

The Virgin Islands Consortium

A Sign Of Bright Future As Complex High School Graduates 209

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ST. CROIX -- There was a level of pride and joy that filled the Island Center Amphitheater on Thursday morning that spilled over from graduates to family, friends and those who simply attended to witness history. The feeling was not hard to explain; completing high school is one of the first major steps on the path of lifelong success, and parents and guardians had worked hard to get their loved ones to that point.

This year's St. Croix Educational Complex graduates, dubbed the "bold, brilliant and luminous" class of 2016, beamed with jubilation as they walked across the stage to receive their diplomas. Some danced, others shed tears, some screamed. A disabled young lady could not hide her emotions as she was wheeled across the stage, touching

the hearts of onlookers. The audience was equally supportive, with parents and guardians sounding air horns as names were called.

Complex Principal Genitta Richards praised students for their achievement, [quoting scripture](#) that sought to remind those who dare take on the challenge of life that the race is not for the swift, but those who can endure until the end. "This, you've done," she said. "I encourage you to always believe in yourself and find your divine purpose in life. And once you do, work hard to fulfill that purpose. Your uniqueness has been divinely created."

Other speakers included Kurt Violet, who pressed graduates to prepare themselves for the road ahead. "Make sure that today is not the last milestone that you will accomplish," he said. "Because come tomorrow, you guys are now in the adult world. Come August, you've got to be doing something that is very constructive with your life. Because we don't want to graduate students to the streets," he later added.

Governor Kenneth Mapp, just like his [speech at the Central High School graduation ceremony](#) on Wednesday, spoke of jobs available in the public sector for graduates, urging students to consider careers in government.

Yet, while all yesterday's speakers gave great talks, what captured the attention of many was the content that came from the valedictorian, Cariece Browne, the salutatorian, Shideya Parrilla, and the ceremony's keynote speaker, Tashima Lambert, MD -- all of whom gave speeches worthy of any audience, delivering their messages succinctly and with a clarity.

"It truly does take a village [to raise a child]. Because look around us, we're hundreds of people gathered here today, and hundreds more watching live to celebrate the bright, black minds that our public schools produce despite the boulders that were placed in our way centuries ago," said Ms. Parrilla.

Ms. Browne delivered a speech that took listeners from one high to the next as she spoke of her journey. She blessed her parents with kind words, thanking her father for being the ultimate provider, and her mother for the ultimate supporter.

Stepping into her role of leader as she was described yesterday, Ms. Browne asked that her class join her in repeating some profound words: "We are not a statistic. We are greater than any stereotype. The Virgin Islands will be revolutionized as a result of our talent and our abilities. We are born to win and destined for greatness."

And Keynote speaker Lambert, whose own talk was short and germane, encouraged the graduates to always be the truest form of themselves. She urged them to be kind and approachable, advice she received from former educator-turn-senator, Kurt Violet, that had greatly paid off.

"People go the extra mile for people that they like," she said. "As much as you may think that you can make it on your own, no one climbs to the top without others as their stepping stones."

"Even when you are the smartest, the most diligent, the most hardworking, life does not necessarily work out how you planned it. Sometimes it's as simple as the right person

being in your corner, so be friendly and approachable. You never know how you might change someone's life or what one person is willing to do to dramatically change yours," she said.

To close, Dr. Lambert admonished the graduates to take life seriously, and relayed lessons that if taken to heart, creates a solid foundation upon which to build.

"1) Get to know yourselves and stand firm in whoever that person may be without being afraid to change. 2) Despite of our highly sophisticated technological advancements, life is still about interaction with people, so embrace them and become the kind of person that others are worthy of embracing. The right person will help build your empire."

She added: "Be bold, be brilliant, and be luminous. Shine your dark places without apologizing for the wall that have to be torn down in order to do so. People will forever remind you of your failures and that's fine, failure can be the greatest motivation. But never forget to celebrate your success."

Feature Image: An emotional Cherique Daniel, who is disabled, is wheeled across the stage after receiving her diploma. (Credit: Ernice Gilerbt, VIC)