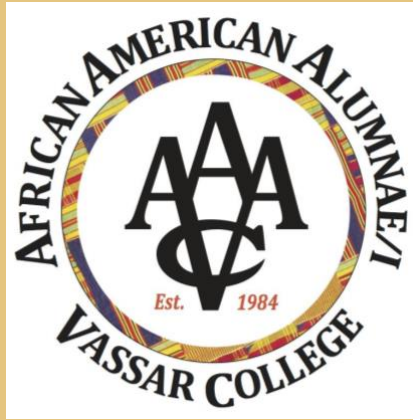


Kente Cloth Bestowal



MAY 23, 2020

1:45-3:00PM



The AAAVC engages and unites Vassar's alumnae/i and undergraduates of African descent and encourages them to thrive by championing equity, access, and excellence on the Vassar College campus and beyond.

SENIORS



| | |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Maya Allen | Ruvarashe Mubaiwa |
| Miranda Amey | Yume Murphy |
| Kci Archibald | Kennedy Murray |
| Ifeacho Awachie | Karina Norton |
| Kevin Kipnetich Baliat | Oluwabukola Oloyede |
| Ariana Berry | Chikezie Onungwa |
| Ruby Brown | Farhia Osman |
| Elyse Canty | Sabrina Perry |
| Jana-Elisse Clevenger | Tatum Phillips |
| Keira Congo | Jessica Quansah |
| Eve Coulibaly | Mary Retta |
| Zahra Crim | Lorice Rodney |
| Athená Davis | Anya Scott-Wallace |
| Dasanae "Precious" Davis | David Stevenson |
| Kaya Deuser | Harrison Taylor |
| Brenda Dzaringa | Antar Thiam |
| Micah Fedenko | Maia Thomas |
| Jami Gibson | Maimuna Touray |
| Makeda Johnson | Jamelia Watson |
| Simone Johnson | James Werner |
| Dylan Joyner | Marcin Williams |
| Simone Karuga | Noah Winold |
| Maria-Sophia Martin | Henery Wyand |

KENTE CLOTH BESTOWAL PROGRAM



Welcome
Dennis Slade, Jr. '91
AAAVC Co-Chair



Performance by UJIMA – “Total Praise”



Remarks by President Elizabeth Bradley



Alumni Speaker Daniel Alexander Jones '91



Introduction of the Class of 2020



Performance by UJIMA – “Down by the Riverside”



Closing Remarks
Tracy Elise Poole '82
AAAVC Co-Chair



Virtual Photo



BIOGRAPHY

DANIEL ALEXANDER JONES '91



Daniel Alexander Jones exemplifies the artist as energy worker. While his wildflower body of original work includes plays, performance pieces, recorded music, concerts, music theatre events, essays, and long-form improvisations, energy is his true medium. The Herb Alpert Foundation notes that he “creates multi-dimensional experiences where bodies, minds, emotions, voices, and spirits conjoin, shimmer, and heal.”

Jones's critically-acclaimed performance pieces include [Black Light](#) (Public Theater, Greenwich House Theatre, American Repertory Theatre, Penumbra Theatre); [Duat](#) (Soho Rep); [An Integrator's Manual](#) (La MaMa, etc. and Fusebox Festival); and [Radiate](#) (Soho Rep and National Tour). Jones has recorded five albums of original songs as his alter-ego, [Jomama Jones](#). He is recognized as a key voice in the development of Theatrical Jazz and has made a significant contribution to Black Experimental Theatre and Performance.

Jones is a 2020 TED Fellow, was a 2019 Guggenheim Fellow, the recipient of a 2019 Helen Merrill Playwriting Award, is a Doris Duke Artist Award recipient, was a Mellon Foundation Creative Research Fellow at the University of Washington, Seattle from 2017-2019, and was the recipient of support from USA Artists, Creative Capital, and the MAP Fund. He was awarded an Alpert Award in the Arts, a Bistro Award, and the Franky Award in Performance. Jones is a Professor of Theatre at Fordham University where he runs the Playwriting Track. He is currently developing the interdisciplinary project, Altar no. 5, commissioned by the Public Theater and New York Live Arts for a virtual & participatory launch in 2020. Visit danielalexanderjones.com for more information.





HISTORY OF KENTE CLOTH

Kente cloth originated with the Ashanti people of Ghana more than 400 years ago and has been widely embraced as a sacred and revered African American symbol of pride and life passage stretching well beyond one African tribe and country. Although the first Kente cloth was made of raffia fibers, Kente cloth associated with Ashanti royalty was made of silk during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The royal Kente cloth was a product of a global trade route that stretched from Asia through Europe to Africa; this cloth and the people also came to be associated with another global trade route—the slave trade. In fact, the history of the Ashanti people, who lived on the West Coast of Africa, is strongly tied to the history of the slave trade.

According to Ashanti tradition, these are the basic Kente cloth colors:

- Black represents Africa
- Red represents the blood of forefathers
- Yellow represents gold
- Green represents the forest



UJIMA: Groove Society is a collective of musicians and vocalists of color who celebrate and sing music of the African Diaspora including R&B, Soul, and Gospel.

“TOTAL PRAISE” VOCALISTS

- 2018 Laena Haagensen, Rebecca-Anne Whittaker
2019 Riah Altman, Zariah Altman, Zahra Crim,
Jenna Llorens-Blas, Melanie Melo, Karla Zabala
2020 Larissa Archondo, Athena Davis, Karina Norton,
Mary Retta, Maimuna Touray, Megan Wang
2021 Wyatt Carey, Chloe Crawford, Abrianna Harris,
Eric Hernandez, Atticus Koizumi, Maisha Lakri,
Stella Royo, Bryan Smith, Lena Stevens

“DOWN BY THE RIVERSIDE” VOCALISTS

- 2020** Athena Davis, Sara Inoa
2021 Eura Choi, Ben Goya, Abrianna Harris, Atticus Koizumi,
Lena Stevens
2022 Gabby Kimbrough, Jess Liu, Jessica Rattray, Paola Castañeda
2023 Laury Senecal, David Padron, Leonard Versola

ADVICE TO GRADUATING SENIORS

Never let anyone or anything convince you to compromise who you are. Whatever sacrifices you make to preserve your authentic self, you will find them more than worth the struggle. The essence of you should never be negotiable. You do you. Always.

~ *Jubi Arriola-Headley, Class of 1991*

Write Now Communications

Don't panic if you don't have all of the answers right now, or if you're unsure about what the future holds after Vassar. Enjoy the journey down the unclear path. Enjoy experiencing new things, and becoming a more fully realized version of who you're meant to be; which will only come with time. Things will always work out if you have faith and are continually working towards having a more fulfilled personal and professional life. Lastly, be proud of yourself for achieving this great accomplishment and always remember to smile!

~ *Tre Artis, Class of 2015*

PhD Student, Harvard University

Connect and grow your own food for yourselves and your community. People worth forming community with may not resemble you in appearance or ideas, but that is not most important. Do not waste time in a city that doesn't need you. Return to nature, it is owed to you, do not fear it. When it comes to the earth, hair and soil science go hand and hand. Our ancestors survived through love, adaptability, and resourcefulness. Read about them and do the same. You'll find yourself ahead of the trend.

~ *Misha Alia Awad 2018*

Nebulous Postgrad; Educator on Blackness to the Chinese Elite; Radical Agrarian

Be yourself, in the truest, most excellent way you know how. Every effort, every kindness—it all counts. But be gentle with yourself if you don't always succeed; life has a way of figuring itself out, as long as you keep pressing on. You are made of and for greatness.

~ *Nana T. Baffour-Awuah, Class of 2014*

Strategist



At a time when you feel like you need to have everything figured out and have your 5-year plan signed and sealed it's easy to feel anxious and worried if the decisions you make are the "right" ones. A Jamaican proverb gets me through these anxious feelings and that is "What is fi yuh, cyah un- fi yuh". It means that what is yours will always find a way to be yours, even if you take a different route than planned or hit a few bumps in the road. So, claim your decisions as yours and enjoy and learn from your journey to wherever you're supposed to be. Oh, and self-care!

~ *Kerri-Anne Bell, Class of 2017*

Clinical Psychology Researcher

Graduation is no small feat, you snapped. I am beyond proud of your journeys and celebrate with you in this accomplishment. I also know that Graduation has a way of making room for uncertainty and second guessing. As you move forward in your future endeavors: always trust yourself, never be afraid to set your own pace or do things your own way and prioritize the things that make you happy and bring you joy. Most importantly, know that you are supported every step of the way. We got you.

~ *Kibi Blaze, Class of 2018*

Dancer, Educator

Don't look at a bare tree and think spring will never come. You might be in a winter state; brittle, and seemingly barren, but frost and ice are no match for the sun.

~ *Nana Ekua Brew-Hammond, Class of 1998*

Writer

Remember that dreams can become reality and you're capable of finding work that you love.

~ *Sienna Brown, Class of 2013*

Founder of Las Morenas

Do not worry about the pace your peers are moving after you accept your diploma. Rest assured that Vassar has given you the tools for you to step into your destiny. This is the beginning of something beautiful. Trust the process.

~ *Renee J Bryant, Class of 2015*

Litigation Assistant



Hold on to your hope. As firmly as your newly earned degrees, hold it. Keep it close because out of it a new you will be born.

It is almost a cliché to say that out of adversity many of the most noble actions arise. But you are preparing now for what you might know years later to have had its beginning in this moment of peril.

Most likely to thwart this blossoming is the loss of hope. Hold on to it.

~ *Jettie M. Burnett, MD, Class of 1970*

Ophthalmic Surgeon

Dear glorious ones:

We are amazed by you and this significant accomplishment! All that you need to know to continue to live your best life, you already know. Believe in yourself and that you already know or can find the answers to questions or solutions to issues.

Peace, love and blessings, Your faculty,

~ *Colette Cann, Class of 1998*

Associate Professor

Do not look where you fell, but where you stumbled.

These wise words, from somewhere in Mother Africa, still guide me, as has this Guinean proverb: Knowledge without wisdom is water in the sand. Wish that I had learned them earlier.

~ *June Jackson Christmas, MD, Class of 1945-4*

Psychiatrist

Stay in touch with the people you met at Vassar, including your favorite professors, guest lecturers and artists, and your classmates. Vassar connections have helped me with housing abroad and in the US; professionally; and socially. Stay connected.

~ *Karen Valentia Clopton, Class of 1980, P '19, '22*

Human Rights Commissioner

Past Co-Chair, AAAC 2015-2018 and Class of 1980 President, 2015-2020

Trust those who trust you back. Always strive to be the best you can be in a profession that makes you happy to go to work everyday...

You may shoot me with your words,

You may cut me with your eyes,

You may kill me with your hatefulness,

But still, like air, I'll rise. ~Maya Angelou

~ *Natasha Cooke-Nieves, Class of 1996*

Professor, American Museum of Natural History, Richard Gilder Graduate School



Connect with people when you don't need their help, do so because you genuinely value their time and energy.

~ *Kleaver Cruz, Class of 2011*

Chief Dream Director

Dear Class of 2020,

11 years ago, my class graduated during the Great Recession. Many of us were jobless & uncertain, and the way out of the fog wasn't clear. Worse than us, you are graduating during an unprecedentedly globally paralyzed time. College is not ending the way you envisioned. Know that we see you (even if from afar) and your disappointment, and are in our hearts. To paraphrase Tabitha Brown – you will come out of this experience stronger and more prepared than most. The fog will clear. And in the future, when dreams or accomplishments don't go as planned, you will remember that you have been through worse before. This will ground you. You are in the training of a lifetime, and you will make it. Also, use your network. Reach out. We are here!

~ *Nana M. Effah, Class of 2009*

Assistant Principal, Achievement First University Prep HS

Truly believing in yourself and loving yourself is the most powerful thing you can do for yourself. Always trust your gut. Know that no one has everything figured out, life is a journey. In the end things will work out one way or another.

~ *Ashley Farrell, Class of 2010*

Research Associate (Recruiter)

This I know for sure:

You must find your passion(s) and ways to pursue them. Hopefully, you can make them your profession, but if not, you can integrate them into your life.

~ *Lauri Fitz-Pegado, Class of 1977*

Partner, The Livingston Group Owner, Inwood Family Acupuncture

Where you find yourself in a few years might not align with your vision of who you thought you would be or where you thought you would be. Find peace with that. Let life take you where it will. Don't limit your vision. And find community who supports you through all stages and phases.

~ *Alexandra Cawthorne Gaines, Class of 2004*

Vice President



Never apologize for being your authentic self nor doubt your intuition.

~ *Indiana Garcia, Class of 2011*

Trainer at the Possé Foundation

Congratulations on this fantastic achievement!! As you step into post-grad life, be confident in who you are. Know that you have the skills, knowledge and resilience you need to succeed, despite the circumstances. Be open to any and all opportunities, and always be kind to yourselves. This is only the beginning of your journeys, and you are so much more than a job title. Welcome to AAAVC!!

~ *Lauren Ginton, Class of 2016*

Grants Researcher and Writer

I wish I'd known that the core of who I was would remain the same, but that the outward expression of it would change. I still do things that feed my soul and help others, but the manifestation is not something I ever would have imagined. Know that change will come, and that it will be expansive and messy and individualized and communal, but that it will lead you on the correct path—yours.

~ *Tina Greene, Class of 1998*

Owner, Inwood Family Acupuncture

The advice I wish someone had given me, is to follow-up when you meet amazing people. During my young years, I met so many individuals from whom I believe I could've learned a great deal. I was never good about seizing these opportunities and have regretted over the years my failure to deepen these connections.

~ *Sherrilyn Ifill, Class of 1984*

President and Director-Counsel,
NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund Inc.

Courage and imagination brought you to Vassar. The knowledge, skills and personal connections you have made there will serve you well as you go into the wider world. You will do wonderful things! You will touch many people with your light. Be kind to others, but never forget to look after your own well-being. As my Dad, used to say, whenever we parted, "Remember, be kind to yourself."

~ *Marilyn J. Jackson, Ed.D., Class of 1989*

Director, Office of International Programs, San Francisco State University



Don't kill yourself to be a pawn in New York if you can live like a king in St. Louis.

~ *Damon Johnson, Class of 2002*

VP of Branded Entertainment, CIVIC

Life is what you make it. Focus on your future, your self-created destiny. Take the reins and make it happen.

~ *Lynai Jones, Class of 1992, P '16*

Owner, Mitchell Black Home

Acknowledging the "joy, pain, sunshine, and rain" of the last four years, your Vassar graduation will forever rank among your most valuable, respected, and influential life accomplishments. Please do not let the proverbial door close behind you. Stay connected and supportive of AAAC and the Vassar College community.

~ *Patricia James Jordan, Ph.D., Class of 1972, P '17*

Clinical Psychologist, AAAC Co-Founder,
National Teachers Hall of Fame, 2015

Remember that one of your best assets is your adaptability: you should still be able to achieve what you want in life, even if it's not on the path you expected.

~ *Glenda Kenyon, Class of 2009*

Property Manager

Congratulations! My advice to you is based on something Toni Morrison wrote: "Definitions belong to the definers, not the defined." You are entering a new chapter in your life, one that will be based on the choices you make, the people you meet, and the values you hold. Don't be afraid to take chances and explore opportunities you may have never imagined. They may lead you to defining yourself in exciting and fulfilling ways.

~ *Allison King, Class of 1988*

Communications Executive

Make your mark on this world. Be bold in your pursuits and take the chance to go where few/none have gone before you.

~ *Adam J. Lee, Class of 2006*

Lead Teacher/Special Education Liaison, Urban Assembly Schools NYC



1) Embrace the unknown and lean into what you are passionate about. While easier said than done, I can say from experience that life after Vassar has been full of wonderful adventures and successes I never could have imagined.

2) Stay connected to the friends and professors that inspire and support you as they will continue to play that role well into the future.

3) Give back in whatever ways you can.

~ *Ashley N. Leonard, Class of 2007*

Founding Associate Director,
To&Through Middle Grades Network

Be trustworthy and trust yourself. Surround yourself with honorable people. Aim for financial independence.

~ *Paula Williams Madison, Class of 1974*

Author, Documentarian, Retired Media Executive, Former Vassar College Trustee,
Former AAVC President, AAAVC Co-Chair 2016-2018, Past AAAVC Co-Chair

Don't take your Vassar relationships for granted, for in some cases, lifetimes will be much shorter than you expected.

~ *Alisa Martin, Class of 2007*

Arts Administrator/Management Consultant

Do not be afraid to ask. Most alumni will be happy to share their time and experiences with you. "The baby that does not cry dies on its mother's back." -Swazi proverb

~ *Gcinisizwe Mdluli, Class of 2009*

International Development/Operations Officer

1. Stay focused on your career goals.
2. Use your contacts and networking opportunities through VC.
3. Stay in touch with others.
4. Realize that entering the world will take you from a rarefied environment to the "real world" of mediocrity.
5. Take a breath then carry on.

Good Luck

~ *Dr. Linda McLean, Class of 1964*

College Counselor



It is not just about being in 'the room where it happens,' it's what you do when you are in that room that matters. Discover your why, your voice, and use it. Sweat equity is as important as financial equity. Be kind, and disconnect to reconnect #unplug

~ *Ken Miles, Class of 2007*

Social Entrepreneur, Vassar College Trustee, Past AAAVC Co-Chair 2009-2015

Believe in yourself!

~ *Tandeka Moleah, Class of 1990*

Fundraising Consultant/Educator

Take the time to celebrate yourself! Graduating from college is no small feat. Despite the challenges you have face, always take time to honor yourself and your community.

~ *Angel Needham-Giles, Class of 2014*

Founder, The Vanguard Beauty

Dr. Ralph Bunche (an African-American political scientist and father of Joan Bunche '53) in his commencement address implored the class of 1953 to "... strive to eradicate prejudice, bigotry, hatred and national arrogance in relations among people." Today we are living in an extraordinary time and it is difficult to discern where we are and where we are headed. The remarks by Bunche are as timely now as they were then. Remember them as you set out to repair the world.

~ *Patricia Ann Neely, Class of 1975, P '18*

Musician

1) Be yourself; 2) Follow your heart; 3) Work hard; 4) ... KEEP GOING! Follow these 4 principles on a daily basis and you will evolve into the inherent badass that is you. Most importantly, Stay Buoyant! xo

~ *Natalie Weathers Nixon, Class of 1991*

Creativity Strategist, Entrepreneur, President of Figure 8 Thinking

One of the biggest things that holds you back in life is fear. If you want to be the best that you can be, lean into the fear. That is where the growth is.

~ *Cynthia Patton, Class of 1983*

Attorney and Life Sciences Executive



Congratulations, Class of 2020! We are immensely proud of you—you are a class unlike any other. Please know that the difficulty of this time will pass. Try to be in the moment, and to savor the accomplishments of your years at Vassar. Celebrate the bonds of friendship that you've formed over these past four years, and the intellectual riches you've amassed. We will always stand with you, and are so proud to welcome you into the family of Vassar alums. Salve!

~ *Roslyn Pedlar-Onderdonk, Class of 1984*

Writer/Editor

Believe in yourself and get up when you fall and keep on going.
Experience is the best teacher.

~ *Karen Elaine Peters, Class of 1976*

Retired/formerly HS Spanish and ESL teacher

Be true to who you know yourself to be. Trying to fit into others' ideas of who you are never works.

~ *Shawn Carter Peterson, Class of 1996*

Actor/Director

Be steady. Persevere through this critical moment in history, trusting in the Divine and knowing that there are strong ancestral, family, community and Vassar ties backing you up. Congratulations!

~ *Edward Pittman, Class of 1982*

Senior Associate Dean of the College

Trust! Such a small word, a huge thing to accomplish. We are a community, we are all here to support you. Times may seem murkier than ever but we always overcome any challenge before us as one community. Trust in the work that you have done for the past several years, trust in your communities, trust your intuition and breath. You are an amazing gift to this world as you are! Thank you for your resilience, passion, and hard work! I see you and I trust you!

~ *Logan Pitts, Class of 2017*

Singer, Actor, Director



You are leaving Vassar and entering the next phase of your life at a time when so many things are “cancelled” due to global circumstances beyond your control. But it is critical that you not adopt a “cancel mentality”. Be bold in your expectations of and for yourself, set ambitious goals, pursue your dreams with passion, always hold on to the confidence to aim high and then...reach back and take others along with you. That, you CAN control.

~ *Tracy Elise Poole, Class of 1982*

Attorney, AAACV Co-Chair

Follow your instincts above all else. If you have a vision for something, believe in yourself no matter what anyone else has to say. Your gifts will make room for you. If ever in doubt think of our ancestors, you had the courage to dream to make something out of nothing. Create your support system, it does not have to be blood relative, you can create a family that supports and loves you unconditionally. When you are trying to make a decision, do something that your future self with thank you for.

~ *Tanikka C. Price, Class of 1997*

Attorney, Author, Motivational Speaker

Act always in love, and work for your communities. Seek out mentors (of all ages) and listen to them.

~ *Danielle Purifoy, Class of 2006*

Lawyer/Ph.D Candidate

Expressing gratitude everyday grounds us in our purpose! So, when you wake up each day I want you to join me in this loving self-care ritual:

1. LOVE YOURSELF: Shout out 3 things that you love about YOU! “I love my eyes, I love my hair, I love my smile” 🧘
2. JUST BE: Give thanks to God/Creator/Universe for the very fact that you GOT UP!
3. AFFIRM YOU: “I AM Worthy,” “I VALUE Me”, “I LOVE Me First” 🧘

~ *Dr. Monica Bickerstaff Riley, Class of 1986*

Doctor, Integrative Medicine and CEO/

“Dr. Monica’s Natural Beauty & Wellness”

🧘🧘🧘🧘🧘 ADOPT AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE!



Remember the words of Invictus:

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

...

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.
It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.

~ *Richard Roberts, Class of 1974*

Chief Judge (Ret.) United States District Court, District of Columbia

You cannot control people, their responses, or actions; you can only control what you contribute to the situation; thus, always be mindful of what changes YOU can make when you are not getting the response you seek/wish from others.

~ *Kaia Ross-Duggan, Class of 2008*

Midwife

Remember the Past! Celebrate the Present! Embrace the Future!
CONGRATULATIONS! YOU DID IT!

~ *Petero Sabune, Class of 1977*

Retired Prison Chaplain

You may feel like this particular year, and this particular economy, are reasons to have an acute anxiety and despair about your future. And those feelings are valid. But try to also keep in mind that feelings are not facts. Your ancestors have passed along to you an incredible resilience. It may not feel like you will be as OK as you might have felt at the beginning of this journey, but you will. You will thrive and you will soar. It is your inheritance.

~ *Joshunda Sanders, Class of 2000*

Author & Journalist



Believe in yourself! Vassar is a great school that opens a lot of doors and they didn't make a mistake by letting you in. Finding the right job (and career) can take a while, but it works out eventually, and the alumni network is always willing to help.

~ *Kwesi Sey, Class of 2011*

Financial Analyst

Vassar taught me the value of planning and that no matter how well you plan you rarely ever end up where you planned but you do end up where you were meant to be. Planning meant I was ready to take the unexpected opportunity, to do the "sideways" thing from a place of sure footing. It's a lesson about adaptability and possibility that sustains me to this day. It's a gift I hope you carry with you into the rest of the world.

~ *Dalindyebo Shabalala, Class of 1998*

Associate Professor of Law

As one of the earliest Black graduates of Vassar (1953), I congratulate you Black graduates of Vassar College, 2020. You have completed four years of strenuous academic work at one of the finest universities in the nation. These are difficult times, as you know. You are on the forefront to lead this nation in healing that which has gone wrong. You will be an inspiration to others as you resume further studies or enter the work-force. I know you will make Vassar proud!

~ *Ruth May Siegrist, Ph.D., Class of 1953*

University Professor, Retired

Even though it was over 30 years ago, I can still remember feeling giddy, carefree and anxious- all at the same time. I was ready for a job to fulfill my passion for social justice, to buy food, pay rent and start paying off my student loans. My advice: Worrying is a waste of time. Focus less on what other people think. Instead, appreciate your uniqueness. Always be you. Boldly be your authentic self. Do that and you will bring precisely whatever is needed in the world.

~ *Stacey Long Simmons, Class of 1989*

Advocacy Director



You just completed the task of graduating an ELITE institution, one that was not created for you, nor did it treat you like you should have been treated. You SURVIVED this, you can and will conquer whatever is set in front of you. Never forget that you were chosen out of many and not by mistake. You are capable. You are worthy. YOU are a gift to Vassar and you will never stop giving. Your future successes will be ones this institution will claim, but know in your heart it's you that will make this place "look good." This place doesn't do that for you. Now go take the world, it's yours!

~ *Alexandria Smalls, Class of 2018*

Executive Assistant

First, savor your academic achievement as a Vassar College graduate. Second, gradually process what your graduation from Vassar means to you today and beyond. Reflect on how this fact will influence and inform the life you will live and enjoy. Third, appreciate the existential value a Vassar education has afforded you and get comfortable with this. Lastly, your status as a Vassar Alumnus/a is well-deserved and well-earned. Many congratulations and good luck in your future endeavors!

~ *Sheryl T Smikle, Class of 1981*

Learning & Development Executive

My congratulations to each of you who have completed the first step in this most important journey. Commencement is a beginning and that is what you are embarking on. You are beginning a life in which you contribute your particular skills, talents and abilities to the world which are so desperately needed. You are standing on our shoulders, and on all those who came before us. Keep moving forward and don't allow anyone or anything stop you from doing what you were destined to do! Amandla!

~ *Virginia Stanley, Class of 1978*

President/Clinical Director, Suffolk Psychotherapy Inc.

Graduating from Vassar gives you access to privileges that are inaccessible to most Americans, and with that privilege comes a responsibility to support your family and communities.

~ *Tanay Tatum, Class of 2012*

Graduate Student, The Fletcher School, Tufts University



Now is not the time to sit back and play it safe. Be brave and take risks now while you are still young.

~ *Ronald Taylor, Class of 2001*

IT/Video Broadcast Engineer

Each of us must ask what we can do to effect positive change in our country. For my generation, an early answer was the occupation of the Main Administrative Building of Vassar College. As Vassar College graduates, you are guaranteed to be **Visible**. When you are **Vocal**, be smart. To create change, you must be **Involved** in a positive movement, rather than the isolated who walk past your own situation with eyes cast downward, refusing human contact.

~ *Claudia Thomas, MD, Class of 1971*

Physician

Pray and work hard. And know that challenges make successes worth savoring.

~ *Amelia Thompson, Class of 2006*

Teacher

Never stop learning and always ask questions!
Staying inquisitive = Staying 'woke.

~ *Charisma L. Troiano, Class of 2006*

Press Secretary

My advice is perhaps not the wisest or even very profound. I would simply say "Do what you love and love what you do!"

~ *Karen Roberts Turner, Esq., Class of 1986*

Senior Associate General Counsel for Health Sciences, Howard University.

Mediator, District of Columbia Superior Court, Washington, DC,

Past AAAVC Co-Chair 2009-2015

The world is not Vassar, and that is OK. It will be difficult, and that is OK. Remember to call on your community and to call on your champions in your moments of need. And remember in the words of Wilma Rudolph "I can't" are two words that have never been in my vocabulary. I believe in me more than anything in this world." Believe in yourself, love yourself, and keep going.

~ *Taylor Jane Veasley, Class of 2018*

Law School Student



This is a time of change and upheaval. Remember that you came to Vassar to help you define, understand, and to shape how you see the world. Whatever you do, use the tools you've absorbed to make the changes before you work for all.

~ *Donna Walker, Class of 1980*

Educator

"Never underestimate the power of dreams and the influence of the human spirit. We are all the same in this notion: the potential for greatness lives within each of us." ~Wilma Rudolph

Be kind to yourself on your journey.

~ *B. Whitsett-Hammond, Class of 1977*

School Psychologist (Retired)

Don't be so hard on yourself. It is okay to "fail". But, be intentional with your structuring and set achievable milestones. Ask for help when you need it. And, it is okay to want to achieve the world and taking small steps towards doing so tomorrow because you planned it out today. Success is marathon; it is built from persistent pursuit for growing yourself and enjoying the missteps and the triumphs. Simply, success is allowing yourself to be you always. No filters. No fronts. Just be you always.

~ *Rudi Williams, Class of 2016*

Digital Content & Ecommerce Strategist

Treat the first few years out as an experiment. Give yourself permission to not really like the thing you've been working toward in college or the thing you've been expected to do, to change your mind and try something completely new. You are broadly capable and it's not a mark of failure to switch gears, but rather a sign of adaptability and curiosity. Nearly every experience is applicable in another situation. Time spent developing yourself in any direction is never lost.

~ *Ellie Winter, Class of 2018*

Event Producer, Ubuntu Pathways



If there is one bit of advice I can give, it is this: Believe in yourself. Know that there are others who have paved the way, who have fought the fight, and who are counting on you to become more brilliant than they were. As the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "Take the first step in faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step."

Too many people waste time waiting for a perfect moment to act that does not exist. If you find yourself surrounded by people who constantly express doubt in your dreams, even family, find new people. Ask for help. And always, always, send thank you notes. Godspeed!

~ Jacqueline Wright, Class of 1991

Meetings Coordinator, American Society of Hematology



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Our program is made possible, in part, by the AAVC Joan Goodman Fund. *A member of the class of 1960, Joan Goodman was a founding member of the AAVC and a life-long champion of programs that support current students. The fund was established in her memory to support student activities and/or programs that bring students and alumnae/i together in ways that are consistent with Joan's interests and dedication to the college. Gifts to the AAVC Joan Goodman Fund will help sponsor future events and activities.*

History of AA AVC

AA AVC was founded in 1984, after a group of interested black alumnae/i participated in a joint venture with the college to increase diversity in the area of admissions, bolster career networking for undergraduates, improve the quality of student life on campus, and help recruit and retain minority faculty.

AA AVC was formed after this group made a series of recommendations to the Alumnae and Alumni of Vassar College (AA VC) board; it became a functioning affiliate group of the AA VC. Since that time, AA AVC has been active in uniting alumnae and alumni of African descent and keeping them “visible, vocal, and involved.” Most recently the group spearheaded a campaign to raise awareness about racial profiling and bias and contributed recommendations for the college to consider as it works to address these issues on campus.

For its decades of service to the college, the AA AVC was presented with the AA VC 2015 Outstanding Service to Vassar award.

