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UVI Hosts 60th Commencement Ceremony on St. Thomas With Honorary Degrees Conferred on R. City, Keisha Lance Bottoms

UVI President reminds the Class of 2024 that "finality should not scare us, but inspire and embolden us to embrace the future"

Education / **Published On May 10, 2024 06:02 AM /**

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Pride, celebration, and relief were heavy in the air at the Orville E. Kean Campus on St. Thomas as students crossed the stage during the University of the Virgin Islands' 60th Commencement Ceremony.

The ceremony was the penultimate one for UVI President David Hall in this capacity, as he is [set to retire](#) in the coming months. Overcome with emotion, he reminded the graduating class that "finality should not scare us, but inspire and embolden us to embrace the future." Dr. Hall, who

led UVI for 15 years, assured the class of 2024 that they were “exceptional in the history of this university.” He celebrated the numerous accolades they achieved long before graduation. “We have at UVI some of the most brilliant, talented, most respectful and most triumphant students in the world,” remarked Dr. Hall.

The class of 2024 has been praised for overcoming the unique academic challenges created by the Covid-19 pandemic. Their resilience and triumph were celebrated throughout the ceremony, including the special address presented by Keisha Lance Bottoms, former mayor of Atlanta, Georgia. Having guided her city through the ravages of the pandemic by enacting policies to successfully cushion Atlanta and its residents from the worst economic blows, Ms. Lance Bottoms’s acknowledgement that the graduates have overcome “obstacles of biblical proportions” seemed particularly poignant. Ascribing her success to her innate curiosity, tenacity, and lack of timidity, she exhorted the graduating class to aim high.

“Nothing beats failure but a try,” Ms. Lance Bottoms reminded listeners. “Don’t ever allow the limitations of those around you to stifle those things that make you, you.”

Similar sentiments were shared by Jackeima Fleming, the class’s student speaker. Having herself grappled with the challenges of tertiary education in the last four years, she urged her peers to “reflect on the profound impact this journey has had on shaping who we are and who we aspire to become.” Placed in the UVI environment, students “are encouraged to produce nothing but greatness,” but as Ms. Fleming mused, that process includes overcoming trials like bills, mental health challenges and even the vagaries of the Water and Power Authority.

In addition to the 182 degrees conferred on the graduating class in St. Thomas, the University of the Virgin Islands on Thursday awarded three honorary degrees. Guest speaker Ms. Lance Bottoms was one recipient, with [Theron and Timothy Thomas](#), the hitmaking duo R. City receiving the other two awards. Widely regarded as “musical geniuses, talented innovators, and brilliant seeds from Virgin Islands soil,” R. City, according to Dr. Hall, is a testament to “why we must invest in people and not stereotype them.” The brothers’ dizzying rise from residents of a local housing development to creating and contributing to award-winning musical albums serves as an example of “the talent and creativity that the Virgin Islands has to offer on the global stage,” Dr. Hall proclaimed.

After receiving their Doctors of Humane Letters degrees from the university, the duo thrilled the audience with a high-energy performance of their hit “Locked Away”, that prompted even Senator Marvin Blyden to sing along as he sat on the dais behind them. Citing a desire to give back to the territory that has given them so much, R. City donated \$20,000 to UVI to officially establish the Miguel “Keibo” Thomas Scholarship Fund, named in their father’s honor.

Contributions of this nature are a vital and welcome way to support future UVI students, and Governor Albert Byran Jr. not-so-subtly reminded the class of 2024 that they “wear the crown of responsibility to the people of the Virgin Islands that got you here in the first place.” He called on the newest crop of university graduates to “be a leader,” arguing that it would be folly to “just fall in line and be a sheep.” Given the current state of the world, Governor Bryan said, “this is a time for lions.” Now that they have successfully completed this course of academic study, it was now time for each graduate to “be the master of your fate.”

On Friday, it will be the turn of students at the Albert A. Sheen Campus on St. Croix to cross the stage and flip the tassels on their mortarboards to the other side, as they join the ranks of over 8,000 UVI alumni.

