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Celebrating 175: Jacob Lawrence, Correspondence, Spelman College, Atlanta, GA, 1977-1978, 1987

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Degrees
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honorary doctor of divinity degree to the Cardinal Jaime Sin, Archbishop of Manila.

At Duke University, giving honorary degrees is "simply a policy," said University Marshal Pelham Wilder Jr., "We've done it for the better part of 125 years."

Duke recently awarded honorary degrees ABC's "Nightline" anchor Ted Koppel, syndicated advice columnist Ann Landers and fast-food tycoon R. David Thomas.

All the honorees had some tie to the university, Wilder said. Koppel's daughter was a member of this year's graduating class; the newsman served as commencement speaker. Ms. Landers frequently consults members of the Duke Medical School's faculty as experts for her column, and she has a keen interest in the Alzheimer's disease center at the school. And Thomas, who is chairman and founder of Wendy's International, recently contributed a building to the university's Fuqua School of Business.

Duke has a procedure for choosing honorary degree recipients. A person can be nominated by "anyone in the academy community, including students," Wilder said. A faculty committee and a trustees committee meet separately to consider names, and then together to vote on a list of nominees.

There is no written set of criteria for honorees. "But we do feel it's prudent to stay free of a person standing for election in a political year," Wilder said.

"The number approved for degrees is quite small," he said. "A name may appear for a number of years before it makes it out of committee." Former president Richard Nixon, although a graduate of Duke's law school, is a prime example. "The name was brought up more than once," Wilder said stiffly. "But he was never given an honorary degree." Some schools, such as Emory, seek a more serious tone in their choice of degree recipients.

Emory's 1987 honorees include Dr. Hugh Gloster, retiring president of Morehouse; Virginia F. Durr, an Alabama author and civil rights advocate; Dr. Frederick C. Barghoorn, an expert on Soviet policies; and Dr. Adetokunbo Lucas, a Nigerian medical scientist.

Florida State University (FSU) is more freewheeling in its approach. No honorary degrees were conferred at the university's May 2 ceremony. But in 1986, the school awarded doctorates to New York theatrical producer Joseph Papp and Florida congressman Don Fuqua. [[1 image]]

[[Lena Horne listens to the Spellman College Glee Club during commencement ceremonies Sunday.]]

Even Burt Reynolds, who played football for FSU but never graduated, picked up a doctorate. Reynolds endeared himself to the university when he endowed a chair in the drama school. In 1978, the school made Lillian Carter an honorary doctor, and in 1975, actress Helen Hayes and King Hussein of Jordan were honored. King Hussein?

"Well, I think he was visiting Florida at the time, and they thought it would be nice," explained Charlene Menacof, secretary to FSU President Bernard Sliger.

Miss Lillian's son, former President Jimmy Carter, holds the distinction of being the only person given an honorary degree from Georgia's state university system. Carter received an honorary doctorate in 1979 from Georgia Tech, which he had attended.

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The state has a policy that allows the granting of degrees only to those

who have been actively enrolled in a university system school or to someone who has obtained the status of president of the United States.

Other schools are more cautious, and when it comes to doing so, honorary degrees.

"Our degrees are considered to be very precious to us," said Spelman College spokesman.

"The board of trustees felt it would diminish the value of our degrees, in some cases," a Tusculum University spokesman said. "We don't even have commencement speakers - from outside the university."

who have actually attended a university system school or to someone "who has attained the office of president of the United States." Other schools are more tightfisted when it comes to dishing out honorary degrees. "Our degrees are considered to be very difficult to earn," and Agnes Scott College spokesman said. "The board of trustees felt it would diminish the value of our degrees, to some extent," a Vanderbilt University spokesman said. "We don't even have commencement speakers from outside the university."

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