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# COMMENCEMENT '91

Editorial Staff

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**COMMENCEMENT '91****I. The Honorees**

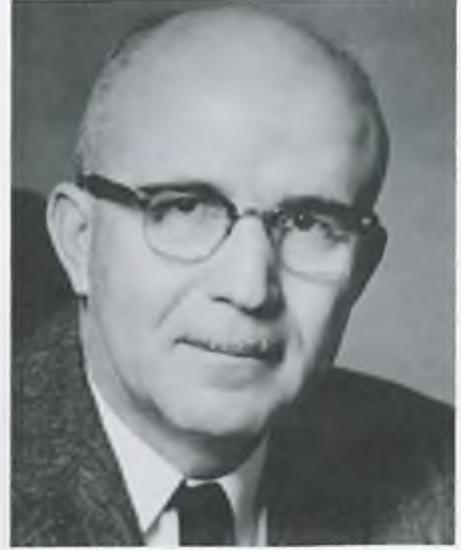
56



Sharon Pratt Dixon



Louis W. Sullivan, M.D.



Augustus F. Hawkins

**A**pproximately 2,000 candidates received undergraduate and graduate degrees, diplomas, certificates and military commissions during Howard's commencement exercises on May 11.

The commencement address was delivered by Sharon Pratt Dixon, mayor of Washington, D.C.—an alumna of Howard University.

Dixon received one of six honorary degrees awarded during the graduation exercises. The other honorary degree recipients were: Louis W. Sullivan, secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Augustus F. Hawkins, former congressman (D-Calif.); Wayne R. Bryant, majority leader of the New Jersey Assembly; Morris S. Dees Jr., civil rights

lawyer; and Asa G. Yancey, retired medical director of Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta, Ga.

SHARON PRATT DIXON received the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws. She became the chief executive officer of the District of Columbia in January, 1991, after being with the law firm of Sidley & Austin. She had been vice president for public policy with the Potomac Electric Power Company from 1976 to 1989, and a professor at the old Antioch School of Law.

Dixon earned a baccalaureate degree in political science in 1965 and a law degree in 1968 from Howard. She has also served on Howard's Board of Trustees.

LOUIS W. SULLIVAN, M.D., received the honorary Doctor of Laws degree. Prior

to his current appointment in 1989, Sullivan headed the Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta for 14 years. He is also a former project director of the Boston Sickle Cell Center and director of hematology at Boston City Hospital. Also, he has been a professor of medicine at Boston University School of Medicine.

Sullivan earned a bachelor's degree from Morehouse College in 1954 and a medical degree from Boston University in 1958.

AUGUSTUS F. HAWKINS, who had been representing the 29th Congressional District of California since 1962 until his retirement this past January, received the honorary Doctor of Laws degree, in recognition "for his long and dedicated service to his state, country and fellow



Wayne R. Bryant



Morris S. Dees Jr.



Asa G. Yancey, M.D.

citizens.''

As chairman of the Education and Labor Committee, he had been a principal guardian of education policy and a watchdog of major labor issues in the nation. Before being elected to Congress, Hawkins served in the California State Assembly for 28 years.

Hawkins received a degree in economics from the University of California at Los Angeles and has earned numerous honorary degrees.

WAYNE R. BRYANT, who last year became the first African American elected as majority leader in the history of the state of New Jersey, received the honorary Doctor of Laws degree. The democrat from the Fifth Legislative District, representing

Camden-Gloucester counties, has served in the New Jersey General Assembly since 1981.

He is also a partner in the law firm of Freeman, Zeller and Bryant, based in Camden, N.J., and has held many municipal and county government positions.

Bryant earned a bachelor's degree from Howard in 1969 and a law degree from Rutgers University in 1972.

MORRIS S. DEES JR., who is the co-founder of the Southern Poverty Law Center in Montgomery, Ala., received an honorary Doctor of Laws degree. He has been involved in civil rights litigation with the center since 1971 and is its chief trial counsel.

Dees is a graduate of the University of

Alabama School of Law.

ASA G. YANCEY, M.D., received an honorary Doctor of Science degree for his work as a health care administrator and medical educator.

Yancey served as medical director of Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta and was associate dean at Emory University School of Medicine from 1972 until his retirement in 1989. He is currently a member of the Fulton-DeKalb Hospital Authority, which is the governing body for Grady Memorial Hospital, and an emeritus professor of surgery at the Emory medical school.

Yancey earned a bachelor's degree from Morehouse College and a medical degree from the University of Michigan. □

# The Commencement Address

58

**W**e live at a time—just nine years—when we will cross the threshold to the 21st Century. We have been in America for four centuries. We have defended America in every war and in every revolution since Crispus Attucks.

We have contributed to her growth, enriched her culture—served her well. It's time for us to claim ownership—to own a piece of the American Rock. For this is our country. And, we need to embrace her as such. For we are truly Americans.

We've made the down payments. Paid the interest. The mortgage is paid up in full. This is our home.

Indeed, the African American could have welcomed the pilgrims to Plymouth Rock. For we were already here in bondage; toiling to create an America 13 years before the pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock.

We were and are first Americans. Maybe indentured servants. Slaves. Kept chattel. Freeman. And now, free-standing citizens, neither victim nor master, but Americans fully cognizant of our rights, potential and capacity to achieve.

Yet, for all of our long history in America, we harbor a strange reluctance to claim it as our own. To call America home—with all of its myriad manifestations of discrimination—is more than a peculiar notion to many African Americans.

How can this America be home when the time honored symbols of racial division are trotted out each and every election cycle to divide the American people?

How can this America be home when in a thousand innumerable ways our legitimate attempts to claim ownership of The Rock are habitually and consistently rebuffed and thwarted?

For it is abundantly clear that America's reluctance to accept the African American in all of our diversity continues.

Yet, claim this America we must. For America cannot reach her full majesty un-







60



til such time as all African Americans have full and equal ownership of The Rock. Not just the capstone of political power, but the capstone of economic power as well. For in America, one must have both political power and economic power to claim full citizenship.

We are an interesting and distinct country. Unlike other countries, we are not deeply divided or anchored in ideologies.

In Great Britain, Germany, or France, being part of the Labor Party, or the conservative or liberal wing really matters. Not really so in America. We are a nation of pragmatists. We have only two real beliefs—democracy and capitalism—and not necessarily in that order.

So, you are not participating in the American dream unless you have an anchor in each of these two experience.

While we have served America faithfully these four centuries, we did not gain access to any real aspect of the American dream until 1965 with the enactment of the Voting Rights Act. Almost 200 years after the Declaration of Independence—and 102 years after the Emancipation Proclamation.

What extraordinary strides we have made in the space of 20 plus years. For there is now one among us who serves as the governor of the Old Dominion [L. Douglas Wilder].

There is one among us who serves as the third highest ranking member of the House of Representatives—Bill Gray. [Gray now heads the United Negro College Fund.]

There is one among us who serves as the chairman of one of the two major political parties in the United States of America—Ron Brown.

And in almost every major city—including the Big Apple with an annual budget of \$30 billion—there is one among us who serves as its mayor—[David Dinkins.]

There is no other ethnic group in all of America's history who has made such extraordinary strides as we have in such a

short expanse of time.

We are truly a resilient and enterprising people. But now, with only nine years from the 21st Century, we must not only have political power—we must have economic power as well.

To claim full citizenship, we must have full ownership of The Rock. Not just political ownership but also economic ownership.

As America enters the high-tech/service economy that allows us to be competitive in what is now a global market place, it is imperative that we become producers and players in this new enterprise. For while we participated in the agricultural revolution, we never, to this day, got the 40 acres and the mule. And, while we participated in the industrial revolution, our labor did not reap us the full benefit of the capital that was amassed and accumulated.

Our task is clear. We must educate not just the "Talented Tenth" but each and every African American so that we become producers and manufacturers—distributors of products and services in the expanding global marketplace.

It is not enough that a Michael Jordan, or a Janet Jackson or a M.C. Hammer achieve economic success. We, as a community of people, must achieve a corner on a critical American industry. Now it might be entertainment. But in entertainment, we must also become the producers and managers—the vendors of entertainment.

In this intensely competitive global marketplace—and especially in an America that believes in capitalism—we have got to bring something to the table. We cannot afford to be defined as simply those who take. We must become, at last, those who make—people who have the power to expand the economic pie. People who use our natural creativity, capacity and energy to become entrepreneurial examples of success.

Our success at grasping the economic levers of power will rebound to this nation's



61



62 long term advantage. For we can supply the labor and ingenuity that can make America competitive again.

We can open doors in the new global marketplace. For this America can no longer live in splendid isolation. And, we are people with an ancestral link to the most beautiful and naturally rich continent on the globe.

Our efforts to grasp the economic levers of power will surely provoke a reaction. For there are more than a few naysayers who will raise up the time-honored tactics of racial division in these times of economic uncertainty and great disparity.

When you are up against the wall economically, when you have mortgaged the future of a country for short-term gain—which has happened in the last several years of Ronald Reagan—when you

have made America less than competitive, how easy it is to pit the poor against the struggling, the insecure against the marginal, the frightened against those Americans who have always been left out and desperately want a piece of The Rock.

You know what I am talking about. Willie Horton isn't new. He has been with us a very, very long time. And, therein lies the problem. Those who diminish us by race baiting and scapegoating, do injury to the very definition that is America.

This is the lesson that Lee Atwater learned in the last months of his life. A man who we once rightly rejected as a trustee of Howard University. Lee Atwater learned—at the end—the true meaning of life. That divisiveness has no place in our politics; that spitefulness and hatred only erode that which is truly magnificent about our country.

The type of ethic and values Lee Atwater embraced when forced to re-examine his life speaks volumes about what really matters and what will really sustain a person.

I commend Lee Atwater for his magnanimity and example of trying to right wrongs. Few in politics have such courage even on their death bed. And, this type of right thinking is the only answer and only response to the politics of racial disharmony.

Already, we hear in the back alleys of American politics the murmur of the naysayers—the power crowd—hard at work reducing our collective inheritance to “wedge issues” and “moving the numbers”—republicans and conservative democrats alike. Their tactics are insidious; their goals debasing.

Make no mistake about it, their coded messages about “quotas” and “diversity” are not about real equal opportunity at all. They seek nothing less than the diminishment of the public estate by dividing and polarizing—the debasing and reduction of the American ethic to a politics of hate and fear.

We can have none of this. We cannot abide by it or tolerate this diminishment of the American ethic. For the America that is our home and our Rock, is an America that is supposed to be free from prejudice and racial bigotry. Where, we as a people, rise together.

That is the only America true to this nation's founding ideals. And it is the only America that has a chance to prosper in the new emerging global society and economic order.

Our America is never easy to achieve. And, even we can find ourselves trapped in the politics of polarization.

This city [in May] has seen the struggle, frustration and anger of our Hispanic community—people who want to call America home—who also want to own a piece of the American Rock.

We cannot and will not tolerate violence or any indiscriminate acts of unrest. . . . But, let us also hear in their cry for

“justice” and “respect” and echo of our own voices; especially our own deep sense of struggle and frustration. Of all people, we—African Americans—know the frustration of being disenfranchised.

Twenty odd years ago, our own sense of frustration and anger spilled out into the streets of Washington, D.C. Let us not be small-minded and get trapped in the politics of polarization.

It is not going to serve our interests—and the interest of this community—to denigrate our Hispanic neighbors just because their voyage to America started long after ours.

I have always believed that when you are climbing up the ladder, don't step on the person behind you. Pull them up so that you can reach the top together. So, together we can remove the many obstacles to our mutual advancement.

Just as we must condemn every form of bigotry, let us also grow out of those forms of insularity within own community that lead to isolationism and mediocrity. Forms of insularity that include: the denigration of success; the tolerance of drug use; the sidewalk belief that your mind is to be wasted; that to be a thinking person is somehow to be less than Black.

These assumptions and attitudes of insularity have no place in the future African American agenda. We cannot loudly protest one type of scapegoating and then only whisper our protest at our own forms of racial isolationism.

And they defy our rich lineage—our rich African American history. For we are the descendants of the first civilization—we are the descendants of the first doctor—and the first mathematician.

In spite of all of our bondage and oppression, we are the descendants of many generations of people who have contributed to the defense and advancement of America. How dare anyone define an African American by what we don't know. To truly know our history is to define us by how much we have done and how far we have come.

Let us tap into our own rich heritage to place our own people into economic positions of power—so that we can move this entire community to the center of power, instead of being on the periphery of power.

We must capitalize on our own rich resources and become captains of industry and commerce. . . .

The voyage that began four centuries ago for the African American is a continuing

voyage—not just a passage from slavery to free-standing citizenship—but the passage of this America beyond the mere aspirations for equity to the full and true expression of equality—so that this America will finally make good on her founding principles.

Make that dream your reality. Go for a piece of The Rock. □

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*The above was excerpted from Mayor Sharon Pratt Dixon's address.*

63

# A Conflict of Images

Each day African Americans are confronted with conflicting images of themselves in the mass media. On the one hand, there are the false, often demeaning images perpetuated by whites and on the other, positive black perspectives intended to counter such stereotypes.

*Split Image: African Americans in the Mass Media* is a comprehensive study of the portrayal of blacks in the mass media—music, film radio, television, advertising, and print and broadcast news. It traces the struggle by blacks throughout recent history to establish accurate depictions of their culture in the media and to win recognition for their contributions to the media.

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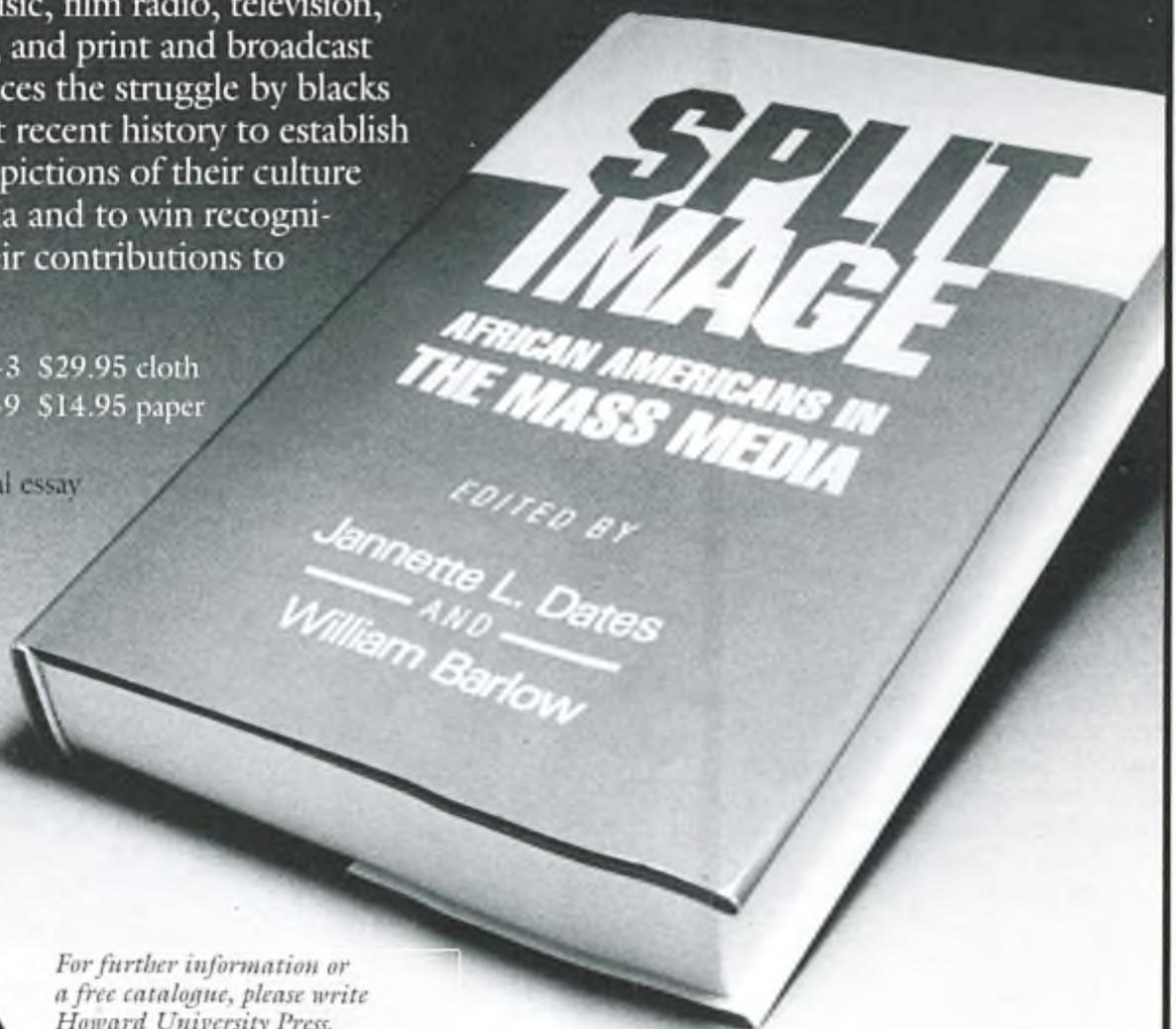
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Index

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