

**PRESIDENT SWYGERT'S OPENING REMARKS**

**MR. JOHN H. JOHNSON, FOUNDER AND CEO OF  
JOHNSON'S PUBLISHING, AND OUR GUEST OF HONOR  
TRUSTEE EARL GRAVES, OUR GUEST ORATOR  
MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
OFFICERS OF THE UNIVERSITY  
DISTINGUISHED FACULTY AND STAFF  
HONORED GUESTS AND FRIENDS  
AND, ESPECIALLY, STUDENTS OF HOWARD  
UNIVERSITY**

Welcome to our 136<sup>th</sup> Opening Convocation, and welcome to this marvelous energy that is Howard University.

A very special welcome to the Class of 2007. Among the freshman class this year, there are 71 National Merit Scholars, our nation's brightest and best who have chosen Howard as the place that they want to form the cornerstone of their higher education. Overall, more than 1400 new students have joined our family this year.

We are proud to have all of you and we look forward to your contribution as we continue to build on a great legacy.

Howard University, undoubtedly, is premier among the institutions that have served as architects in the creation of a new world society since its beginning in 1867.

We have blazed a trail in academia, in community service and in Civil Rights. We have produced courageous, creative

and conscientious leaders for America the nucleus of world politics in the last century; for Africa, the cradle of our civilization and for the West Indies, the place where people of all seven continents first met and formed new societies.

For the past 137 years, we have begun each academic year thus, with the formality and pageantry of our convocation ceremonies. We revel in occasions like these, symbolic as they are of tradition and continuity; of links to the past and the present, and most importantly, of new beginnings and a future that is ours to shape.

This year, there is added fanfare and meaning to this occasion. We have among us pillars of the African-American community including our guest speaker, Earl G. Graves, founder and publisher of *Black Enterprise* magazine, and Mr. John H. Johnson, Founder and Chairman

of Johnson Publishing Company, publisher of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines and owner of Fashion Fair Cosmetics.

Convocation this year is a special tribute to Mr. Johnson for his pioneering work in journalism, his philanthropy and visionary leadership and his commitment to the African-American community.

Today's ceremony also marks the beginning of a series of activities designed to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Brown v. Topeka Board of Education , the case which sounded the death knell for racial segregation in the United States.

For many of our young people, the concept of segregation is history--something that they read about in old books, or another of the tall tales told them by grandmothers or great-grandmother. In fact, even among us adults, it sometimes

seems sufficiently far-removed from a reality that many of us lived.

Not so for John Johnson.

John was born in rural Arkansas, at a time when segregation was the norm. The elementary school, he attended was segregated, it was crowded and unwelcoming of black children. There were no high schools for African-American children so when he finished elementary school, his mother joined the great African-American migration of 1933 and headed north to Chicago, in search of a place where her son could fulfill his dreams.

So many black children did not or could not have dreams then; to have dreams too often meant crushing disappointments-- because dreams were so easily denied.

John Johnson had his dreams and he had the courage and the determination to go after them.

Fresh out of high school, he went to work for Supreme Liberty Life Insurance Company collecting news and information about African-Americans and preparing a weekly digest. And just like that, he had this idea –that he could do the same thing for the general mass of African-Americans to whom mainstream magazines and newspapers did not cater.

His first magazine, the *Negro Digest* featured articles about the social inequalities in the United States and gave a voice to the concerns of African-Americans. Within eight months, Negro Digest reached a circulation of 50, 00 a month in sales. The following year, Johnson launched *EBONY* magazine and six years later, he created *JET*.

Today Johnson presides over a multi-million dollar enterprise as one of America's most successful entrepreneurs.

He has received numerous honors and awards, among them, the coveted Spingarn Medal, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom. And, he was the first African-American to be named to the Forbes's list of the 400 wealthiest Americans.

Today we will rename the Howard University School of Communication in his honor.

John Johnson is a testimony to what is possible provided that one has the courage to dream and the opportunities to make them into reality.

In this respect, Johnson's accomplishments and his contributions are also pause for us to contemplate what

might have been lost had his mother been content with life in the segregated South.

The truth is that for every John H. Johnson, there is the one that did not make it. For every John H. Johnson with the creativity and courage to turn adversity into triumph, there is one whose spirit was too broken to carry on the daily struggle for dignity and respect—the life of nearly every black person in the United States, a few decades ago.

As we look critically at the legacy that he has created, we must also reflect on how succeeding generations can make that legacy bigger and better.

We must commit and re-commit ourselves to the highest standard of excellence in whatever we do;

We must commit ourselves to a sense of community—each one helping the other along, particularly those who are less fortunate than we are;

We must commit ourselves to a renewed sense of purpose as we strive to fulfill our dreams and to help our children fulfill theirs.

And we must commit ourselves to the struggle for equality of opportunities for our people.

Here, at Howard, we have a tradition of excellence in many areas, but especially in Civil Rights. It was the collective effort of the staff, faculty and students of Howard University, particularly the School of Law that resulted in the Supreme Court's ruling on Brown v. Board of Education.

Explicitly and implicitly, the promise of Brown

Is that every ever child should have the opportunity to fulfill his/her dream;

That the humanity and dignity of our children should never be questioned regardless of their ethnicity; race or social class;

That all of us are entitled to the benefits and protection of the Constitution.

Throughout this year as we observe the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Brown*, we are again challenged to look hard at the landscape in which we live; the progress we have made, and the obstacles that are yet to be overcome.

And as we pay tribute to John H. Johnson, one of our heroes, and revel in the successes of all of the others who are here today, let us take seriously our responsibility to

ourselves, our communities and to institutions like Howard University, that have been at the forefront of the struggle for social justice.

As African-Americans and as members of this family, it is our destiny to lead in the critical examination of the structures of our society, a deconstruction of those that do not advance the human race, and reconstructing them in forms and images that honor the dignity of all humanity.

Again, it's my pleasure to welcome all of you to Howard.