



***Spring 2019, Commencement Student Commentary  
Presented by: Vernahj Pinder***

President Anderson, distinguished faculty, invited families, and fellow graduates: Good morning, my name is Vernahj Pinder, a hospitality and tourism management major hailing from the breathtaking islands of the Bahamas. It is my absolute pleasure to stand here before you today to deliver this speech on behalf of the Class of 2019.

Can you believe that 4 years ago, we were freshmen anxiously settling in at this University? We made the decision after high school to continue our education and make something of ourselves. When we look back on our time here, I'm sure many of us are overwhelmed with mixed emotions. Our decision to pursue a higher education wasn't an easy decision but rest assured it was the best decision, and one we should not take lightly. I guarantee that somewhere in the midst of our journey, we wanted to pack up and go home. Some have done that, but

we stayed and here we are today. We've experienced heartbreak, depression, loss - we've even had our fair share of meltdowns, but we didn't let these challenges stop us. Many would have given up, but we found the strength, the light inside of us and kept fighting. We used those obstacles as cornerstones for the foundation we are standing on right now.

When I started here, I did not know what to expect. I was completely nervous about venturing out on my own. I was a shy, introverted student, who just wanted to get good grades and stay out of trouble (which I'm happy to say I've managed to do). I also wanted to make an impact and leave a legacy. I fought vigorously, like many of you, to find something I can contribute to this University and to this community. And just like many of you, I have.

Once you leave this astounding institution, you will each embark on a journey that will catapult you to your destiny. It's funny how the dictionary's primary definition of commencement means to begin, yet we are using it to signify the end of our collegiate journey. OH, THE

IRONY? Then again, it makes sense because as one door closes, another one opens. This may be the end of a chapter but as singer Natasha Bedingfield would say “today is where your book begins, the rest is still unwritten.”

As we conclude this chapter in our lives and buckle up to face the next one, we should thank the people who have nurtured and supported us along the way. To the almighty God, Our Father, our refuge, our strength and our strong tower. The light that guides our path and the lamp under our feet.

To our families and friends for your love and guidance throughout the years.

To our professors, who have gone above and beyond the call of duty to ensure we learn.

To the administrators that put up with us and took care of us... with love, we say Thank You.

Now the question is, how will we move forward? How will utilize the quality education we have received at this institution and make an

influential impact in this world? Today, as we gather with family, friends, and faculty to celebrate our last four years and to remember our college experiences, let us ponder who we have become and who we have the potential to be.

Let us not be defined by the mistakes we've made but, the mountains we've moved. Don't be discouraged by how many chapters you have left to finish in your story. Pause and look at how many chapters you've already completed. Live your life fearlessly, don't be afraid to take chances. Remember, hockey Hall of Famer Wayne Gretzky said, "you miss 100% of the shots you don't take." Do not let the doubts and stereotypes people place on you weigh you down. We've been told so many times that we have to compete against each other rather than working cohesively to build communities. We are stronger in numbers and when we stand together, we are unstoppable.

As you work to become the best version of yourself, I implore you to find someone to mentor. Our biggest mistake is not pulling people

up with us at the fear that it will dim our own light. I'm inspired by these words from author Marianne Williamson:

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

So, keep your light shining and be beacons of hope in this world. You are greater than you will ever know. Congratulations to the Class of 2019. We came, we saw, and we conquered.

{Subject to Change}

{Draft}