The Honors Day Convocation last Thursday morning recognized and celebrated students’ outstanding academic achievements during the 2019 fall semester. Dr. Stephen Middleton, a 1976 honor graduate of Morris College, delivered the convocation address. Dr. Middleton grew up in Cross, SC, where he plowed the field and picked cotton with his parents and eight siblings.

After earning his Bachelor of Arts in history, he went on to earn the Master of Arts in Black History and Black Studies from Ohio State University, and his Ph.D. in Constitutional History from Miami University of Ohio. Dr. Middleton has taught at Wilberforce University, the University of Connecticut, and at North Carolina State University, where he was a longtime professor of Constitutional History. He is the inaugural director of African American Studies at Mississippi State University, where he currently holds the honorary title of Professor Emeritus at Mississippi State.

Speaking on the theme: “You Can Get There from Here!”, Dr. Middleton enthusiastically shared three simple yet substantiated points to help students along their journey. You are enough now, strive for excellence, and be patient were the points he used to inspire students to realize their potentials and embrace their possibilities for the future. Excited about returning to his alma mater, he admonished students not to sell themselves short and to stay the course. “I make this promise to you,” he concluded, “if you are in alignment with who you are, there is nothing on this planet that can separate you from your dreams.” The audience erupted in applause with a standing ovation as its show of approval for his inspiring and motivational message.

Dr. Staggers thanked Dr. Middleton for returning to the campus and delivering not only a compelling message but for being an example of the message he delivered. He also commended and encouraged students to continue on their paths to success. Students who made the President’s List received their textbooks for the spring semester free of charge. Representative J. David Weeks, ’75, Chairman of the Board of Trustees and Mrs. Lorraine Dennis, the spouse of Sherriff Anthony Dennis of Sumter County, provided the books.

Mr. Warren Williams, UNCF representative, and Mr. Tony Signore were special guests on campus last Thursday. They met with Dr. Staggers and his cabinet for a small reception on the second floor of the Dr. Solomon Jackson, Jr. Administration Building. Mr. Signore and his family fund the Frederick Douglass Bicentennial Scholarship. The scholarship provides financial assistance to outstanding young men and women attending HBCUs.

Mr. Signore established the Frederick Douglass Bicentennial Scholarship in 2018. He also commissioned the awarding-winning visionary and impressionist artist, Ylli Haruni, to create a three-foot by four-foot oil painting of Douglass. The painting commemorates the bicentennial of Douglass’ birth. Alan received the limited edition of the painting. Mr. Signore, during the reception, presented lithograph #4 of the painting to Dr. Staggers. He spoke passionately about his appreciation and respect for Frederick Douglass and how he struggled to receive an education. He commended the college for embodying the legacy of Douglass as an institution of higher learning.

Mr. Signore passed on to the college the respects and admirations of Nettie Washington Douglass, the last living direct descendant of the historical leader. She hailed Dr. Staggers for the leadership and guidance and the great responsibility he carries so well.
Alan P. Johnson, III

2020 Frederick Douglass Bicentennial Scholarship Recipient

I would like to sincerely express my gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Tony Signore and the UNCF for selecting me as a recipient for the Frederick Douglass Bicentennial Scholarship. I am very honored and blessed to receive such a generous scholarship.

This assistance helps lighten a financial burden and allows me to focus more on high academic achievement and to take part in cultural enrichment opportunities that I never thought possible as I pursue my undergraduate degree. I hope one day to be in a position to be able to give back and help other students achieve their goals.

Again, thank you for your generous financial support towards my higher education.
I was considering giving a scholarly talk on Natural Law and the Roots of American Constitutionalism. But my time has shifted from thirty minutes to fifteen minutes. I am going to change gears a little and speak to the honor students in particular and to other students as well. To help you on your way, I want to talk from the theme, “You Can Get there from Here!”

First, you are enough. You are not becoming enough; you are enough now! The person that you are is not the one that you see when you look in the mirror. You are beyond your skin and complexion. You are beyond the one that you take care of and groom and wash and feed. What you are is closer to consciousness than anything else. Neuroscientists and quantum physics have come to conclude that the human being is actually empty. You will not find you in your body. You are enough, now.

Second, it is essential to know what you want. What you want may change, and that is fine. But, it is crucial to come to terms with what you want. What you want is not a fantasy. I am not talking about someone four feet tall, saying, “Look! I’m a professional basketball player; that is fantasy. But when you recognize who you are and that you are enough, what you want naturally flows from that. So, when you have a target, and you start moving toward your target, I assure you that almost nothing is impossible to you.

Quock Walker, whose African name was Kwaku, was born in 1753 in Massachusetts during slavery. His slave owner, who promised to free him when he turned 25, died before fulfilling his promise. The widow to his previous owner remarried, but Walker’s new owner refused to release him. Knowing he wanted to be free, Walker ran away but was captured and punished. He sued the person who held him and won his freedom. The Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled in the early 1780s that slavery was contrary to natural law because Kwaku was a free man. The court recognized that Kwaku was enough, and he was more than what he saw when he looked in the mirror. So, when you know what you want, it is as if the universe will conspire to bring what you want to you.

Third, strive for excellence! The late Senator Edward William Brooke, III, once said: “There is no substitute for excellence.” Excellence is about more than merely getting good grades. Getting good grades is fine. Graduating with honors is great. But there is something about excellence that will take you beyond just grades.

You, 21st-century scholars, are in the age where we know more today than any other time in human history. You will not only be competing with your peers on your left and right in this room. As you go on, you will be competing with students from different universities in this country and from around the world. Remember, there is no substitute for excellence. So, I encourage you to strive for excellence.

Finally, be patient. “Rome,” as the adage goes, “was not built in a day.” I assure you that what you will become is not who you are now. There is no leader, no writer, no orator, no athlete, or anyone of substance who started at 18, 19, or 20 and remained that person who had reached the highest goal possible in their career. Be patient, because you are going to astound yourself if you stay on the path.

Consider Fredrick Douglass, who at an early age, though born in slavery, wanted to become an educated person. He studied hard and tried to develop skills as an orator. He became a learned man. There was no way in the world Douglass could have predicted that he would become an ambassador and one of the greatest 19-century orators. He could have never predicted that he would publish a newspaper or write his autobiography. He could have never imagined that he would be invited to Europe, to England to give lectures during the 19th century. Be patient with yourself and grow into the person you want to become.

Booker T. Washington could not have predicted that he would become an educated man, but excellence was his standard. He wanted more than what he started with. There is nothing like the backside of a mule to inspire you. If you have a desire, Morris College will give you an education. Be patient; wait until your change comes.

Martin Luther King, Jr., could have never predicted that he would become the pastor of a church in Montgomery, Alabama. Because of that experience, he would lead the civil rights movement in the United States and become the drum major for justice until the walls of segregation came tumbling down.

So, what am I saying to you? Don’t sell yourself short. Stay the course! No one else knows your dreams but you, because they are after all your dreams. No one else knows what you what but you because after all, the desire was given to you. It is up to you to nurture it, to groom it, to be patient with yourself. I make this promise to you— if you are in alignment with who you are, there is nothing on this planet that can separate you from that. Now, there are dream stealers in the world, so don’t let anyone steal your dream.

It is truly a pleasure to be back at my alma mater, where I started 48 years ago, and I’m not done yet. “You Can Get There from Here!”
The Morris College Cultural Arts Committee announces The MLK Essay Contest, “Discovering Your Authentic Purpose of Pursuing Higher Learning.” Students may request an application and guidelines from Mr. Darnell J. Holland in the Brawley-Starks Academic Success Center Room 103. Ms. Priscilla Patten in Academic Hall Room 208, or Mrs. Henrietta M. Temoney in the Brawley—Starks Academic Success Center. The deadline for the final paper submissions is Friday, February 21, 2020 by 5 p.m. Winners will be announced on Thursday, February 27, 2020. The papers will be awarded:

**First Place**—$500 Cash Prize  
**Second Place**—$200 Cash Prize  
**Third Place**—$100 Cash Prize

The Morris College Cultural Arts Committee is sponsoring a Canned Food Drive to benefit the Mt. Pisgah AME Church Soup Kitchen. All campus organizations, faculty, staff, and students are urged to bring canned goods beginning February 17, 2020 to the Brawley – Starks Academic Resource Center Computer Lab. For more information, please contact Mrs. Henrietta M. Temoney at 803-934-3186.

The deadline for verifying cap and gown measurements for graduation is February 28, 2020. Please contact Mrs. Holmes in the Bookstore (803-934-3989) immediately to verify your measurements.