

**“The Soul of Morehouse and the Future of the Mystique”**  
**President’s Town Hall Meeting**

**Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel**

**Tuesday, April 21, 2009**

**11 a.m.**

*(The following is an excerpt from prepared remarks delivered by Dr. Robert M. Franklin to the students of Morehouse College.)*

...I’d like to address a subject that is vital to every man of Morehouse, namely, the soul of Morehouse and the future of the Mystique.

I have tried to translate the mystique into terms more comprehensible to the public. So, you have heard my vision language on many occasions and many of you have already begun to interpret and apply this vision in creative ways. Here is the vision in eight simple words:

***Renaissance Men with social conscience and global perspective.***

Morehouse produces such leaders in a very special kind of community; we call it “The Brotherhood.” ... [The Morehouse Mystique] is a distinctive and mysterious bond between good men that strengthen us when we’re together and sustains us when we’re apart and until we meet again. It is captured in rituals like the College hymn. Show me one other college that sings its hymn in a manner where a mystical bond seems to radiate above and within the members. This is Morehouse. It cannot be reduced to words or data.

But after two years, I have learned something that I did not [know] before. One of the critical ingredients in the Morehouse mystique is a fundamental sense of discontent with mediocrity and nonsense. Morehouse men bond around their complaints about how Morehouse often functions or ‘dysfunctions.’ In other words, you cannot be a Morehouse Man in the making—a Renaissance Man with social conscience and global perspective—unless you are uneasy about the human condition. I want each of you to have a healthy impatience with the status quo. And I will declare at every Morehouse commencement that

Morehouse men must be so sensitive to the presence of disorder, mediocrity and injustice that they cannot sleep well at night until they tip the scale toward justice. Unto whom much is given, much is required.

## THE SOUL IN DISTRESS

But today, our soul is sick and our mystique is threatened. Not for want of more financial resources. We have never had enough money. (And, it is amazing that we continue to produce Ivy League results with HBCU resources.) Nor is the mystique threatened by what the Harvard historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. called “discrepancies between our rhetoric and our reality.” Every institution has its discrepancies and gaps in quality and performance. My administration is fully committed to eradicating and alleviating Morehouse discrepancies and I trust that you see evidence of progress....

Our soul is threatened by the presence of a few people inside and outside the Morehouse village who are spiritually ill and disoriented. So, I’d like to speak very directly to those men and women, but primarily to men of Morehouse. As all of you listen to these remarks, I want you to do two things: first, help us to disseminate this message widely, especially to our brothers who were unable or unwilling to join the president in this historic chapel meeting....

Second, to those who have not yet committed to the Renaissance and renewal of Morehouse, I want you to listen and make a decision about whether you should remain at Morehouse. I know that a few of you are enrolled because it was mama’s or daddy’s dream. But, if it isn’t your dream, you should exercise the discernment and the courage to transfer to a more suitable environment. There are a lot of schools out there that would love to have a young man who qualified for admission to Morehouse. And remember that there are thousands of brothers out there who did not receive a Morehouse admission letter.

## A PIVOTAL DATE FOR THE MOREHOUSE RENAISSANCE

On this day, April 21<sup>st</sup>, I want to set forth and clarify the expectations of the Morehouse Renaissance. This date is pregnant with meaning. According to tradition and myth, on April 21, 753 B.C., Romulus and his twin brother, Remus, founded Rome, perhaps the first great international city, the first world

house. Today, I use that event to symbolize the groundbreaking of a renewed Morehouse as world house.

I have articulated five attributes of the Renaissance Man. My staff calls them the “Five Wells.” Well read, spoken, traveled, dressed and balanced. (To remember them in order, remember that “R,S,T” are consecutive letters of the alphabet. You’re on your own for remembering the final “D” and “B.”) I want to highlight three of these today: reading (or the life of the mind), speech and dress.

- Well-read. You have seen that HBCUs face a crisis of graduating students, especially black men. In many schools, less than 29% of the men enrolled graduate within six years. This year, Morehouse is reporting a rate of 67%, which is exceptional to most people—but not good enough for Morehouse. Last week, at the student election debate, I heard a candidate announce an initiative called “GOT: Graduate On Time.” Perhaps more parents should follow the model of elite institutions that award scholarships. They pay for eight semesters, period, and only if the student maintains a 3.0 GPA.
- Last week, the College honored several hundred men who earned a place on the Honor Roll at Morehouse College. Recently, a record was set as 688 students (out of our 2,600 total) earned the distinction of Dean’s List placement. I challenged all of my students to aim for this honor and then to aim higher. But, if you need assistance, be man enough to ask for help rather than fail a course. Our teachers are smart, but most of them cannot read your mind or follow the games some students play to pass courses without really learning much.
- It gives me heartburn to mention this topic, but there is the matter of academic dishonesty. During my time here, we heard the joke, ‘All work and no plagiarism make for dull papers.’ Some of you are smart, but not as smart as you think. We know about using technology to cheat, about texting answers into exams. Brothers, someone is paying for a Morehouse education. Shouldn’t you be trying to get it? Do the right thing.
- I have seen too many students standing in lines wasting time. You should carry something to read and make good use of your down time. Read books, not just summaries of books. Choose an accomplished and prolific writer as a role model. But just as important—if not more—study

grammar and syntax and the art of composition. General Education at Morehouse seeks to teach and encourage you to apply these fundamental rules. Learn the power of accurately constructed sentences and well-positioned words.

- It matters how well you write. Each of you must be able to write a solid personal statement for a job, graduate application or a fellowship. Once you have been accepted into the prestigious programs, it is crucial to be able to write flawless research papers, theses and dissertations. And on an ongoing basis, your written communications with superiors and colleagues in the workplace are of even more importance. I do not want employers or professors to call us and ask, 'How did Morehouse graduate a student who writes so poorly?'
- If you are not learning, if you need a tutor, ask for help. Morehouse provides tutors and we are about to establish a more comprehensive mentoring program inspired by a student-led movement called Resurgence of the Crown....
- ... The Renaissance Man is well-spoken. He chooses his words carefully. This reduces the necessity of relying on profanity or empty verbal placeholders like, 'um, um, ahh...' or nonsense like 'you know what I'm saying, you know what I'm saying?'
- Strive to have something valuable to say, and be in possession of elegant words and phrases that allow you to effectively communicate complex emotions and ideas. Profanity does not reflect your verbal grace and style. It suggests a lazy mind and is contrary to the Morehouse ideal...

## EXPECTATIONS FOR THE RENAISSANCE

- In the matter of violence. Morehouse will be a campus of peace and justice. We will be a violence-free zone. ... We have an excellent judicial council and it will continue to render decisions in student misconduct cases. But, I intend to take a personal interest in brothers who try to resolve conflict by violent means....

- In the matter of gender relations, Morehouse will be a community that respects women. We will be a community of zero tolerance for sexual abuse, date rape, prostitution, pimping and other forms of illegal behavior....
- In the matter of customer service and professionalism, Morehouse will operate in accord with the best practices of a selective, private college. I have heard your call for improved customer service. It is outrageous to learn that occasionally a faculty or staff member has behaved in ways that fall below Morehouse standards. We will not tolerate this. But, at the same time, we expect every one of you to show respect to all faculty and staff.
- It is unacceptable to be demanding or demeaning, threatening or challenging, insulting or inflammatory. We are here to meet your needs, but the staff and faculty are not obligated to yield to rudeness....
- The other issue concerns our campus and its conservation efforts. We are becoming a greener Morehouse. We will improve utilization of energy-efficient light bulbs and paper recycling. I want to thank students and alumni for working with my team to accomplish this.
- As for our attractive ambience, we employ the services of professionals to help maintain the grounds of the campus. ...We have a collective responsibility to ensure the cleanliness and hygiene of our dorm rooms, classrooms, bathrooms and the entire campus. If I can stoop to pick up trash, may I ask that you do the same?
- After all of the filth and trash that the slave system forced us to endure, how can we deliberately litter our campus with flyers and handbills? I have asked our General Counsel to prepare a legal communication to the companies that are employing people to dump handbills on our campus grounds....

## SQUARING IDENTITY AND ETHICS: A CAMPUS IMPERATIVE

In the matter of diversity, Morehouse will be a safe, respectful campus that balances personal liberty with the responsibility of membership in a moral community. Morehouse is blessed with a variety of diversity assets. You hail from 43 different states and 27 different countries. You are diverse in ethnicity and race, region, socio-economic background, culture, religion, political loyalty and personal interest. But all of you can and will become Renaissance Men.

As an all-male institution with the explicit mission of educating men with disciplined minds, perhaps the great challenge of this moment in history is our diversity of sexual orientation. ... Part of our greatness lies in our ability to accept men of quality who wish to uphold the Morehouse mystique. We do not pry into a person's private identity; nor do we wish to have identity paraded in an undignified manner. We do demand that everyone aspire to high ethical standards and responsible community behavior. Identity must always square with, and yield to, ethics.

...I have appointed a committee on Diversity and Tolerance to review the effectiveness of what we have done and are currently doing. You will hear more in the fall. But, let me be clear: three basic principles will govern our life together in this moral community:

1. The principle of safety and security. Anthropologist Abraham Maslow has observed that if people do not feel secure, not much else will matter. Every student, staff and faculty member must feel safe and secure in the Morehouse community....
2. The principle of diversity. It is a privilege to study and live in a diverse community. People often assume that an HBCU is less diverse than other majority institutions. Well, I've been a student and taught at majority institutions and they are hardly more diverse than Morehouse. We have a small percent of non-African American men. Most majority schools have a small percent of nonwhite students.
- Since we are unique, why don't we use this opportunity to model something our community needs? Straight men should learn more about the outlooks and contributions of gay men. Read a book by a gay author. Have an intelligent conversation with a gay neighbor. At a time when it was truly scandalous to have homosexual friends or associates, Dr. King looked to Bayard Rustin, a black gay man, as a trusted adviser. And, Malcolm X regarded James Baldwin, a black gay man, as a brilliant chronicler of the black experience. To my straight brothers, diversity at Morehouse is an opportunity that can enrich your education if you are courageous enough to seize the opportunity. We cannot force you, but we invite you to learn from your environment.

3. The principle of decorum. Decorum is a Latin word that means orderly, dignified, becoming and handsome. ...

- Here, I offer a word about being well-dressed, the fourth of the “Well” attributes. I have not desired to be overly prescriptive about this. You do not have to wear a tie and jacket to class, although no one would object to it. You’re a college student. You can enjoy yourself while wearing comfortable clothing that respects the fact that you are part of a community of educated and ethical men...
- We cannot monitor what you wear when you leave campus, but while you are on the Morehouse campus, in the presence of adult learners, do not sag your pants, do not show your undergarments. Do not wear do-rags, and do not wear baseball caps in class or in the cafeteria. ...
- And, to those who would experiment with wearing clothing associated with a women’s garb (dresses, tunics, purses and pumps) I am directing that you not exhibit these items on the Morehouse campus. Wear what you wish to off campus. But, while you are here on the ground where Mays and Martin and Maynard walked, those items are off limits. A man in women’s clothing on campus is provocative and will not be tolerated.

I want to establish a culture of high expectation and encouragement, not one of enforcement and harassment. But, I ask you to work with me to restore the Morehouse that our mothers and fathers prayed and sighed for.

## THE CONCLUSION OF THE MATTER

So, in summary, I want to say that Morehouse is your house. You must take responsibility for its excellence.

...If you cannot follow the guidelines of a moral community, then leave. Change your behavior or separate from this college.

...If you want to be part of something rare and noble, something that the world has not often seen—a community of educated, ethical, disciplined black men more powerful than a standing army—then you’ve come to the right place....

**Up you mighty men of Morehouse, you aristocrats of spirit, you can  
accomplish what you will!**