MOREHOUSE was written all over Maynard Jackson. The impressive, darn near regal bearing. The courage, conviction and morality. The erudite orations that often swayed the masses to do “what was right.” Jackson graduated from Morehouse in 1956, but the College never left him. It showed in the way he represented its best ideals.

“Maynard was the quintessential Morehouse Man, part of the school’s tradition of leaders who make tremendous contributions to society,” says Walter Fluker, director of the Morehouse College Leadership Center.

Continued on page 54
Leading the city to international greatness as Atlanta’s first black mayor ranks prominently among Jackson’s myriad contributions. Much of that was due to his overseeing the successful expansion of Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport, helping to make it the world’s busiest airport and the largest economic generator in the southeastern part of the country.

But more importantly, following in the tradition of prominent alumni like Howard Thurman ’23 and Martin Luther King Jr. ’48, Jackson was an “ethical leader,” says Fluker, whose Leadership Center promotes ethical leadership and offers a minor in Leadership Studies.

Through his groundbreaking affirmative action program, Jackson created opportunities for all citizens to benefit from Atlanta’s development. His triumphant stance to not begin expansion on the Hartfield International Airport until blacks and women were fairly represented in the awarding of city contracts is the stuff of political legend.

“Maynard was moved by his spirituality to do what was right. His spirituality formed his ethical insight,” Fluker says. “To miss Maynard is to miss his spirituality.”

Spirituality is a large part of an ideal Morehouse Man, said Dean Lawrence Carter, dean of the Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel. According to Carter, Jackson demonstrated the “highest form of spirituality—cooperation” when he was able to work with former segregationists to make Atlanta a better city for everybody. Carter, who is also a professor of religion, as well as the curator and archivist for the Chapel, recognized
Jackson and his place in history by hanging a portrait of him in the Chapel's International Hall of Honor. The Hall celebrates the contributions of nearly 100 individuals who used the tenets of King's Beloved Community, such as non-violence, to fight for social and economic justice.

Again true to his Morehouse roots, Jackson was committed to producing leaders to follow in his formidable footsteps. “His interest was always in developing leaders for the 21st century. Morehouse has always been about producing leadership, and Maynard took the issue seriously, especially black leadership,” said Fluker.

Jackson was a hands-on honorary chair of the advisory board of the Center, often keeping Fluker informed of the best practices of leadership to impart to young Men of Morehouse. Jackson was also the first member of the board to make a significant monetary contribution to the Center.

His commitment to developing youth wasn't restricted to the Morehouse campus, however. In 1992, he established the hugely successful Maynard Jackson Youth Foundation, a teaching program that develops leadership and mentoring skills for high school students in the Atlanta public school system (see sidebar.)

But as much as he did for others in his capacity either as lawyer, mayor or successful businessman—his Atlanta-based Jackson Securities, with branches in several cities, ranks among the top black-owned securities businesses in the nation—Jackson always found time to remain engaged with his alma mater.

An intellectual prodigy, as well as a son of a Morehouse Man (Maynard Jackson Sr., '14), Jackson graduated from the College at the age of 18, a time when many students enter college—four years after his early matriculation as a Ford Foundation Early Admission Scholar. Tobe Johnson, a Morehouse political science professor who shared a class with Jackson in the '50s, believes that Jackson was especially appreciative of the “milieu of Morehouse... imbuing in you the idea you can and will achieve. “I think that's why he spent so much time and energy at Morehouse [after he left]. It was his way of paying the school back,” says Johnson, who served as an “informal advisor” in the Jackson administration.

Jackson's long-term commitments to the College included membership on the Morehouse College National Alumni Association and 18 years of service on the Morehouse Board of Trustees, including tenure as chair of the policy-setting Governance Committee. Words like “active” and “tireless” pop up when members of these bodies talk about Jackson's contributions.

Continued on page 56
"He was a strong supporter of the Alumni Association, very active," said John Draper '57, who serves as the Association’s acting director. "We could always depend on him to speak to the metro chapters of the alumni association. I wish we had more like him."

Said President Walter E. Massey '58: "As a board of trustees member, Maynard was a tireless advocate for excellence, a visionary who believed his alma mater's future role in the education of African American men would be even greater than its past."

There is a belief—perhaps a hope—that a departed person's spirit will dwell with the people and places that he held dear in life. Jackson, the consummate businessman, made the necessary arrangements to ensure that there would be tangible evidence of his spirit, leaving a scholarship for political science students and his political writings to the College. In turn, to honor his spirit of tested, tried and true commitment to the ideals of ethical leadership, the Morehouse Board of Trustees recently passed action to name the new Leadership Center in his honor.

Jackson died June 23 while traveling to Washington, D.C., of a heart attack. A few days later, on June 27, Maynard made his final visit to the campus. Thousands came to say farewell as he lay in state in the King Chapel. Later that evening, a program was held to celebrate his community spirit... an indomitable spirit that led him to volunteer his time and talent to the House, impart his wisdom to young and old alike, give generously toward scholarships and champion the Leadership Center and its call for ethical leadership.

On the day of his funeral, June 28, Atlanta mourned the loss of a political giant in a ceremony attended by thousands at the Atlanta Civic Center on June .

It seemed everyone—from former presidents to Atlanta politicians to Morehouse staff—had a “Maynard moment” to share.

While Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin recalled how Jackson was the impetus for her seeking the City's highest office, people like Phyllis Bentley, director of Academic Operations at Morehouse, told of a brief, slightly less momentous, but equally memorable encounter with Jackson.

Bentley had on occasion held short conversations with Jackson when he visited the campus. But then again, so had countless other faculty, staff and students. One day, as she passed him near Gloster Hall, she said a quick "Hello, Mr. Jackson" and kept moving, not expecting the busy ex-mayor and businessman to remember her name.

As she walked away, Jackson replied: “Bye, Phyllis.”

She was impressed. ■

Indeed, Atlanta had lost a mayor that had put the city on the international map, but Morehouse... she had lost a beloved son.
Maynard Jackson changed the way Wayne Martin thought about everything. The college he wanted to attend. The career he wanted. Even about being late for band practice.

Martin, a participant in the Maynard Jackson Youth Foundation, had every intention of moving out of Georgia to attend college. Because of Jackson’s influence, he is now at Morehouse studying political science. And, like Jackson, he plans on becoming a lawyer and practicing in Atlanta.

What also impressed Martin about Jackson was the man’s dedication to the Youth Foundation. “He never missed a session,” Martin recalls. Up until then, Martin had thought missing high school band practices was no big thing. “But I saw how dedicated he was and that made me become more disciplined. That’s what stands out now most about those [Youth Foundation] sessions and that’s what I use today to help me achieve my goals.”

But beyond career goals and dedication to the task at hand, Martin was enamored by the entire Maynard Jackson package.

“It was his presence, the way he handled himself, his confidence that I really admired above everything else,” said Martin, now 20. “I said, ‘I want to be like Mr. Jackson.’”

Jackson became Martin’s mentor when Martin began participating in the Maynard Jackson Youth Foundation as an 11th grader at Therrell High School in southwest Atlanta. The foundation partners with Atlanta public schools to identify at-risk, low-income eleventh-graders who show leadership potential.

“Even more than top grades, [these participants] have a spark of leadership so that we can develop them for leadership positions in the workplace,” said John Holley, the foundation’s president. The foundation recruits nearly 20 students a year and teaches them to master the spoken and written language, hone salesmanship skills and learn the stock market, among other subjects. They also are encouraged to give back to the community by serving as mentors, tutors or counselors. The program features guest speakers, mentors and field trips, such as the one the group took to the Chicago Stock Exchange.

Nearly 130 students have gone through the program since its inception in 1992. Some of the foundation’s participants have gone on to such institutions of higher learning as Morehouse, and Emory and Harvard universities—or service in the military.

Holley credits Jackson’s leadership skills and his commitment to excellence for the success of the program. “We don’t tolerate failure,” he said.

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