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A Tribute to Mordecai Johnson

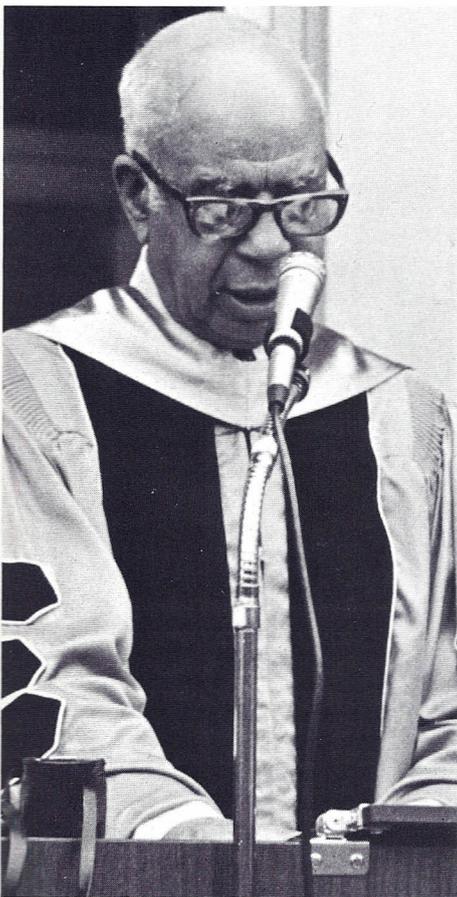
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Dr. Asa T. Spaulding

A Tribute to Mordecai Johnson

The following remarks were made by Dr. Asa T. Spaulding, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, on September 6, 1973, on the occasion of the naming of the University's Administration Building in honor of Dr. Mordecai Wyatt Johnson, President Emeritus of Howard University.

After having existed for almost 60 years, the Board of Trustees of Howard University turned—for the first time—to a Black man in 1926 to head the institution. The strong, dynamic, visionary young man called upon to perform this awesome task was 37-year-old Mordecai Wyatt Johnson.

Thirty four years later, in 1960, Mordecai Johnson retired as President of Howard at the age of 72. During those 35 years, the character, physical form and the foundation of Howard as we know it today were molded by the spiritual mind and genius of Mordecai Johnson.

When he retired in 1960, he left some lasting impressions—impressions that most of us can be proud of. Some of these are: full accreditation of all of Howard's colleges and schools, almost tripling of the student population and enlarging the campus into a \$38 million educational facility, from a meager \$2 million plant. He realized then, as we, too, now know only too well, that quality education costs money. And, he was particularly successful in persuading the United States Congress to appropriate funds each year to Howard with the commitment on the part of Congress to assist Howard in becoming a "university of the first rank."

Mordecai Johnson is a missionary, an educator of the highest caliber, a dedicated administrator and an orator of phenomenal proportions. His preachments have touched the lives of literally thousands of men and women.

His father, a former slave, and Baptist minister, was considered a "mighty powerful preacher" in the modest southern church where he delivered his sermons weekly. The deacons there used to say of the elder Johnson's sermons, "He lays down the word right out of the mouth of God." Such words also apply to the younger Mordecai Johnson who was ordained a Baptist minister in 1916. For his talent as an outstanding preacher, Dr. Johnson himself used to say, "The Lord told me to speak, but He did not tell me when to stop."

Mordecai Johnson's mother was the most profoundly influencing factor in his life. On the occasion of his mother's death—when he was only 27 years old—he was forced to ponder the age-long question of life and death. He reached a conclusion that he would justify his life by devoting it to the service of the needy and the poor of his race.

When he accepted the offer to become the President of Howard, he was young in age, but mentally dedicated, and spiritually prepared to enter into an era which proved to have far-reaching effects on higher education, not only as it related to the students at Howard, but also as it related to other parts of the country and the world.

As a symbol of his many years of dedicated, loyal and unselfish service to Howard University, The Board of Trustees has declared that this building be known henceforth, and forevermore, as the Mordecai Wyatt Johnson Building.

It is our great hope that the activities which go on within the walls of this building always be conducted in the spirit of the man whose name it bears. □