

# Bell comes to Morgan as role model

Md.'s new chief judge speaks at alma mater

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SUN STAFF

Robert Mack Bell arrived at Morgan State University in fall 1961 as a poor, skinny kid from East Baltimore. After a semester, he was hospitalized with tuberculosis.

He returned in fall 1963 and took to his course work, finishing all but two credits by his senior year, graduating in 1966 and going on to Harvard Law School.

Yesterday, during Morgan State's founders' day ceremonies, Bell gave his first major address since being named chief judge of the Maryland Court of Appeals two weeks ago.

Bell recounted some of his humble beginnings and challenged the several hundred students assembled to use him as a role model.

"As chief judge," he said, "I'm proud to say I stand be-



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**Robert M. Bell spoke at Morgan State yesterday.**

fore you young people as a symbol you might emulate."

In a 45-minute speech, Bell quoted James Weldon Johnson, recited a poem by Will Allen Drumgoold and praised his alma mater and other historically black colleges that have produced today's unprecedented number of African-American judges and lawmakers.

Bell credited several Morgan graduates with helping boost him to his current post, including NAACP President and Chief Executive Officer Kweisi Mfume, Baltimore Democratic state Sen. Clarence W. Blount and Del. Howard P. "Pete" Rawlings, a Baltimore Democrat and chairman of the House Appropriations Committee.

They are said to have helped persuade Gov. Parris N. Glendening to name Bell to the job.

"My fellow Morgan alumni and my friends provided the leadership for [See Bell, 5B]

the community of citizens that coalesced behind my appointment as chief judge," Bell said. "It is their leadership that is responsible for my being where I am today."

In introducing Bell, Morgan State President Earl S. Richardson said the judge "symbolizes the 129-year legacy of this institution — ordinary people can achieve extraordinary things."

Bell and Richardson, with Morgan regents, faculty members and administrators, all in full academic regalia, marched into Murphy Auditorium accompanied by the school band.

The Morgan State University Choir sang two selections.

Bell said the site of his first major speech was not chosen by accident. He said he wanted to underscore the importance of maintaining historically black colleges.

He reviewed Morgan's history, including its beginnings as a Methodist school for training African-American ministers, and noted his alma mater's rocky past of state budget cuts and attempts to merge the school with other institutions.

Of Morgan, he said, "We have come over the way that with tears has been watered," borrowing words from James Weldon Johnson's "Lift Every Voice and Sing," a song known as the black national anthem.

Bell praised Morgan faculty and staff, naming some in the audience who had nurtured and en-

couraged him as a student, including 92-year-old Alice Warner Parham, director of student activities at Morgan from 1958 to 1970, according to university records.

Near the conclusion of his speech, Bell, as he has done many times before, recited Drumgoold's poem from memory, "Now Then Shall We Build," about an old man building a bridge for a younger man to cross.

Then he told the students, "You hold the legacy in your hand. ... Join in the legacy by becoming another Morgan 'first.'"