

Commencement 2022

Hello, family, friends, supporters, and especially the Class of 2022.

My name is Renita Washington. Over the last four years, I have worn many leadership hats, but today, Class of 2022, we all will share the same responsibilities. We will be alumni of Trinity College. This role comes with great honor, dedication, class, and privilege.

Maya Angelou once said, “I can be changed by what happens to me. But I refused to be reduced by it.” When I think about what this quote means, I can’t help but connect to the challenges we experienced from 2020 till now to ensure we had a meaningful college experience. Think back to your first year when you stepped onto campus. You were welcomed with open arms and love. And I’m sure your parents told an RA or P.R.I.D.E leader, “Take care of my baby.” I’m sure we had a long list of expectations and things we wanted to accomplish. Some of them we did; others we didn’t.

In the spring of our sophomore year, we were all hit hard by a global pandemic and conversations about racial inequity. We were all affected. But if I do say so myself, we persisted. It wasn’t easy dealing with all that life has brought us.

Every day was a question of whether this time would pass, if would we have to just live with this, and how we would define our new normal for ourselves and our community. Remember the bonds that we shared with the Class of 2020? Everyone gathered on Crescent Street as a community, and although I’m sure we may have been breaking social distancing rules, it would be the last time for a while, the first time in a minute, that we would gather in such a way. I felt like this brought us together in an odd but unique way.

At that moment, we lived in the present while embracing the unknown. And little did we know, the real challenge came senior year. Remote learning wasn’t the end. We were the leaders of the school, and we had so many students looking up to us to determine what the culture would be on campus. They had questions about how to navigate the post-pandemic uncertainty. And we had questions of our own. What a task, but once again we persisted. We made the most of what we had and made a lot happen. Today, we celebrate our successes. By reflecting on all the ways we have persisted, I know this will carry us into our futures. By thinking back on all the ways we have persisted, I know that we can live with the unknown and make the best choices for our well-being.

As we move forward in the next stage of our lives, there are still going to be times of uncertainty. Some of the feelings from the pandemic will return. There may be times where we are filled with fear and concern about the unknown. As we all know now, that is simply unavoidable. I encourage you to remember the trials and tribulations that you have been through in the past four years. Through the ups and downs, we remained. We persisted against all odds, no matter how impossible things felt, no matter how much life beat us down. Olympic athlete Jesse Owens once said, “We all have dreams, but in order to make dreams come into reality, it takes an awful lot of determination, dedication, self-discipline, and effort.” In the next chapter of our lives, we continue the journey to make our dreams come to fruition while becoming integral parts of the surrounding communities that support us. No matter how uncertain the future may look, there is one thing for sure: The future is not set in stone. We may enter the next chapter of our life with one expectation in mind and end up in a completely different trajectory. No matter where life takes us, we must remember to breathe, remember who we are, remember we are not alone, and, with our heads held high, own it because WE DID IT.