

White Valedictorian Makes History at Morehouse

Contributed by Michelle D. Anderson -- Black College Wire
Friday, 16 May 2008

Joshua Packwood delivers graduation address at HBCU

While the nation may soon be witnessing the induction of its first non-white president, Morehouse College will be honoring its first white valedictorian in the school's 141-year history.

Joshua Packwood, an economics major from Kansas City, Mo. will be honored May 18 for graduating with a perfect 4.0 grade point average. He is one of the few non-Black students to attend the nation's only predominately black and all-male institution of higher learning.

As the first white valedictorian since Morehouse's establishment, Packwood's achievement has been discussed a great deal on several blogs and news Web sites.

Packwood recently appeared on the nationally syndicated radio and television programs including the Tom Joyner Morning Show, National Public Radio and the CBS Early Show.

When asked if he expected all of the media attention, Packwood said "Absolutely not."

"It's been very surreal," Packwood told Black College Wire in a phone interview.

During the interview Packwood shared one of his favorite memories— "Spirit Night," which was held during new student orientation. Packwood recalled marching in rain towards Frank L. Forbes Arena with his Morehouse brothers "about 800 strong."

During that night, Packwood learned chants, songs, and engaged in other Morehouse-exclusive rituals in his alma mater's largest sporting facility.

"It was a memorable moment for me," he said.

During his time at Morehouse, Packwood racked up several honors. He was a finalist for the Rhodes and Marshall scholarships. He also became a member of various honor societies including the oldest honor society, Phi Beta Kappa.

The 22-year-old recently launched his professional career as a proprietary analyst for Goldman Sachs in New York City.

While many people have praised Packwood for his achievement, he hasn't been without criticism.

Some of the message boards on blogs and social networking Web sites have been magnets for many of the remarks. Some say that Packwood's achievement has promoted the notion that a white student must be the savior of a black school.

Packwood responded to some of the criticism saying he doesn't think Morehouse is "based on race."

"I really think it's based on mission," Packwood said. "I don't think my graduation as valedictorian diminishes the mission of Morehouse in any way."

Mona Ray, assistant professor of Economics at Morehouse, taught Packwood principles of Micro and Macro economics. She said she was proud to have taught Packwood.

"He is a sincere, diligent and intelligent student," Ray said in an e-mail. "His biggest quality is his humble yet confident disposition. He truly makes us feel proud as his mentors."

Gregory N. Price, the Charles E. Merrill Professor & chair of Morehouse's Economics Department said he didn't have the privilege of teaching Packwood, but that he has interacted with him on numerous occasions. "Josh is indeed a first-rate student, gentleman and scholar in my estimation," Price said.

Price was especially impressed when Packwood's displayed an interest in obtaining a doctorate in philosophy.

"He understands the foundation of all knowledge," Price said in a phone interview. "Very few

students say they want to get a Ph.D in philosophy.”

Micah Moon, who was recently rumored to be sharing Packwood’s academic honor as co-valedictorian, will graduate as third highest achieving student in the class of 2008.

“Joshua has worked really hard for this honor and he’s a deserving valedictorian,” Moon said of his colleague.

The 21-year-old Moon, who will attend graduate school in September at the University College in London, said Packwood has done a good job of portraying black colleges as worthy institutions in light of criticism about the purpose of HBCUs.

During commencement, Moon will follow Shannon Joyner, who will graduate with the honor of salutatorian. Joyner accumulated a 3.99 GPA during his time at Morehouse. Both Joyner and Packwood entered Morehouse as Presidential Scholars their freshman year.

Earlier in a press release, Packwood said Morehouse expected students to be leaders, scholars, but also enjoyable individuals.

“I spent four years immersed in a culture of achievement, excellence, and accountability. I interacted with nearly 3,000 black men each year that were changing perceptions and the world.”

{moshaloscan}

Michelle D. Anderson is a student at Spelman College and a regular contributor to Black College Wire.