

**Mrs. Cheryl Brown Henderson, 2017 MLK Convocation Keynote Speaker**  
**Founding President, Brown Foundation**



Cheryl Brown Henderson is one of three daughters of the late Rev. Oliver L. Brown who, along with 12 other parents in the fall of 1950, led by attorneys for the NAACP, filed suit on behalf of their children against the local Board of Education. Their case joined with cases from Delaware, South Carolina, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. on appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court and, on May 17, 1954, became known as the landmark decision *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. Oliver

Brown died in 1961 before knowing the impact this case would have on the nation.

Cheryl is the Founding President of the Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, Excellence and Research, and owner of Brown & Associates, an educational consulting firm. She has an extensive background in education, business and civic leadership, having served on and chaired various local, state and national boards. In addition she has two decades of experience in political advocacy, public policy implementation, and federal legislative development.

Along with numerous awards for her work in education and community service, Cheryl has an honorary doctorate of humane letters from Washburn University, and she has been recognized for her work with Congress and the National Park Service to preserve sites associated with the landmark U.S. Supreme Court ruling of 1954, including the *Brown v. Board of Education* National Park in Topeka, which opened in May of 2004.

In 1988 she founded the Brown Foundation. Since its establishment, the Foundation has provided scholarships to more than 100 minority students; presented awards to local, state and national leaders; established libraries for children in low income communities; developed curriculum on *Brown* for educators across the country; created traveling exhibits and a web site about *Brown*; and sponsored programs on diversity and educational issues for thousands of people. In 2001, under her leadership the Foundation successfully worked with the U.S. Congress to establish the *Brown v. Board of Education* 50th Anniversary Presidential Commission.

**Rev. John Perkins, Founder  
John and Vera Mae Perkins Foundation**



John, Vera Mae and their families have ministered among the poor for the past six decades. In 1960, the couple left a successful life in California and moved to Mississippi, where Perkins helped start a day-care center, youth program, church, cooperative farm, thrift store, housing repair ministry, health center, and adult education program.

John and Vera Mae also organized their communities during the Civil Rights era. With marches and community action, John and Vera Mae

led the way for civil disobedience, and John was brutally beaten and imprisoned by law enforcement. Their children were some of the first students to desegregate their local schools.

In Jackson, Voice of Calvary Ministries started a church, health center, leadership development program, thrift store, low-income housing development, and training center. From this ministry, he initiated community development projects and health centers in neighboring towns of Canton, New Hebron and Edwards. The John M. Perkins Foundation, started in 1983, has engaged the community in Jackson and spread a message of reconciliation and development across the U.S.

In 1989, John Perkins called together a group of Christian leaders from across America bonded by expressing the love of Christ in America's poor communities; not at arm's length, but at the grass-roots level. An association was formed and the Christian Community Development Association was born. CCDA held its first annual conference in Chicago in 1989. CCDA has now grown from 37 founding members to over 6,800 individuals and 600 churches, ministries, institutions and businesses in more than 100 cities and townships across the country.

In 1982, the Perkins moved to Pasadena, California and his family founded Harambee Christian Family Center, now Harambee Ministries in Northwest Pasadena, a neighborhood that had one of the highest daytime crime rates in the entire state of California. Harambee has run after-school tutoring, Good News Bible Clubs, an award-winning technology center, summer day camps, youth internship programs, and a college scholarship program. They currently maintain many of these community programs as well as a preparatory school for youth in the community.

After the death of John and Vera Mae's eldest son, Spencer, in 1998, the Perkins established the Spencer Perkins Center, the youth arm of the John M. Perkins Foundation with youth programs such as After School Tutoring, Summer Arts Camp, Junior and College Internship Program, Good News Bible Club, Young Life and Jubilee Garden. The foundation also has a housing arm, Zechariah 8, providing affordable housing for low-to moderate-income families with a focus on single mothers. In 2010, the John M. Perkins Foundation changed its name to the John and Vera Mae Perkins Foundation to honor the contributions of John's wife, Vera Mae.

**Mr. Michael A. Middleton, Interim President  
University of Missouri**



Michael A. Middleton was appointed interim president of the University of Missouri on November 12, 2015, by the University of Missouri Board of Curators after student protests forced a change in administration. He previously served as deputy chancellor of the University of Missouri-Columbia and is a professor emeritus in the MU School of Law.

Middleton joined the faculty of the MU School of Law in 1985, after an illustrious career with the federal government, where he was first a trial attorney in the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice. In 1977, he was appointed assistant deputy director of the Office for Civil Rights within the former U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. After serving as director of the Office of Systemic Programs for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and as principal deputy assistant secretary for Civil Rights at the U.S. Department of Education,

Middleton was appointed associate general counsel of the EEOC's trial division.

Beginning in 1997, Middleton served as the interim vice provost for minority affairs and faculty development at MU. A year later, he accepted the position of deputy chancellor, a role he held until his retirement on August 31, 2015.

Throughout his career, Middleton has received several accolades including: the Distinguished Alumni Award from the MU Black Alumni Organization in 1995, the Harold Holliday Award from the Missouri Legislative Black Caucus in 1998, the Spurgeon Smithson Award from the Missouri Bar Foundation in 1999, a Citation of Merit from the University of Missouri School of Law in 2001, the Chief Justice's Award from the Missouri Supreme Court in 2003, the President's Award from the Missouri Bar in 2003, the MLK Dream Conference Trailblazer of the Year Award in 2006, and most recently the MLK Jr. Distinguished Drum Major for Justice Award, the Legislative Black Caucus Public Service Award, and the Trailblazer Award from the Columbia NAACP in 2016.

Middleton grew up in Jim Crow-era Mississippi. His dad, a chaplain with the Army, couldn't be politically active, but other family members inspired Middleton to get involved in civil rights. He often tagged along with aunts and uncles who were active with the NAACP. Middleton remembers attending a conference of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the early 1960s, along with Ted Kennedy, Thurgood Marshall and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Middleton is married to Dr. Julie N. Middleton, who retired in February 2016 after serving as director of organizational development and an extension professional at the University of Missouri. Together, they have three children and seven grandchildren.

**Dr. Rod Paige, Interim President  
Jackson State University**



JSU interim President Rod Paige, the son of a school principal and a librarian, rose from humble roots in a segregated small-town in Mississippi all the way to U.S. Secretary of Education. He assumed his new role on Nov. 7, 2016.

From 2001 to 2005, Paige served in George W. Bush's administration. As the nation's top educator, he championed student achievement and employed "best of breed" solutions to raise national standards of educational excellence. A member of the presidential Cabinet, Paige spearheaded the implementation of the historic No Child Left Behind Act, with the goal of reinvigorating America's education system.

Paige forged his reputation for seeking out and putting in place innovative approaches to systemic academic improvement when he was dean of the College of Education at Texas Southern University (TSU). At TSU, he established the University's Center for Excellence in Urban Education.

He also has shown a knack for inclusive leadership, first as a school board trustee and then as superintendent of the Houston Independent School District, then the nation's seventh-largest district. When he was appointed superintendent in 1994, he was the first African-American in the district's history to serve in that position. In 1999, Paige was named one of the top two educators in the country by the Council of the Great City Schools. Two years later, Paige was honored as National Superintendent of the Year by the American Association of School Administrators.

Following his time as Secretary of Education, Paige served as a Public Policy Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. In 2006, he authored *The War Against Hope* and, in 2010, published *The Black-White Achievement Gap: Why Closing It Is the Greatest Civil Rights Issue of Our Time*.

In his relentless quest to improve the quality of education for all students, Paige is an active member of numerous boards, including the Universal Technical Institute (UTI), Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, the American College of Education, Patten University, Strake Foundation, Blue Cure Foundation, Texas Charter Schools Association and the National Council of Economic Education's Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, among others.

Paige is the eldest of five siblings. He and his wife, Stephanie Nellons-Paige, have a son and daughter.