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### Obituary Program Frederick Humphries

Tennessee State University

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TSU CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF

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# DR. FREDERICK S. HUMPHRIES

4TH PRESIDENT OF TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

DECEMBER 26, 1935–JUNE 24, 2021

**ORDER OF SERVICE**

Sunday, July 18th, 2021 | 2:00 PM

TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY AVON WILLIAMS CAMPUS

**Reverend Dr. Gerald L. Durley, Presiding**

*Pastor Emeritus, Providence Missionary Baptist Church, Atlanta, GA*

**MUSICAL PRELUDE**

Reverend Pamela G. Kellar  
*Director of TSU Meistersingers Alumni*

**PROCESSIONAL****WELCOME & PRAYER**

Reverend Dr. Gerald L. Durley

**MUSICAL SELECTION**

TSU Alumni Meistersingers

**GREETINGS AND SPECIAL REFLECTIONS**

Dr. Glenda Baskin Glover  
*President, Tennessee State University*

Dr. Larry Robinson  
*President, Florida A&M University*

**PROCLAMATIONS**

Dr. Deborah Cole  
*Chair, TSU Board of Trustees*

Mr. Charles H. Galbreath, Jr.  
*President, TSU National Alumni Association*

The Honorable Senator Brenda Gilmore,  
*District 19 of the Tennessee General Assembly*

The Honorable Reverend Dr. Harold M. Love  
*State Representative, District 58*

**MUSICAL SELECTION**

Mr. Louis Cross

**FAMILY TRIBUTE**

Mr. Frederick S. Humphries, Jr., Esq.

**VIDEO PRESENTATION****REFLECTIONS**

*(Please limit comments to 3 minutes)*

Ms. Georgette "Gigi" Peek Dixon  
*First Female TSU SGA President 1982-83*

Mr. Augusto "Gus" Macedo, Esq.  
*Family Friend and Former TSU SGA President 1985-86*

Dr. Decatur B. Rogers  
*Former Dean of the TSU College of Engineering*

**MUSICAL SELECTION**

Mr. Manoah Collins

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Mr. Grant L. Winrow  
*Tennessee State University*

**WORDS OF COMFORT**

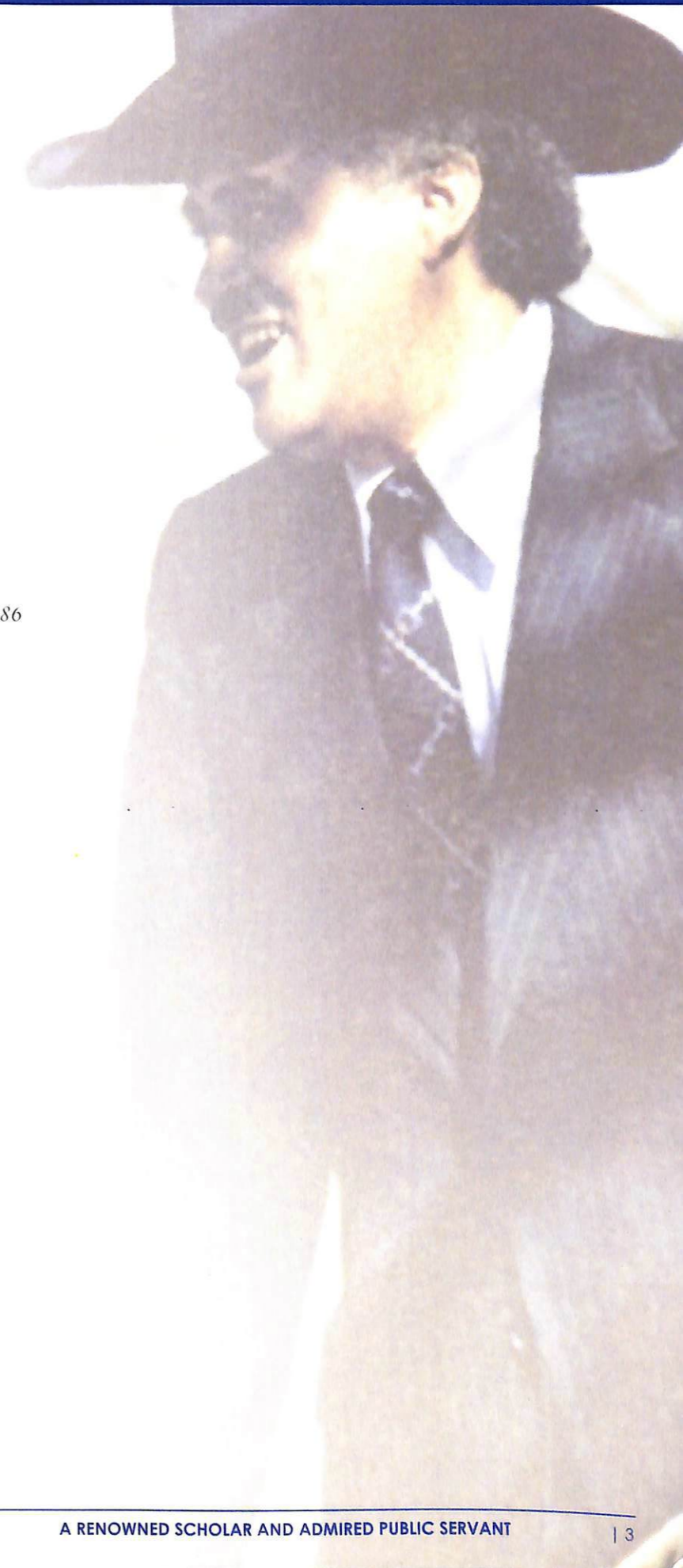
Reverend Dr. Gerald L. Durley

**CLOSING REMARKS**

*A Daughter's Message of Love to her Father*  
Ms. Robin Tanya Humphries Watson

**RECESSIONAL**

TSU Alumni Meistersingers





## TRIBUTE TO A MAN LARGER THAN LIFE

### Dr. Frederick Stephen Humphries, Sr.

Today we honor, celebrate, and salute a giant among men. Dr. Frederick S. Humphries, Sr. has been described by many as “Larger than Life,” yet he leaves a rich legacy of caring for and about others. Dr. Humphries transitioned from this life on June 24, 2021, in Orlando, Florida, at age 85. His rich and profound legacy will live on in the thousands of African American students that he helped shape through his “Excellence with Caring” motto. His students will smile whenever they think of this powerful servant-leader, who touched their hearts and prepared them for greatness.

Born and raised in Apalachicola, Florida, Humphries was an extremely competitive student influenced by strict teachers who encouraged him to strive for excellence. He was the 1953 valedictorian of Wallace M. Quinn High School. He was positioning his trajectory for many “firsts.”

In the fall of 1953, Humphries enrolled at Florida A&M College, which became a university during his matriculation. As a college student Humphries excelled not only in the classroom but also as a fierce competitor on the basketball court. A day that was forever etched in the heart and soul of Humphries was November 8, 1954, the day that he was initiated into the BETA NU Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., the first intercollegiate historically African American fraternity. From that day forward, Humphries lived each day embodying many profound qualities: versatile, scholarly, ambitious, gentlemanly, bold and tenacious.

He graduated from Florida A&M University in 1957 magna cum laude with a major in physical chemistry. Upon graduation, Humphries was the first African American officer to be commissioned in the Army Security Agency (Army Intelligence Branch). After serving in the Army for two years, he entered the University of Pittsburgh in 1959 as a teaching assistant in chemistry, began a graduate research fellowship the next year, and soon earned his master’s degree in chemistry. Later, he was the first African American scholar to earn a doctorate in physical chemistry from the University of Pittsburgh. His Society memberships included Phi Lambda, Sigma Xi, Alpha Kappa Mu, and Beta Kappa Chi.

Dr. Humphries became the fourth president of Tennessee State University in January 1975. Prior to coming to TSU, Dr. Humphries held several directorships. He also held the position of Vice Presi-

dent for the Institute for Services to Education (ISE) in Washington, D.C. He inherited the court battle of Tennessee State University and the University of Tennessee at Nashville (the Geier case).

Upon arrival at Tennessee State University, Dr. Fred Humphries found that no suitable presidential residence was on campus. He established temporary residence in the off-campus community and began to immediately address the problem, particularly since the case was not the same for other similarly governed universities nearby. He was successful in getting an exceptional home/residence/reception center for the University’s president, strategically located on campus through the support of the legislature, students, faculty, alumni and community of the University. At TSU, Dr. Humphries set as an early significant goal the rectification of actions that were in flagrant disregard for the programs of TSU by its governing board while enhancements were made to the programs of the primarily majority institutions.

Dr. Jamye Coleman Williams remembers serving as Head of the TSU Department of Communications during the Humphries Era. She and her late husband, Dr. McDonald Williams, Director of the TSU Honors Program, traveled to Knoxville along with a group of other TSU supporters to observe Dr. Humphries in the TSU/UT merger negotiations. She added that when Dr. Humphries arrived at TSU, faculty salaries were not comparable to other university faculty salaries. Dr. Humphries conducted a salary study which later resulted in TSU faculty receiving their long overdue salary raises.

Dr. Humphries worked diligently to carry out the goals of the institution and establish TSU as middle Tennessee’s premier urban university. The impact of his leadership was evident in the direction he provided in educational and civic affairs in Nashville. Locally, he was a member of the Nashville Chamber of Commerce, Leadership Nashville, the Young Men’s Christian Association, and the Ethical Conduct Board for the Metropolitan Nashville Government. He endeared himself to the religious community as a supporter of the Interdenominational Ministers Fellowship, an organization of churches in Nashville. His wise counsel and advice played an important role in that organization’s establishment of the College Trust Fund which provides financial assistance to students in historically Black institutions in Nashville. Dr. Humphries created an incredibly positive image of TSU as an institution of compassion and quality through his speaking engagements, media interviews, and personal appearances at a wide variety of civic, religious, and community functions in Nashville. Although Dr. Humphries served as a member of a number of boards, it was his activities as a member of the Board of Directors of the National Association of Equal Opportunity in Higher Education (NAFEO) that his leadership was most powerful and effective. Dr. Humphries eventually served as President and CEO of NAFEO.

In the words of award-winning veteran journalist and TSU alumnus, Reginald Stuart, “as the Nashville community comes to grips with the loss this month of another icon, the spreading awareness of the death of Dr. Frederick S. Humphries, President of Tennessee State University from 1974-1985,

renewed confirmation of a long held feeling that Dr. Humphries was the right man at the right time in the University's evolving growth into a major state-controlled institution." Stuart also recalls in an article published in the Tennessee Tribune that Dr. Humphries fought the legal battle that eventually led to the merger of TSU and UTN (University of Tennessee at Nashville), with TSU becoming the surviving institution. This decision has been called "one of the fairest and most important desegregation decisions of the 20th Century."

During his tenure at TSU, Dr. Humphries demonstrated outstanding administrative and leadership skills, resulting in improved and expanded academic programs, upgraded faculty qualifications, increased enrollment and quality of students, and expanded scholarships and support activities. He remained close to TSU and continued his financial support through the years. Dr. Glenda Baskin Glover, current President of Tennessee State University, was quoted in a recent article in the TENNESSEAN as saying, "Dr. Humphries was a stalwart of higher education, and more importantly, a staunch advocate for historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). He demanded that HBCUs have their rightful place as leading institutions, and this was evident during his leadership of the historic merger of the University of Tennessee at Nashville and TSU."

The University of Tennessee was given the authority to construct and develop a campus very near Tennessee State University that initiated duplication of programs offered at TSU. As President of TSU, Dr. Frederick Humphries adopted a course of action that positioned him as a strong defender of the interests of the HBCU as such interests were expressed by the court interveners, the Tennesseans for Justice in Higher Education, a large class of citizens comprised of TSU faculty, students, alumni, administrators, and parents of TSU students and future students. The coalition also included Black teachers and other Black professionals in the public schools of Tennessee and other concerned citizens. Dr. Humphries' testimony in the court revealed efforts made by the Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) to get him to fire Mr. Sterlin Adams who, along with Dr. Raymond Richardson, was highly visible in the successful effort to situate the Tennesseans for Justice in Higher Education as a plaintiff party to the lawsuit that sought to dismantle the dual system of public higher education that existed in Tennessee.

Dr. Humphries knew that his actions and testimony would not endear him to the TBR but never the less he stood with the interests of the University that he was selected to lead. Tennessee State University was fortunate to have his leadership. The former campus of the University of Tennessee at Nashville is now the Avon N. Williams Downtown Campus of Tennessee State University. The Downtown Campus carries the name of the lawyer retained by Mr. Sterlin Adams to represent the Tennesseans for Justice in Higher Education. Due to Dr. Fred Humphries' strong sense of leadership, backbone and character, he refused to fire Mr. Adams. History was made and Tennessee State University now has two campuses – the main campus and the Avon Williams Center (Campus) in downtown Nashville.

Dr. Humphries' accomplishments at Tennessee State University from 1975 through 1985 included a new Cooperative Agricultural Research Building, new buildings for business, physical education, library, engineering, president's home, outdoor track facility and improvements for the Memorial Library, Harned Hall and McCord Hall. He awarded TSU's first doctorate degree in 1983 and developed a new Ph.D. program in Public Administration, an MS degree in Mathematical Sciences, a BS/BA degree in Interdisciplinary Studies, a new respiratory therapy program, and new computer centers for academics, administration, and social sciences.

Dr. Humphries was Chairman of the Board of Directors of the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges and was a member of President Bill Clinton's White House Advisory Committee on Historically Black Colleges and Universities. After his tenure as President of Tennessee State University, he served for many years as President of Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU). He also served as a Member of the Board of Directors of Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. and was a Founder and Board Member of the Thurgood Marshall Fund. His other notable board memberships included: Board of Trustees, University of Pittsburgh; Brinker International; Barnett Bank (Bank of America), Florida; the National Merit Corporation; the Princeton Review; and the Academy for Educational Development (AED).

We have been richly blessed and empowered by the life and legacy of Dr. Frederick S. Humphries, Sr. It has been written that life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away. He led a life of "firsts" – of service, scholarship, fellowship, good character, and the uplifting of humanity. This "Larger Than Life" global scholar, noble gentleman, visionary leader and educational icon, has made his mark of "Excellence With Caring," leaving thousands of proud, prepared, professional, and productive men and women to carry the Dr. Frederick S. Humphries' torch.

Dr. Humphries is survived by three children, Frederick, Jr., Robin Tanya Watson, and Laurence; eight grandchildren; and beloved companion Barbara Curry Murrell of Nashville, TN. Antoinette McTurner Humphries, his wife of 46 years, died in 2006. Antoinette McTurner and Frederick Humphries met while he was a student at the University of Pittsburgh and he lived next door to Antoinette's family in Pittsburgh. Mrs. Humphries was a loving wife and devoted mother and was Dr. Humphries' greatest supporter during their lives together. Their romance and marriage is best reflected in the words of Gandhi: "Where there is love, there is life!"

**Rest in Perfect Peace, Dr. Frederick S. Humphries, Sr.!**

July 18, 2021

To The Family of Dr. Frederick S. Humphries and the Tennessee State University Family

Re: Memories of Dr. Frederick S. Humphries

Dear Family:

I wish that I could be with you today in Nashville to reflect on my time with Dr. Frederick S. Humphries. I would like to thank the Humphries family and the TSU Family, Dr. Glenda Glover, Mrs. Barbara Murrell, and Grant Winrow, for giving me this opportunity.

Dr. Humphries was a special man to me and to the TSU students who he touched. I was President of the Tennessee State University Student Government Association for the academic year 1977-1978. During that time TSU was in the mist of numerous historical issues surrounding academic excellence, om physical plant, social unrest, and its smvival as Tennessee State University. We were also the constant target of the State Board of Regents. As the student body president it was my job to articulate the feelings of students in these areas and to act on their behalf.

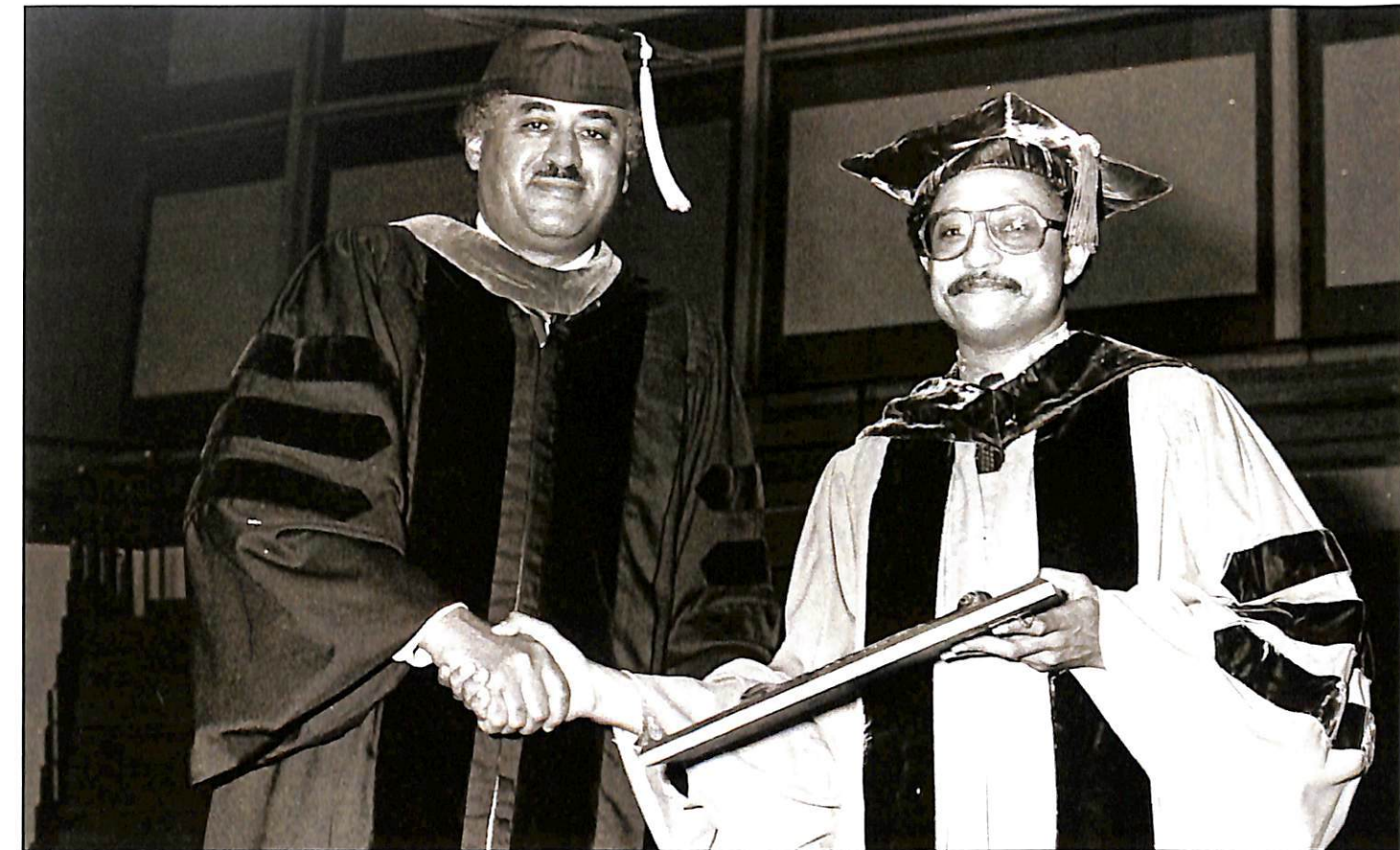
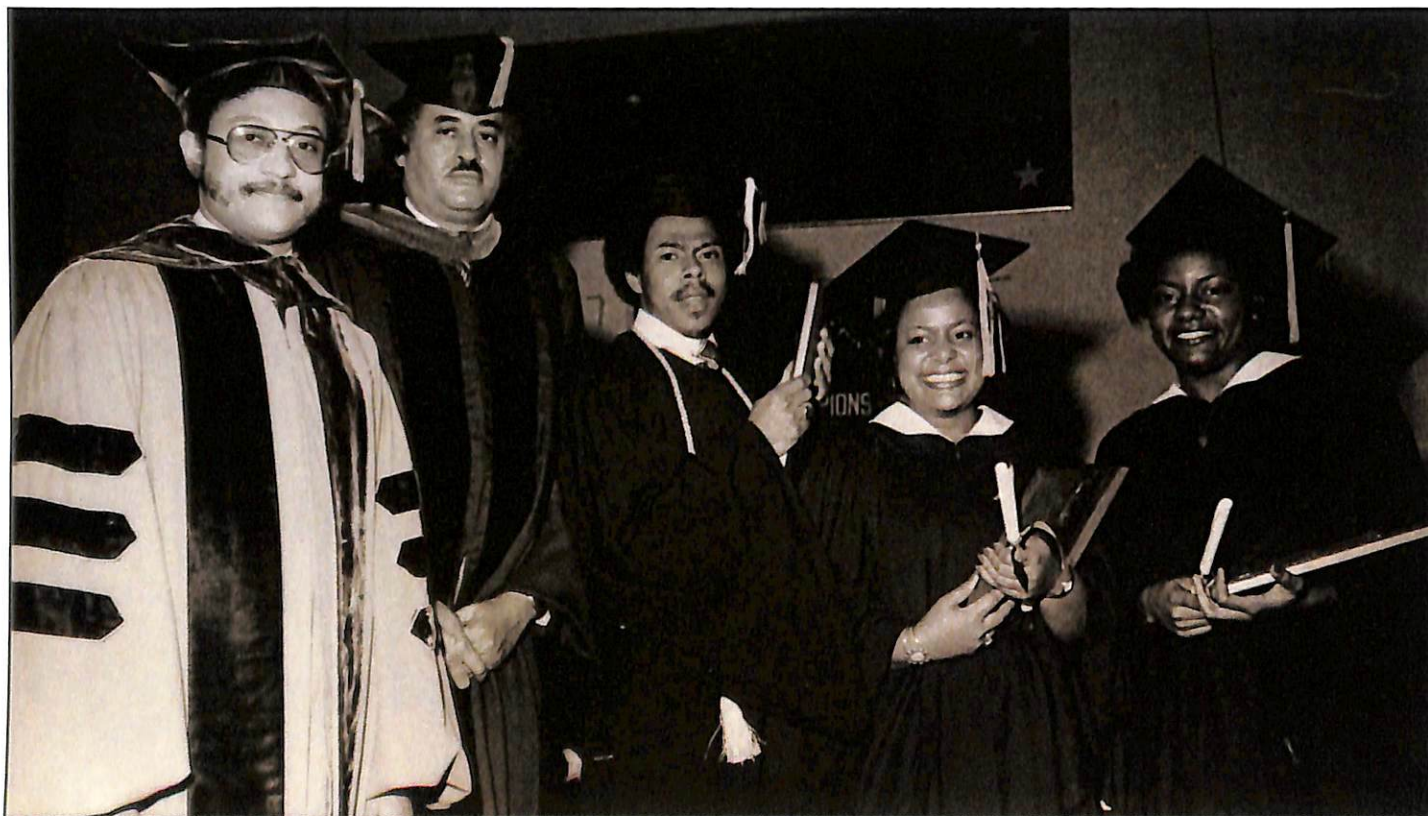
Dr. Humpbris was my hero through all of these times. He was a somce of strength for the students in general and for me in particular. In Dr. Humphries I saw an African American man that was not afraid to stand up for what he believed and to be willing to fight for the students and the University. Dr. Humphries always demanded that TSU have its rightful place among the other schools in the State Board of Regents system, and because of his demanding attitude, we as students were made stronger. I did not realize at that time that when I rubbed shoulders with Dr. Humphries, that I was rubbing shoulders with history.

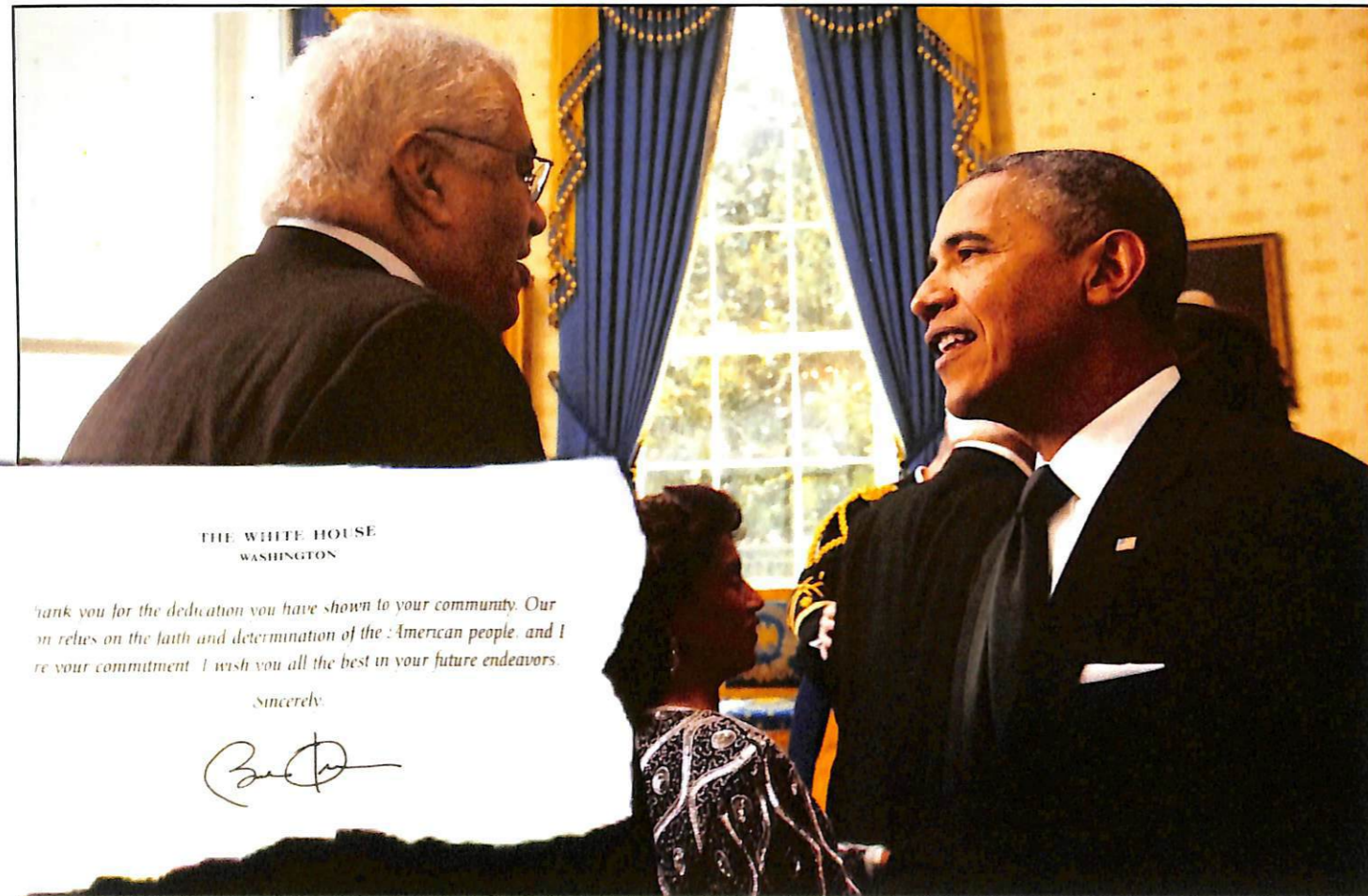
During my time as SGA President we marched to the Tennessee State Capitol to demand better academic opportunities and facilities. We marched to protest South Afica's participation in a tennis tournament in Nashville at the height of apartheid, and we marched to make sme that TSU survived as an institution. All the time we were fully backed by President Humphries. We all gained strength to fight for justice because we saw that Dr. Humphries was such a fighter for us.

But while I knew Dr. Humpries to be such a fighter for African American students, I also knew him as a scholar and gentlemen. I deeply respected Dr. Humphries for all that he did for TSU, its students, and how he allowed me to represent those students as I saw fit without fear of retaliation from an administration that may have had a different view.

In closing, I know that I was blessed to have had the opportunity to know Dr. Frederick S. Humphries. Tall in stature, Dr. Humphries was not just a monument, he was a movement. He was a truly remarkable man. Rest in peace, Dr. Humphries.

Bryan R. Williams  
 TSU alumnus – 1974-1978  
 SGA President-77-78





THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

Thank you for the dedication you have shown to your community. Our nation relies on the faith and determination of the American people, and I appreciate your commitment. I wish you all the best in your future endeavors.

Sincerely,



Dr. Hazel E. Welton returned during the year for the dedication of the student union plaza in his honor. Dr. Welton established the first endowment scholarship fund for students in 1977.









### In Appreciation

The family of the late Dr. Frederick S. Humphries, Sr. would like to thank each and every one for the kindness shown to them during the illness and passing of their loved one. Thank you for the comforting messages, prayers, calls, flowers, food and all expressions of love and sympathy during this time.

Please continue to pray for us. May God bless and keep you!

—The Family

### Special Acknowledgments

Dr. Glenda Glover  
 Tennessee State University  
 Mrs. Barbara C. Murrell  
 Mr. Grant Winrow  
 Mr. David Todd  
 Dr. Larry Robinson  
 Dr. Jacqueline Mitchell  
 Chevron Corporation  
 Ms. Georgette "Gigi" Peek Dixon  
 Mr. Bryan Williams, Esq.  
 OICSFL  
 TSU National Alumni Association  
 Mr. Bobby Demby  
 Lewis & Wright Funeral Directors  
 Dr. Phyllis Adams  
 Dr. Sandra Holt  
 TSU Creative Services Department  
 Rev. Dr. Gerald Durley  
 Lowes Vanderbilt Hotel



# WHEN GREAT TREES FALL

Maya Angelou

When great trees fall,  
rocks on distant hills shudder,  
lions hunker down in tall grasses,  
and even elephants lumber after safety.

When great trees fall in forests,  
small things recoil into silence,  
their senses eroded beyond fear.

When great souls die, the air around us  
becomes light, rare, sterile.

We breathe, briefly. Our eyes, briefly,  
see with a hurtful clarity.

Our memory, suddenly sharpened,  
examines, gnaws on kind words  
unsaid, promised walks never taken.

Great souls die and our reality,  
bound to them, takes leave of us.  
Our souls, dependent upon their  
nurture, now shrink, wizened.

Our minds, formed and informed by their  
radiance, fall away. We are not  
so much maddened as reduced to the  
unutterable ignorance of  
dark, cold caves.

And when great souls die,  
after a period peace blooms,  
slowly and always irregularly. Spaces fill  
with a kind of soothing electric vibration.

Our senses, restored, never to be the same,  
whisper to us. They existed. They existed.  
We can be. Be and be better. For they existed.