

UVI Graduates Called to Resist, Rebuild, and Redefine the Future in Stirring St. Thomas Ceremony

Amid reflections on hurricanes, pandemics, and global unrest, the Class of 2025 was told they are ready to lead a new era—armed with resilience, integrity, and a duty to shape the narratives that define their people and their power.

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2025 UVI graduates. By. UNIVERSITY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS.

The graduating class of the University of the Virgin Islands on St. Thomas received their degrees during a stirring commencement ceremony on Friday.

University President Dr. Safiya George awarded the St. Thomas class of 2025 the epithet “lit”, an acronym of “Limitless,” “Innovative,” and “Tenacious,” which is how the graduates described

themselves. “You're the next generation of leaders at the nexus between educational preparation and implementation for greater impact and economic development right here at home,” George said, repeating her encouragement to the St. Thomas cohort that they remain in the Virgin Islands to make contributions to their community.

Keynote speaker Hill Harper challenged graduates with the admission that “my generation has really screwed up this work, and the charge is on your generation to actually have to fix it.” The class of 2025 and their agemates are capable of this monumental task, he argued, “because you’ve already come through hurricanes, you’ve come through a global pandemic, you’ve come through economic uncertainty and geopolitical uncertainty, and now you're entering and continuing to fight in a world that you need to shape and change.”



2025 UVI graduates (Credit: UVI)

He urged the students to take conscious control over their future. “You are active architects of your own life,” Mr. Harper said, encouraging them to dream, to plan, and to sketch out their goals and the steps required to achieve them. This helps to stay true to those goals, he said, avoiding “shape shifting on your dreams” and watering them down. “If the dreams that you sketch out aren't that outrageous, then they're too reasonable, and you've already discounted your dreams and goals.”

Noting that countervailing forces are working assiduously against progress, Mr. Harper called on students to dream big. “I need you to sketch out a blueprint of outrageousness because that's what the opposition is doing.” In addition to removing limits on their goals, Mr. Harper also called on them to follow best practices in architecture, ensuring that the framework they were building for their lives had a good foundation, solid construction, and was fit for purpose. He encouraged them to acquire skill in new and cutting edge fields, including artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and digital currency. “I need you graduates to run to where the ball is going to be,” he said, referencing a quote from legendary soccer player Pele.

Class speaker Joleen Buchanan responded positively to George's promise during her remarks that UVI was actively working on enhancing student experience in a number of ways. Ms. Buchanan called for improved conditions in the dining area, and “just better vibes” overall, as part of the improvement efforts. “These suggestions do not come from disrespect, but a place of care and wanting to see UVI's full potential,” she assured, noting with humor that she would not be able to benefit from these improvements when they are implemented.

Ms. Buchanan acknowledged that for many graduates, the future is uncertain. However, noting that her cohort's transition from high school to college was done under the cloud of a pandemic, she reassured her fellow graduates. “We’ve done uncertain before, and we turn to resilience, creativity and growth...Uncertainty will always be there. We don't run from it, we build from it,” Ms. Buchanan said. “We are more ready than we think.”

In his remarks to the graduates, Senate President Milton Potter exhorted them to protect and cherish their integrity as they move through the world. “You will face opportunities to cut corners, to rise faster by stepping on others, to silence your conscience in exchange for applause,” he warned. “Resist that temptation, because when the light fades and the titles change and the world quiets down, it is your character that will speak the loudest.”

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach, speaking on behalf of Governor Albert Bryan Jr., repeated an anecdote he told the day before to the 2025 graduating class on St. Croix. Emphasizing the importance of authentic voices in telling local stories, he recalled an instance when a local newspaper, newly overseen by a national corporation, published a claim that guavaberry trees were being cut down for lumber — a statement that anyone familiar with the plant would instantly recognize as absurd. “Who tells the story is important,” Lt. Gov. Roach emphasized. “We are living in a time when the narrative is being rewritten...the narrative that chronicles our existence, our struggle, our survival with some semblance of our African self is under attack,” he declared. With African Liberation Day on the horizon, Mr. Roach told graduates that “we must be the shapers and the tellers of that narrative.”