

TO BE A MORRISITE OR TO LIVE A LIBERATED LIFE
IN PURSUIT OF CONSCIOUSNESS

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In a hand-written note, this text is described as a speech Solomon gave at the 1977 Morris College Alumni Banquet. At this time, Solomon was working Coordinator of Facilities Planning at the South Carolina Commission On Higher Education (a state agency specializing in higher education).

Thank you, Mrs. Wells¹, for your most kind and generous introduction. You know I had thought that I would begin my remarks by stating the year in which I graduated from Morris College, but since you preceded me that would pin-point your age and because you look so young I refuse to do that to you. However, I notice that the program contains some very pertinent information regarding our years after graduation and just wish to assure everyone here that all those dates are correct.

President Richardson, other distinguished associates at the headtable, to the seniors and to the alumni and friends of Morris College. It is difficult for me to relate my feelings regarding this opportunity to share with you, the soon to be Morrisites, the faculty and administration, and the Alumni of Morris College, this occasion. Certainly, this is a significant time for us. It is a significant time for you the Seniors of 1977 for you are about to realize the dream for which you have struggled these past few years. You are about to graduate from College, an achievement of which I am sure you are proud, and rightfully so.

It is a significant time for you, the faculty and administration, because you again have the opportunity to see other students who as a result of your commitment and dedication are equipped to enter the world as professionals ready to meet the challenges which confront them, and it is a significant time for all of us as Alumni and friends of Morris College because we in our time can move our college to full accreditation status with the Southern Association and thereby insure its unqualified acceptance by others in the educational world.

So the significance of this time and this occasion causes me to have mixed feelings. On the one hand I am elated and honored to be here and on the other hand I am humbled by the awe of it all and feel inadequate to cope with it. However, knowing that tomorrow you will hear the Rev. Jessie Jackson, I feel safe in paraphrasing one of President Abraham Lincoln's statements

¹Julia E. Wells was an administrator at Morris College.

and saying that in view of this, “You will little note nor long remember what I say here so I’ll attempt to say what I have to say and permit you to take your leave.”

When I was asked to speak here tonight, I immediately said yes. For who would not accept the opportunity to return to his alma mater under such circumstances. Then I started thinking about what I might say that would be appropriate and of interest, and I must admit that such thoughts did not come easy. However, finally I did make a decision and while [what] I decided to talk about may be neither of interest nor appropriate, it is sincere. So here goes.

You the Seniors of 1977 are the threshold of joining an illustrious group of individuals spread throughout the length and breadth of this State, this Nation and the world. You are on the threshold of becoming a Morrisite.

Now I realize that Morris is a Baptist affiliated institution and that therefore there exists a mind set among those closely associated with the College which requires that certain things be done in the Baptist tradition. So it seems to me that I am required to take a text (oh, excuse me, I mean a subject) for my remarks. Well, for the sake of anything better, let’s say that my subject is “TO Be a Morrisite OR to LIVE a Liberated Life in Pursuit of Consciousness.”

To put matters into perspective we should say that we are using the word liberated in the traditional sense of being free from domination and having equal rights and status.

However, when we speak of consciousness, we speak of it in the sense presented by Julian Jaynes² in his very recent book entitled “The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind.” Jaynes contends that everything that we think we believe about consciousness is false. It is a “much smaller part of our mental life” than we can customarily imagine, he says. It is not a necessary precondition for perception, reason or learning. One may write, read, speak, and listen without being conscious Jaynes contends. He goes on to say that certain activities are better performed without it than with it, and that individuals may function perfectly well in its absence, and entire civilizations are possible without anything like consciousness in any of their members.

If Jaynes is correct, consciousness is a latecomer to the human scene. Humans learned to talk, invented the wheel and level, built pyramids and cities, fought wars, struggled against the elements and each other, buried their dead and celebrated their heroes, and told themselves stories about their ultimate origins and final destiny, entirely in the absence of anything we would recognize as conscious mental life.

It would seem that even now consciousness continues to elude mankind. One needs only to survey the actions and deeds of people individually and

²Julian Jaynes was an American researcher in psychology who was a lecturer at Princeton University from 1966 to 1990.

collectively to find support for this argument. This being the case, the pursuit of consciousness is indeed an essential element of the good life. So the topic, live a liberated life in pursuit of conscience, is one worthy of our consideration and I further contend that to be a Morrisite compels one to strive for such a life.

For in my opinion, to be a Morrisite means to be prepared for life, and to be dedicated to the good life. Not only for one's self but for all mankind. Two obvious questions seem to follow. Namely, 1). When is one prepared for life? and 2). What is meant by the good life? I believe that one is prepared for life when he has made a commitment to become liberated from ignorance, spiritual stagnation, racial biases and a self-centered perspective. I further believe that to be dedicated to attaining a high level of spiritual consciousness, a consciousness of the importance and necessity for protecting and perpetuating one's culture, and a high level of consciousness of the need to remove from all aspects of life those things which are demeaning, degrading and devastating to the dignity of mankind.

If you can accept this line of reasoning, then you are at least receptive to the notion that to be a Morrisite is to strive to live a liberated life in pursuit of consciousness.

The fact that you as seniors have been recommended by the distinguished faculty of this institution to receive your respective degrees says to all that you have made a commitment to liberate yourselves from ignorance. Please note that I said that you made the commitment to become liberated from ignorance not that you are now so liberated. Ignorance disguises itself in misunderstanding, prejudices, hate, and all sorts of other forms. Hence, one should never let down his guard by allowing himself to be deceived into thinking that he is liberated from ignorance, but should continue to strive for such liberation as long as he lives. As Morrisites, we are obligated to continually remind ourselves and others that the statement "that learning is a life long process" must not be taken lightly for this is one of the fundamental truths of nature.

Also, just as the physical body is sustained by nutrients and chemicals so must the intangible self be sustained through spiritual consciousness. A good baptist minister would probably say that the soul must also be fed. Say it anyway that you like, but the truth of the matter is that spiritual stagnation is as detrimental to one's self as physical starvation. So, there is indeed a need to strive for a high level of spiritual consciousness.

The importance of and necessity for protecting and perpetuating one's culture is a need that may best be illustrated by the phenomenon commonly referred to as roots. I suspect that Alex Haley would tell us if he were here tonight that he and his family were just an instrument which was used by the infinite power of the universe to re-awaken in man a knowledge of this fundamental need for cultural and family ties. That is to raise the level of consciousness of mankind for this fundamental need. Let us forget this awakening and let us pledge to not only share with those who follow us that

link in the chain of life which our generation formed but to also discover as many of the hidden links of past generations as we can. This is your responsibility as a Morrisite.

A self-centered perspective is like a milestone around one's neck. To live, to grow, and to contribute one must look beyond himself to the totality of life. Let us not be so concerned with our other personal needs and problems that we fail to minister unto our fellow man. Again, a good Baptist minister might say, "that the master said, he that ministers unto the least of those brethren ministers unto me."

Lastly, there continues to exist a need to remove from all aspects of life those things which are demeaning, degrading, and devastating to the dignity of mankind. I submit that in order to do this each of us individually and collectively must strive to raise our level of consciousness to their need. I continue to be concerned and perplexed by the frequency in which the question, "Is there anything worthwhile left in this world for which we strive?" is asked by people either verbally or by their deeds and actions. The rising suicide rate, the ever increasing rate in which drugs are misused, the breakdown in the family structure, the sensuality found in music marketed principally for the consumption of the youth, the new (so called) sexual morality, the murder, the rape, the robbing, the copping out, etc., all provide a legitimate basis for such a question. But, they also emphasize the need for raising our level of consciousness with with regard to their demeaning, degrading and devastating effects upon mankind.

I contend that a necessary compliment to that which the home and church contribute to developing one's level of consciousness regarding these matters is the liberating experience provided by institutions such as Morris College. Now, we could spend a considerable time exploring such liberations in each of the areas already mentioned and many more. But this is not the time or place for such in depth discussion. However, I feel so strongly about the demeaning and degrading effects of much of our present day popular music the life styles of our youth, and the devastating of racial and sexual biases upon mankind that I ask for your indulgence for just a few moments for a brief discussion of these two concerns. First a quick reference to the top ten popular songs during almost any time period will serve to emphasize the point which I am attempting to make.

I believe that you will agree that the message which most of this music delivers is demeaning and degrading. Indeed, the single commodity being marketed is sensual. The music is funky (whatever that means) and the lyrics suggestive. O.K., so you say, we are adults and can handle it. I don't argue with that for a moment. In fact, this is not my concern. My concern is that the media which contributes this music to us, the adults, (namely radio and T.V.) also delivers it to our younger brothers and sisters and sons and daughters who are not adults and are not able to handle it. The impressions which such music has upon young people is detrimental so much so that it is not enough for us as adults to be liberated from its adverse effects. We

must also protect our young from such adverse effects. I contend that this can only be accomplished by eliminating to a significant degree such music from radio and television. I submit that this is a social problem and that as Morrisites who are ourselves liberated from its effects are duly bound to do whatever we can to raise the level of public consciousness to this problem in order to minimize its effects upon our youth.

Secondly, racial and sexual biases have plagued mankind from the beginning of time. And while we in America have made noticeable progress towards establishing legal barriers to such biases the truth of the matter is that the level of consciousness to the devastating effects of such biases has not changed appreciably. And as a result, the changes through which the progress we have made is only cosmetic.

A few examples:

1). Many educators but especially public school administrators have deliberately set in motion procedures which will reduce the number of minorities in professional positions. Further, such persons by perpetuating the notion that only so many black children can effectively destroy the will of such children to excel.

2). The criteria used by employers to select their employees are at least ineffective and tend to work against the employment of minorities and women in certain job categories.

We could cite many more examples, but I think the point has been made. As Morrisites we must continue to work to raise the level of consciousness to the devastating effects of racial and sexual biases.

In closing, may I say that what I have attempted to do is to impress upon the seniors and others as well that there is something special to being a Morrisite. I again say that, in my opinion, to be a Morrisite means to be prepared to live and to be dedicated to the good life, not only for one's self but for all mankind.

The simple truth is that all who have studied here have left a little bit of himself to sustain, nourish, and enhance that entity which is Morris College. You see, Morris College is not only these grounds and buildings, the present administration and faculty, or the present student body. Morris College is also that composition of pride, love, appreciation and memory which each Morrisite has within himself. It is made up of a little but of every Morrisite that has gone on before us, a lot of ourselves and will be added to by all who shall follow. The value and worth of Morris College is measured in the value and worth of the contributions of each of us individually and all of us collectively, to ourselves, our families, our communities and our time.

Let it never be said that any of us failed to live up to this heritage which we all shall have as Morrisites. Let us strive to live a liberated life in pursuit of consciousness.

I am proud to have ben with you, my friends, on this night, and I am doubly proud to have been a part of the transfiguration of these persons who today call themselves seniors at Morris College but who tomorrow will join our ranks as Morrisites.

Good luck, keep the faith, and God Bless you all.

Acknowledgements. This text is based on an original document in the James L. Solomon holdings of the South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, S.C.