

Remarks  
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President Berger-Sweeney, trustees, faculty, family, friends, and fellow graduates, I am honored to be our class's Commencement speaker.

First, I'd like to thank the administration and faculty of Trinity College for their hard work and dedication on our behalf. We all were not sure if we would be able to gather together for this important day ... but here we are!

Now to the illustrious Trinity College Class of 2021, we have made it!

From being born right down the street at Hartford Hospital and being the first member of my family to graduate from college, I do not take one bit of this moment for granted.

I'm a Hartford local. I'm from a city with a rich history but unfortunate perspective. Hartford has always been home for me; it has given me so many authentic relationships and life lessons that I will hold near forever. No, Hartford is not this scary dangerous place. It's a beautiful international and interconnected city that bears many fruits, fruit that will supply so many generations to come. From our city officials, to our educators, to our creative community and small business owners, we all inhabit a community that we have built ... together.

I remember when news got out that three Hartford students from Global Communications Academy got a full ride to Trinity College. I remember the day like it was yesterday. Tiana, Kiera, and I got on the CT bus after school, and everyone on there—and I mean everyone—wished us well and were so proud of us. You would've thought we were related to everyone on that bus. Even in the staff at the Aqui Me Quedo Restaurant across from our school (that we went to every day) were so excited to share this accomplishment with us. In addition, every little kid in our school and around Hartford shared this moment with us. We are now known as “the kids who got into college.”

In these very moments, we realized the impact that we were making on our city. We also realized the power of community. Our community is so strong and authentic, no matter what people may say. Who would've thought three students from an under-resourced school would end up at a prestigious institution in their hometown? Who would've thought one of them would become the first Black man from Hartford to be Trinity College's SGA president?

I say this all to say ... whenever I was down, whenever I wanted to give up, I looked back on that day. It's important to reflect throughout your journey as it reminds us of where we started and where we are headed.

I was hoping you could bear with me for this quick mental exercise. Close your eyes, and take a deep breath. Now go back to the day you first stepped foot on this campus as a member of the Class of 2021. As you walked around with your loved ones, taking in the beauty of our campus and the future you began to see for yourself, did you get filled with excitement? Did you start to imagine yourself being an athlete, or a student-leader, or maybe a barista? Did you imagine the friends you would have, the various spaces around campus, and all the fun you were about to get ready to have? You might've been eager to finish unpacking your room and to get your parents to leave.

Now, go through a montage of your time here at Trinity. Remember the lows, and remember the highs.

Once I got to Trinity, it was hard. I struggled with my identity and where I saw myself on this campus. But throughout those lows, I had many highs. I met so many beautiful souls and gained some long-lasting friendships. I had so much fun running up and down this very quad in the middle of the night with my friends after we just finished an assignment. We all had so much fun watching Lil Yachty throw water bottles into the crowd during 2018 Spring Weekend.

Now think to yourself ... what would've happened if we let fear stop us from beginning our journeys?

Something that will remain true to all of our experiences was that we were ready to start.

We may not have known the end goal, but we were ready to start our educational careers; we were ready to build upon the people before us, even when there was no foundation.

We were ready to start being agents of change.

We were ready to start challenging ourselves in a holistic way.

Whether you majored in the social sciences, STEM, or the arts, we all spent sleepless nights stressing over exams and preparing the foundations of our futures, the foundations that will later bear fruit and lead us to become community leaders, health professionals, educators, artists, and waymakers.

Now open your eyes, and look at where you are today. We are at the 2021 Trinity College Commencement ceremony about to cross this stage!

We are here today as representations of strength and resilience. We've not only made it through college, but we have also made it through a pandemic.

COVID-19 has taken a lot away from us but has also given us new perspectives and lessons. One lesson being ... remain in the moment. Often, we as individuals try to plan 10 years in advance, and within that, we sometimes look over what's happening now. Let's shift our thinking from worry to gratitude. Let's be grateful for still being healthy and alive.

As you continue your journey, nourish and protect your highs! **BE IN THE MOMENT!** No matter how hard it gets, don't let that inner voice stop you from finishing what you started!

I want to take this time to thank my beautiful mother, who has made tremendous sacrifices to get me here. I would also like to thank everyone in the Hartford community who stood behind me and supported me throughout my college career, and I would also like to thank my amazing friends for standing by me.

I also want to take this time to give a standing ovation to the heroes who have been working endlessly to keep us safe and healthy ... the Chartwells workers, the ABM team, our first

responders, our professors, and every community leader working hard to bring this pandemic to an end. We thank you!

Now we are coming to a close. Think about where you want to start next. Continue to be invested in the moment, and make every second count. Be the change you want to see. Reach for the stars, Class of 2021, and be all you can be.