainly understand and appreciate those concerns,” said Fluker. “Our data-gathering process, while not strictly scientific, was designed to help us quickly determine where people are with respect to this very controversial and very personal issue. We think it is important for the Task Force recommendations to reflect the real feelings of real people, not just our assumptions about people’s views.”

Among those who have been most vocal in their views regarding the College’s handling of the assault and its aftermath are Morehouse alumni. “We’ve gotten hundreds of e-mails and letters that run the gamut of emotions on this issue,” said Henry Goodgame, director of alumni relations.

Some alumni feel that homophobia is not a problem at Morehouse and that the College is doing too much for the sake of being perceived as “politically correct.” Some fear that by focusing on the concerns of homosexual students the College is straying too far from its Christian heritage and values. Others applaud the College’s efforts to confront an issue they say is long overdue for frank discussion.

Massey acknowledges the differing opinions among members of the community, but believes Morehouse’s legacy of leadership in civil and human rights sets the appropriate tone for how the College must move forward in fostering a more inclusive campus environment.

“One of the advantages Morehouse brings to this situation is that our reputation, history and rhetoric are consistent with our current efforts to create a safe and supportive environment for everyone,” he said. “The timing of the Task Force was precipitated by an unfortunate event, but it is not detracting from the path we were already on.”

Taking the Message Home to Students
Two years ago, Morehouse embarked on a path to encourage every member of the community to make a personal commitment to excellence. Through an initiative called the Institutional Values Project, students, faculty and staff engaged in dialogues about the shared personal and institutional values they feel are necessary for Morehouse to realize its vision to be among the nation’s finest liberal arts colleges. Participants agreed the most important values to achieve that goal are accountability, civility, community, compassion, honesty, integrity, respect, spirituality and trust.

IVP included a variety of educational initiatives, from a...
poster series that uses compelling graphics and text to illustrate and describe the institutional values, to an executive lecture by Dr. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, a sociologist and professor of education at Harvard University and author of "Respect: An Exploration."

"Respect is our number one value at Morehouse, so it became our inspiration for a student campaign," said Gaffney. "The objective of the 'Expect Respect' campaign was to reinforce the diversity, mediation and anger management initiatives already being offered by the Office of Student Services and add some new ones to our programming."

"Expect Respect" included training for students on the College's harassment policy and open discussions about tensions between gay and straight students. Dr. Janice Haynie, a social psychologist who directs the College's Wellness Resource Center, volunteered to live on campus to serve as residential dean and to administer the program.

In January, Haynie began nightly meetings with small groups of about 20 students, moving methodically, dorm to dorm, floor to floor. By the time she completed her mission, each of the 1,200 residential students had a chance to analyze his feelings and behavior, which, for many, are rooted in religious beliefs and common perceptions of masculinity.

"The young men were very forthcoming and have very, very strong feelings about this topic," said Haynie. "Some straight students are realizing for the first time that things they say can be hurtful and insulting. And some gay students are learning that their behavior can make some of their fellow students feel uncomfortable. It is an important first step in developing respect for others."

Malcolm Gossett '03, president of SafeSpace, an inclusive student organization dedicated to creating a safe and respectful campus environment for all students, and a member of the Local Advisory Committee, agrees that the up-close-and-personal approach involving gay and straight students in small-group discussions has been effective.

"One of the problems with homophobia on campus is the persistence of the fallacious idea that it is gay people's duty to battle against homophobia and not everybody's regardless of one's identity," he said. "Our obligations to one another, as human
**TASK FORCE ON TOLERANCE AND DIVERSITY**

When President Walter E. Massey ’58 assembled a think tank to address the issue of homophobia at Morehouse, some of the nation’s top thinkers on tolerance and diversity volunteered their expertise. From a gay minister who preaches tolerance from a biblical perspective to a Morehouse alumnus who founded an organization that helps organizations devise strategic diversity management processes, the National Advisory Committee is itself a model of diversity.

**LOCAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

> **Dr. Walter Earl Fluker**, Morehouse Leadership Center executive director and chair of the Task Force on Tolerance and Diversity

> **REV. DR. PETER J. GOMES**  
Plummer Professor of Christian Morals and Pusey Minister in the Memorial Church at Harvard University, Gomes, who is gay, uses biblical scripture to teach against prejudice and homophobia.

> **DR. CARYN McTIGHE MUSIL**  
Vice president for education and diversity initiatives and director of the program on the status and education of women at the Association of American Colleges and Universities, Musil focuses on diversity missions and issues in academia. She previously served on the faculty at LaSalle University.

> **DR. ROOSEVELT THOMAS**  
President and founder of the American Institute for Managing Diversity Inc. (founded on Morehouse’s campus 19 years ago), Thomas focuses on strengthening communities and institutions through diversity initiatives that encourage a paradigm shift to a strategic diversity management process. A Morehouse alumnus, Thomas previously served as a faculty member and administrator at the College.

> **Dr. Robert Dixon ’64**, Morehouse professor and chair of the Department of Physics

> **Dr. Rita Finley**, Morehouse assistant professor of biology and chair of the Faculty Council

> **Malcolm Gossett ’03**, Morehouse student and president of SafeSpace

> **Adrienne Harris**, Morehouse associate vice president for executive communications and president’s representative

> **Roger Humphrey ’03**, Morehouse student

> **Dr. Cindy Lutenbacher**, Morehouse assistant professor of English

> **James Moffett ’04**, Morehouse assistant professor of English

> **Geri Oladuwa**, Morehouse Leadership Center executive assistant

> **Cynthia Trawick**, Morehouse director of the Public Health Science Institute

**NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

> **DR. PAUL J. BURGETT**  
Vice president, general secretary, and senior advisor to the president at the University of Rochester, Burgett is also a professor of music and previously served as dean of students at Rochester. He has a special interest in the treatment of human beings in relation to the development of future U.S. and world leaders.

> **REV. DR. ROBERT M. FRANKLIN ’75**
Presidential Distinguished Professor of Social Ethics at Emory University and visiting professor at Harvard Divinity School, Franklin’s work focuses on the theology of reconciliation through which leadership can bridge the gap between ethical tensions. A Morehouse alumnus, Franklin is former president of the Interdenominational Theological Center.

> **ALLAN GILMOUR**  
Vice chairman and chief financial officer for Ford Motor Company; Gilmour retired from Ford after a 34-year career, but rejoined the company in his current position in 2002. He is frequently invited to speak to corporate and community organizations from the perspective of a gay man in a position of influence.

> **PHILLIP RUSH**  
Program officer for the Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta. Rush’s expertise lies in community affairs and community relations. As a gay man, he is actively involved and has valued insight into the politics of the gay and lesbian community in Atlanta.

> **DR. ROOSEVELT THOMAS**  
President and founder of the American Institute for Managing Diversity Inc. (founded on Morehouse’s campus 19 years ago), Thomas focuses on strengthening communities and institutions through diversity initiatives that encourage a paradigm shift to a strategic diversity management process. A Morehouse alumnus, Thomas previously served as a faculty member and administrator at the College.

Charged with the task of collecting and analyzing information about community attitudes toward homosexuality, benchmarking best practices at other colleges and universities, and compiling recommendations for President Massey, the Local Advisory Committee, comprised of students, faculty, staff and alumni, met weekly to share its findings. Members of the group will continue to meet periodically during the implementation phase of the recommendations.

**LOCAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

> **Takkara Brunson**, Spelman student and Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance representative

> **Shirley Carpenter**, Morehouse associate vice president for human resources and Institutional Values Project representative

> **Jacqueline Davis**, Morehouse project coordinator for the Task Force on Tolerance and Diversity

> **Dr. Robert Dixon ’64**, Morehouse professor and chair of the Department of Physics

> **Erin Edwards**, Spelman student and AFREKETE representative

> **Dr. Rita Finley**, Morehouse assistant professor of biology and chair of the Faculty Council
beings and students, transcend the boundaries of identity and encompass the whole of the space we cohabit, especially the dormitories where we live together.

“Expect Respect,” which ran through May, also included an academic component. Faculty from the psychology, sociology, and philosophy and religion departments conducted educational forums for freshmen on three topics: the formation of gender identity, masculinity and sexuality, and the role of religion in responding to sexual orientation. The forums were followed by spirited discussions in the cafeteria.

“We found that before the sessions, there was a general lack of knowledge and a lot of misinformation about these issues among our students,” said Haynie. “Now, they are better equipped with information and terminology appropriate for the discussion.”

Developing Men for Leadership

That newfound knowledge will, no doubt, prove useful. One of the goals of a liberal arts education is to challenge students to think critically about a wide range of issues. At Morehouse, that now includes thinking critically about what it means to be a man, in general, and a Morehouse man, in particular.

“The perception of what constitutes masculinity is at stake,” said Fluker. “This is an all-male college so, first, we must ask what it means to be male in American culture. Second, we must begin to talk about the culturally distorted notion of black machismo, analyzing and rethinking market-stimulated images of black men. If we don’t deal with that, we probably won’t get to some of the root causes of the November 3 incident.”

Given Morehouse’s emphasis on academics, the Task Force report, which is due to President Massey by the end of June, is likely to include recommendations for a number of ongoing educational initiatives to help students continue their intellectual exploration and dialogue on issues related to male sexuality. The report, a comprehensive document that will be based on the focus group and survey data, as well as some anecdotal feedback, is also likely to recommend even stronger College policies regarding the prohibition of violence and harassment.

Whatever Morehouse does in its continuing efforts to address homophobia and intolerance on its campus, it most certainly will remain the focus of attention from interested people both inside and outside the College community. President Massey says that doesn’t bother him at all.

“While I certainly would not have wished for an incident like this to occur at Morehouse, I see it as an opportunity for the College to exercise leadership on an issue with which many institutions of higher education continue to struggle,” he said. “People all over the country, the world, perhaps, are looking to see what Morehouse will do in this situation because of our reputation for outstanding leadership during tough times and on tough issues.”

“At Morehouse, our rhetoric is exceptional,” said Massey. “Obviously, we do not always live up to it, but one thing that is true about us is that we keep trying to achieve what we espouse.”

EDITOR’S NOTE: The trial of the former Morehouse student who was accused of assaulting a fellow student concluded June 11, 2003. The young man was found guilty of aggravated assault and aggravated battery and sentenced to 10 years for each conviction, to run concurrently. He was acquitted of the hate crime charge.