

MORGAN'S LONG AND CONTINUING LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP

*"Appointed by Gov. Parris N. Glendening on
Oct. 23, Judge Bell is one of the state's highest
constitutional officers and one of only a handful of
African American chief judges in the country."*

BY WILEY A. HALL, 3RD

Two weeks after his appointment as Chief Judge of the Maryland Court of Appeals, Robert M. Bell chose Morgan State University as the site of his first major public address. The occasion was the university's annual Founder's Day Convocation. And Judge Bell - the first African American ever to head Maryland's highest court - used the event to pay homage to Morgan's 129-year legacy of leadership.

"My success," he said during the Nov. 7 ceremony, "is symbolic of the legacy of this institution. I am just one of the many individuals who symbolize the importance of Morgan and other historically black colleges and universities. Schools such as Morgan have over the years been the birthplace for many firsts like me. One need look only at local, state, and national politics to see what Morgan's legacy has been."

Morgan's role in history is clear. For centuries, segregation meant that HBCUs such as Morgan provided the only chance most African Americans had to go to college. Just as the black church stood at the spiritual center, black colleges served as the intellectual hub of their respective communities. In Maryland, most of the region's black doctors, lawyers, clergymen, educators, social workers, and performing artists spent their formative years at either Morgan, Bowie State, Coppin State, or what is now known as the University of Maryland Eastern Shore.

What may not be clear, however, is the degree to which HBCUs continue to produce a significant proportion of the black leadership, professional, and middle classes. Yet Morgan's impact has been demonstrated in particularly dramatic fashion in recent months.

In January, for instance, Richard N. Dixon, who received both a bachelor of science degree and a master's degree in business administration from Morgan, became the first African American to serve as Treasurer of Maryland, one of the highest constitutional officers in the state. As treasurer, Mr. Dixon sits with the governor and state comptroller on the state Board of Public Works, supervises the state's \$2.6 billion investment fund, and is vice chairman of the board that manages Maryland's \$20 billion pension fund.

Then in February, Kweisi Mfume stepped down after 10 years in Congress to become president and chief executive officer of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Mr. Mfume, who had assumed national prominence as chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, graduated magna cum laude from Morgan and currently serves on the university's Board of Regents.

All three men made a special effort to share the limelight with their alma mater. Mr. Dixon held his swearing-in ceremony as state treasurer on campus. The Morgan choir performed at Mr. Mfume's installation as NAACP presi-



Maryland's Court of Appeals

dent in Washington. And Judge Bell's speech at the university's Founder's Day convocation focused on Morgan's role as an incubator for leadership.

"For all of us, it was not simply coming to Morgan and getting a good education that enabled us to achieve these heights," Judge Bell said after listing several of the national and local leaders who graduated from Morgan. "No, Morgan also helped us develop a strong sense of community and leadership."

Morgan's legacy stretches back to the institution's earliest days as a training ground for African American clergymen in the Methodist Church. George W.F. McMechen established a tradition of public service when he became the first person to graduate from Morgan College in 1895. After obtaining a degree from Yale Law School, Mr. McMechen eventually returned to Baltimore and became the first African American to serve on the city's board of school commissioners.

Today, Morgan awards more undergraduate degrees to African Americans than any other institution in the state, including the majority of those receiving degrees in engineering, physics, telecommunications, marketing, and elementary education. In a 1993 survey, 36 percent of Morgan gradu-

ates went on to graduate school - 12 percent higher than the statewide average - and 80 percent of the university's graduates were working in a field related to their undergraduate major.

"The role of historically black colleges and universities such as Morgan has not changed, even though African Americans ostensibly have access to any campus in the country," noted Dr. Earl S. Richardson, Morgan's president. "We continue to be the primary proving ground for leadership in the African American community and, indeed, for the broader community. If anything, our role has broadened. We are training the next generation of political leaders here. But we also are training the next generation of African American leaders in the fields of science and engineering."

The impact of Morgan's graduates may have exceeded even the founder's wildest dreams.

Said Judge Bell, "even [the founders] did not know that the enterprise they created would develop over the years into an institution whose football team would play in a sport's classic in Tokyo, whose choir would perform before enthusiastic, appreciative audiences in Helsinki and Leningrad, whose graduates would serve in the U.S. Congress and be generals in the U.S. Army, whose faculty would hold

Guggenheim and MacArthur Fellowships, and whose president would be an educational advisor to the President of the United States.

"This is a venerable institution," the jurist continued, "where - if I may borrow the words of President Richardson - 'thousands of ordinary people achieve absolutely extraordinary things.'"

Judge Bell certainly has reached extraordinary heights.

As chief judge, he presides over the state's seven-member Court of Appeals and oversees Maryland's entire judicial branch, a sprawling \$175 million a year bureaucracy that includes 250 judges. The chief judge appoints the administrative judges of the district and circuit courts and has a profound influence over judicial policy, standards and practices in Maryland. Appointed by Gov. Parris N. Glendening on Oct. 23, Judge Bell is one of the state's highest constitutional officers and one of only a handful of African American chief judges in the country.

Other successful alumni include: Judge Harry Cole, Class of '43 and chairman of the Board of Regents, who was the first African American to sit on the Court of Appeals and one of the first to serve in the state Senate; W. Wilson Goode, '61, who was the first African American elected mayor of Philadelphia; and Congressman Parren J. Mitchell, the first African American to represent Maryland's Seventh District.

As Majority Leader, state Senator Clarence W. Blount, '50, is one of the most powerful leaders in the Maryland General Assembly, chairs the Economic and Environmental Affairs Committee, and sits on several other committees including Legislative Policy, Rules, Executive Nominations, and Spending Affordability.

And as chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, Del. Howard P. Rawlings, '58, is one of the most influential leaders in the state House of Delegates. Morgan graduates comprise more than a third of the members of the state's Legislative Black Caucus. Morgan graduate Arrie W. Davis is one of the 13 judges on the Court of Special Appeals and at least half a dozen judges on the district and circuit courts attended the university. In fact, two of the most recent appointees to the bench happen to have gone to Morgan: Sheila R. Tillerson, Class of '79, was elevated from the district court to the Prince Georges County Circuit Court; and Bonita J. Dancy who was appointed to the District Court of Baltimore.

A native of Rocky Mount, N.C., Judge Bell grew up in East Baltimore, the youngest of three boys. He was a student leader at Dunbar High School and participated in the student sit-ins and protest marches that marked the early years of the civil rights movement. He arrived at Morgan in the fall of 1961, but was hospitalized with tuberculosis after one semester. He returned two years later, though, and majored in history and political science. He was president of the student government and chief justice of the Dormitory Court during his undergraduate career. He built a reputation on campus as a coalition builder during a period of student activism and political turmoil.

"The culture at Morgan was such that everyone of my generation was aware of the fact that we were being groomed

for leadership," said Judge Bell in a recent interview.

"I learned that how you do things is just as important as what you do. Diplomacy was my forte. I saw myself as a bridge between the students and the administration. I never had a problem going to the dean and discussing issues before we [students] took action. Morgan taught me to respect authority but not to fear it."

The jurist's ability for building coalitions was cited as one of the deciding factors in his appointment.

"Morgan made me," Judge Bell said. "I credit Morgan with shaping my values and goals, with instilling in me a sense of social responsibility that, I hope, has characterized my career as a jurist."

Mr. Dixon credited Morgan in a similar way after his appointment as state treasurer last January.

"Morgan provided me with an excellent, well-rounded education," Mr. Dixon said. "It wasn't the only important influence in my life, but it was indeed an important influence."

Just as importantly, Morgan alumni led the lobbying effort that persuaded Gov. Parris N. Glendening to appoint Judge Bell to Maryland's highest court.

Judge Bell acknowledged that support on Founders' Day. "I want you to know this morning that my fellow Morgan alumni and my friends provided the leadership for the community of citizens who coalesced behind my appointment as Chief Justice. It was their leadership that is responsible for where I am.

"In fact," Judge Bell continued, "while some have said openly that historically black colleges and universities are anachronisms - that they have outlived their usefulness - these African American leaders, all sons and daughters of Morgan, have secured the state's guarantee not only that Morgan State University will survive and prosper, but also that state and local governments will become increasingly fair and inclusive."

The judge then urged students to continue the pioneering spirit of their predecessors.

"You must become educated people who boldly go where no Morganite has gone before," he said. "You cannot become the first African American to head the judicial system in Maryland, I have beaten you to that goal. But you can become the first Morganite to sit on the Supreme Court of the United States. And you cannot become the first Morganite to be Solicitor General of the City of Baltimore. Regent Neal Janey has beaten you to that goal. But you can become the first Morganite to be elected mayor. One Morganite has already beaten you to the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, but you can become the first to win the Nobel Prize for Literature or for Peace, or for Science.

"You cannot become the first Morganite to win a Fulbright Scholarship to study abroad. Nearly 100 Morgan graduates have done that already. But you can become the first to win a Rhodes Scholarship.

"There are plenty records out there that beckon you to be broken," Judge Bell told the assemblage. "Morgan can prepare you. If you want to be first, you are wise to have come to Morgan."

