Rev. Al Sharpton Urges Students to Seize the Moment, Take Control of Future at Commencement

During the 2011 commencement address, civil rights activist and political leader Rev. Al Sharpton urged B-CU students to make the most of their degree, continue support of historically black colleges and seek healing and reconciliation rather than revenge in times of conflict.

Sharpton, founder and president of the National Action Network, a not-for-profit civil rights organization based in Harlem, N.Y., and a former presidential candidate, also received an honorary Doctorate of Divinity degree.

The ceremony was an emotional moment for Sharpton, as he received his degree before his father, Al Sharpton Sr., who was seated in the audience among the thousands in attendance.

A product of a single-parent household, Sharpton recalled graduating from high school 40 years ago, and resenting his father’s absence at his graduation. However, he credits his efforts to reconcile with his father as the reason he is now able to rekindle that lost moment four decades later. He used that example as a teachable moment for the graduates.

“If I had focused on revenge, [my dad] would not have shared this moment with me,” Rev. Sharpton said.

Sharpton urged students to use their degrees as a launching pad toward achievement, and reminded them that failure is not an option, regardless of any obstacles and hindrances they encounter.

“No matter what you face, you have the grounding and foundation for excellence,” he said. “You are not responsible for all that happens to you in your life, but you are responsible for what you do with what happens to you in your life. It doesn’t matter in life who’s on your side if you’re not on your own side.”

Noting that many Historically Black Colleges and Universities such as B-CU are facing severe financial problems and budget cutbacks, and that some critics even question whether they are still necessary, Sharpton said the institutions still play an important role and continue to open doors for people in the Black community.

“We have a Black President, a Black Attorney General, 40 Black members of Congress – we’ve got more working for us than those who preceded us,” he said. “But most are doing less with what we’ve got. We still have a long way to go. We are still fighting violence and bigotry. We have come a long way, but we haven’t gotten there yet.”

“They can slash the budget, but they can’t slash hopes and dreams,” Rev. Sharpton added. “Education is the civil right of the 21st Century.”

He also encouraged the students to face challenges in the spirit of the institution’s founder.

“I am honored by what Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune meant to our history,” he said. “When Black people were still in the back of the bus, she built an institution. We need to be re-awakened to the pursuit of excellence she taught.” He added: “Blackness has never been about how low you can go, or how bad you can be. Blackness is about the fact that no matter how far we were pushed down, we found a way to get up anyhow.”

The 2011 graduating class – 564, up from 519 last year – is the largest in B-CU history.

Rev. Sharpton’s presence helped make the ceremony special, said B-CU President Trudie Kibbe Reed.

“It is our great honor to welcome Rev. Sharpton back to Bethune-Cookman University as our commencement speaker,” she said. “He has demonstrated excellence in leadership, education and service in his career that makes him a tremendous role model for our students.”

The University also gave Rev. Sharpton a special plaque from the Black Males In Higher Education Think Tank commemorating the First National Summit of the Black Males in Higher Education Think Tank, hosted by B-CU on March 22.

Sharpton commended B-CU President Trudie Kibbe Reed on her efforts to highlight Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune’s legacy at the university through her innovation and groundbreaking initiatives.

“Dr. Reed is the most visionary President I know,” he said. “She has honored us with her faithfulness and diligence. For me as a civil rights activist to be honored here is awe-inspiring.”

Note: Be sure to look for even more commencement photos in the next Weekly Digest.
Volusia has an infant mortality rate that is three times the state average.

The challenge of identifying and trying to eliminate all health disparities. Recently, Dr. Dixon and her team hosted a conference significantly to the Office of Minority Health, Dr. Dixon has contributed to the challenge of identifying and trying to eliminate all health disparities. The individual must have addressed at least one health disparity area (HIV/AIDS, Cancer, Infant Mortality, Cardiovascular Disease, Oral Health, Immunizations, and/or Diabetes) within a Florida community.

According to the Office of Minority Health, Dr. Dixon has contributed significantly to the challenge of identifying and trying to eliminate all health disparities. Recently, Dr. Dixon and her team hosted a conference to raise awareness to the growing problem of infant mortality which in Volusia has an infant mortality rate that is three times the state average.

North has many years of teaching experience in the public school system as a paraprofessional and as a substitute teacher. She was one of three who was chosen by the Florida Department of Education and the Federal Government to teach in an early childhood project in the late 1970s. This project was a two-year pilot which resulted in early childhood education being placed into the curriculum for colleges throughout Florida in migratory areas. As part of this project, she was responsible for teaching, research, and the written report which was approved. Since then, she has worked as a paraprofessional for 16 years at Janie Howard Elementary School in Lake Wales, Fla., and has served as a substitute teacher.

The School of Education commends her determination to pursue her degree and graduate at the 2011 commencement.

SPOTLIGHTS

**Dr. Alma Dixon**, director of the B-CU Odessa Chambless Wellness Center has been named Volusia County’s Community Healthcare Pioneer by the Florida Department of Health, Office of Minority Health. There is a pioneer selected from each county.

The nominees must be affiliated with at least one community or faith-based, non-profit organization within the past 10 years and have a contribution for a specific health service, role or product that is provided to a community in the county or county-wide area. The individual must have addressed at least one health disparity area (HIV/AIDS, Cancer, Infant Mortality, Cardiovascular Disease, Oral Health, Immunizations, and/or Diabetes) within a Florida community.

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Zenesha Barkley, a faculty member in the School of Nursing (SON), was recently appointed as ambassador for the National League of Nursing (NLN). In her role, she will act as liaison between the B-CU SON and the NLN, provide the NLN with feedback or suggestions for programs, speakers and initiatives and participate in the NLN ambassador community system.

Barkley also serves on the Florida Cancer and Research Advisory Council. She was appointed by former governor Charlie Crist for her qualifications and interest in serving the people of Florida.

**Students Accepted to Competitive Pre-Law Scholars Program**

Two B-CU students have been accepted to the Ohio Northern University College of Law Pre-Law Undergraduate Scholars (PLUS) program.

LaVerne Harris, a sophomore criminal justice major with a minor in pre-law, and Brenee’ Johnson, a freshman political science major with a minor in pre-law, have received will attend the program with all expenses paid.

The PLUS program will expose the students to the fundamental skills necessary to succeed at law school and as a lawyer and offers a comprehensive look at the legal profession. They will have an opportunity to meet and interact with law school professors, deans, directors, practicing attorneys, judges and community leaders. The program will also give them the tools to navigate through the law school application process. Finally, it will offer several educational and recreational outlets and opportunities to travel in the Ohio area.

As part of the program, the students will tour the Statehouse and Ohio Supreme Court in Columbus, the Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, the Hancock County Common Pleas Court, and visit the Cedar Point amusement park in Sandusky.

Go, Wildcats Sports!

A player from a prestigious northeast Ohio high school basketball program has made the decision to bring his talents south to Daytona Beach. Bethune-Cookman University Head Basketball Coach Clifford Reed announced the signing of Ricky Johnson, Jr. to a national letter of intent.

Johnson, a 5-10 point guard from Akron’s St. Vincent- St. Mary High School - the alma mater of NBA MVP LeBron James - will join the defending Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference regular season champions for the 2011-2012 season. A four-year starter, he helped the Irish win the Ohio Division II boys basketball state titles in 2009 and 2011.

"Ricky comes from a proven program and has the confidence and mentality of a winner," Reed said. "To remain a premier program in the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference, we need outstanding guard play and Ricky can contribute to our point guard needs."

Johnson is the third B-CU signing of the off-season. Last week, the Wildcats announced the signings of 6-7 forward Alex Smith from Jacksonville, Fla., and Marc Mack, a 6-6 forward from Chicago.

With the Professional Golf Association Minority Collegiate Golf Championship approaching, B-CU Golf Coach Loritz Clark was featured on a recent PGA podcast to discuss the Wildcats’ outlook for the weekend.

Clark also reflected on the late Dr. Gary Freeman, the B-CU former head coach whose teams won 12 national champions, the program’s past success in the tournament and his thoughts on this year’s Championship.

To listen, visit: http://www.pgamediacenter.com/podcasts/scooter_clark.html The tournament begins Friday. Highlights will air June 29 at 8 p.m., on the Golf Channel. Additional airing times will be July 4 at 9 a.m., and July 26 at 5 p.m.