n the fall of 1990, two dreamy-eyed high school seniors from Detroit visited Morehouse during traditional Homecoming festivities. The young men took the trip with members from the Detroit Chapter of the Morehouse National Alumni Association to see if Morehouse was a place they might want to attend. It was not long before they were won over by Morehouse’s rich history and campus culture. This was the starting point of the similar paths that childhood friends Tupac Hunter ’95 and Bill McConico ’96 would lead.

At Morehouse, Hunter and McConico were dorm roommates who were active in various campus organizations together. After graduation, these Detroit natives both went on to become Michigan State Representatives for the communities in which they grew up. Hunter and McConico say that their unique experiences at Morehouse armed them with the necessary tools to be influential leaders in their communities.

“Morehouse instills a higher calling to go out and shape the world. So, there’s an expectation when you come home from Morehouse that you’re going to do something for your community, not just yourself. And I’ve tried to deliver,” says 29-year-old McConico, who grew up on Detroit’s east side in Connant Gardens.

Getting elected was an amazing feat for McConico. He was a virtually unknown and very young candidate, with a three-man campaign staff, paltry campaign funds, and no support from the outgoing representative. Perseverance
State House

and a strong work ethic—tenets he says he learned at Morehouse—won the election for him in 2000 with 93 percent of the votes. He was reelected for a second term last November.

Once McConico proved that a young person could successfully break into Detroit’s old-guard politics, Hunter, also 29, decided to run for office a year and a half later. Beating out a field of six incredibly formidable candidates, Hunter won the Democratic primary election and ran unopposed in the general election last November. Like McConico, Hunter was young, with no prior political experience. But he says Morehouse gave him an attitude that he could accomplish anything he set his mind to, and he did just that.

As children, Hunter and McConico vowed to make Detroit a more attractive city to live in when they grew up. Hunter wanted to be an entrepreneur and McConico hoped to be mayor. These Michigan Democrats assumed their current positions determined to fulfill life-long dreams of rebuilding their badly deteriorated hometown.

Hunter and McConico grew up at the nadir of Detroit’s recent history. In the

1970s and 80s, the once bustling Motor City was plagued with a host of social and economic problems: failed businesses, high unemployment, high crime, violence and drugs in the public schools, and middle-class flight to the suburbs. Hunter grew up on the northwest side in Crary-St. Mary’s, an area notorious for drugs and gang activity at the time. It was also typical for Detroit kids to go off to college and never return home to live.

They tucked away their big dreams and immersed themselves in their schoolwork. They met at the University of Detroit Jesuit High School and Academy, and they quickly became best friends. Having heard great things about Morehouse from prominent area alumni and Detroit Chapter members, they joined a small group of high school students and took that fateful trip to Atlanta. Within a year, they were being indoctrinated in Morehouse culture during Freshman Week in 1991.

“At Spirit Night in Sale Hall Chapel, the presence of important alumni figures like Maynard Jackson ’56 and Spike Lee ’79 told me this was to be a very significant experience of a lifetime. They were professional, articulate and motivational. It got me charged,” says Hunter.

Hunter majored in urban studies and public policy, but initially had his sights on a career in investment banking. He traveled to Hong Kong and Singapore with the prestigious Spring Tour and was selected for a Sponsors for Educational Opportunity (SEO) internship on Wall Street.

“The things I learned looking for internships or jobs while at Morehouse are the same types of things I’ve used to run my campaign and conduct my business as a legislator,” Hunter says. “I learned how to prepare for an interview, how to network, how to work a cocktail party and correspond with people on high levels.”

McConico majored in history and was always the political-minded of the two. (He wanted to be president of the United States as a child—and still does.) “I always knew Bill would run for office, but I never imagined in a million years that I would,” Hunter confesses. “Bill was in the Student Government Association, always doing something political. I was always turned off by politics.”

Attending Morehouse was the perfect springboard for a budding politician like McConico, a four-year UNCF scholar. He landed a post as treasurer for the Freshman Class and later joined the SGA in the same position. “If you can politic at Morehouse to get into the SGA, you can politic on any level,” McConico said. “We knocked on doors in Hubert Hall when I was running for SGA treasurer, and we knocked on doors in the three cities that I represent. We went to the students and got them to the polls, and we used that same formula seven years later in my campaign for the state house.”

When U.S. Congressman John Lewis Hon. ’98 was recruiting Morehouse students to intern at his Atlanta district office, McConico jumped at the opportunity. Two summers later, he would work in Lewis’ Washington, D.C., office. His experiences in Lewis’ office taught him that he could get involved in politics early and make a difference.

“Congressman Lewis taught me to be a principled politician without getting caught in the hoopla of the position. You

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can represent those who sent you to do the job with morals and convictions every single day. That's what I try to bring to my office right now,” McConico said.

While in college, Hunter and McConico were very active in organizations like the Morehouse Mentoring Program and the Pre-Alumni Association, and they also pledged Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity together through the graduate chapter.

“If you're just gonna go to class and then go home, you might as well not go to Morehouse. The Morehouse experience is a holistic experience,” McConico said. He also went on to become president of the National Pre-Alumni Council. After graduation, McConico entered law school at Case Western Reserve University with ambitions of practicing in a big law firm.

Meanwhile, Hunter had graduated and returned home, enriched from the Morehouse experience he had received, to find a different Detroit in 1995. A new mayor and a better economy were slowly spurring new business developments and tourism, breathing new life into the once dying city. Hunter was inspired.

“Detroit was making a comeback. I wanted to be a part of the coming renaissance, and get in on the ground floor,” Hunter said. He immediately got involved with his community council and even started a block club in his neighborhood. He landed a position as a staff aide to the Detroit City Council, and later served as project manager at the Detroit Economic Growth Corporation for six years. “I have a lot of stake in Detroit's growth because I managed various retail, residential, industrial, and commercial projects that will benefit the city and contribute to its turnaround.”

After law school, McConico was also excited to find his hometown on the rise again. Like Hunter, he reconnected with his own community and realized that the time was right to start making some moves. McConico left for the state capital in Lansing and became the youngest chief of staff for any state representative at the time.

“Once I got in the mix, I realized I could do the job right now — I didn't have to wait,” said McConico. “I decided to run for state representative within a year after law school graduation.”

With the same brotherly spirit cultivated while at Morehouse, Hunter assisted McConico as a member of his campaign staff. A year and a half later, McConico returned the favor. “I was very hard on him. I wanted him to win, so I gave him a lot of tough love,” McConico said. “We definitely had our yelling sessions, but his work ethic on that campaign was amazing. He worked very hard and deserved the victory.”

These men possess a strong sense of camaraderie and brotherhood, without any hint of competition. Their priorities lie in addressing the needs of their communities and rearing their children: Hunter's two-year-old son Jalen and McConico's four-year-old daughter Kendall.

“I want my son to go away to college, hopefully Morehouse,” Hunter said. “And after he accomplishes what he sets out to accomplish, I want it to be in his mind that Detroit is a place to come back and settle in.”

As young Democrats (and the only Morehouse alumni) in the majority-Republican Michigan state legislature, Hunter and McConico still have many challenges ahead of them. With the United States Supreme Court considering a decision to reverse affirmative action policies at the University of Michigan (and ultimately all state-funded colleges), they both are worried that their work to uplift their constituents may become an uphill battle.

“If affirmative action is ended in higher education, we'll be left with state-sponsored segregation,” says McConico, who authored position papers on affirmative action for the National Black Law Students Association while in law school. “Then you're going to see less educational opportunities for African Americans and minorities as a whole at a time when education is the most critical it's ever been. We have a duty to make sure that our educational opportunities are available.”

Tupac Hunter '95
B.A. Urban Studies and Public Policy, with Departmental Honors

CURRENT POSITION: Michigan State Representative, 9th District—Detroit

HOUSE COMMITTEES: Appropriations
Judiciary Sub-Committee (Ranking Democrat)
Transportation Sub-Committee
Capital Outlay Sub-Committee

AFFILIATIONS: Detroit Branch of NAACP, Michigan Democratic Party
Pre-Alumni Caucus, Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., Geometry Lodge No. 49 (Prince Hall Affiliation).

MENTORS: Alumni: William McGill ’47, Charles Allen ’70, Charles D. Moody ’78; Faculty & Staff: Benjamin McLaurin ’69, Dr. Ebenezer Aka Jr., Curtis H. Crockett