

## Michael Connor's UNCF speech

I am grateful for my blessings and I bless all of mankind.

Initially I want to thank Mamie Walker for recognizing the significance of my work. She didn't see me just as an artist. However, she also saw me as a humanitarian. Since this is Black History month, I looked into my history. My grandfather told me once, "That whatever you do, help someone." John Connor, not the Terminator but the cultivator, was my grandfather and his father was Cheeseman Monroe Connor who was born in slavery in 1855, his mother, my great great grandmother Peggy Graham aka Margaret Connor was born in 1815, her parents were possibly Nigerians according to my DNA.

When I look at my biological history it humbles me. My family history was a struggle like many African Americans. Although John Connor was able to own a considerable amount of real estate and a road is named after him, John Connor Road, and I live on that road. It beacons me to give back. My father taught that lesson when I was very young as we sat under grandpas' big shady oak tree eating watermelon. I said, "Dad why are we littering the ground with seeds?" Remembering the commercial on television that said, every litter bug hurts. Dad said, "When you take from the soil you must give back to the soil."

In my way, I have tried to give back. It is my duty as a humanitarian to do so. The legendary actress, Bette Davis, said to me, "You must have come from good stock." Although she was trying to be endearing, I changed her comment to mean "You come from a long line of good people." When I consider my great great grandmother had three children, I know of, and my great grandfather, whose father was white, had twenty-one children; and my grandfather had twelve and two foster children; and my father had four boys and four girls, does make for a long line of people. Image without my ancestors, this Michael Connor, you see before you today, would not exist and most certainly would not have done the things that he has done to make this world a little better than he found it.

I want to thank my mentors and friends from the HBCUs for establishing some of the work that I have been able to accomplish.. Dr. Horace B. Caple and Dr. Patricia C. Caple from Shaw University as well as the late Reverend Dr. C. T. Vivian, who was instrumental in helping me attain my first job on the Broadway stage. Madelyn Lowery for letting me write plays for Johnson C. Smith University's upward bound program. Last but not least, Dr. Jimmy R. Jenkins, Sr. for allowing me to practice and teach my favorite subject Theatre Arts at Livingstone College.

I am appreciative of the journey on which God has led me. I would like to close with this poem by an unknown author:

### **A Creed to Live By**

**Don't determine your worth by comparing yourself with others.  
It is because we are different that each of us is special.**

**Don't set your goals by what others deem important.  
Only you know what is best for you.**

**Don't take for granted the things closest to your heart;  
cling to them as you would your life, for without them life  
is meaningless.**

**Don't let your life slip through your fingers  
by living in the past or for the future.**

**By living your life ONE DAY AT A TIME  
you will live all the days of your life.  
Don't give up when you still have something to give.**

**Nothing is really over... until the moment you stop trying.**

**Don't be afraid to admit that you are less than perfect;  
it is this fragile thread that binds us to each other.**

**Don't be afraid to encounter risks,  
It's by taking chances we learn how to be brave.**

**Don't shut LOVE out of your life  
by saying it's impossible to find.**

**The quickest way to receive LOVE is to give LOVE,  
the fastest way to lose LOVE is to hold it too tightly  
and the best way to keep LOVE is to give it wings.**

**Don't dismiss your dreams.  
To be without dreams is to be without HOPE;  
To be without HOPE is to be without purpose.**

**Don't run through life so fast that you forget not only  
WHERE YOU'VE BEEN -- but also -- WHERE YOU'RE GOING.**

**Life isn't a race, but.....  
IT'S A JOURNEY -- TO BE SAVORED EACH STEP OF THE WAY.**

—Author Unknown

I sincerely thank you for inducting me into the United Negro College Fund "Share Your Love" and Service in Celebration of Livingstone College Leaders Hall of Fame. I am honored to accept this prestigious award.