

Cambridge College Graduates 700 in Savannah

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There are 700 people who now serve witness that adversity can indeed be met with a very happy ending. On Sunday, February 11th, Cambridge College graduated 700 students in their Commencement ceremonies at the Johnny Mercer Civic Center.

Thousands watched as their loved ones—graduates from all walks of life—walked across the stage together towards the very same goal: a better life filled with increased opportunity. Commencement speaker J. Veronica Biggins then charged the graduates with the responsibility to improve the world around them.

“Most of you are educators like my mother and father,” said Ms. Biggins. “You have made the tough choice to impact this region, the nation, and yes, the world. You have accepted the greatest calling of our nation.”

Ms. Biggins is the Managing Partner for the Diversity Services Practice at Heidrick & Struggles, a leadership solutions firm based in Atlanta, Georgia. Prior to joining Heidrick & Struggles, Ms. Biggins served in the Clinton Administration as Assistant to the President and Director of Presidential Personnel, where she was responsible for the selection and hiring of all political appointees within the federal government.

Ms. Biggins shared the results of a recent report that found the United States no longer leads the world in per capita high school graduates. The report shows that 30 years ago the United States had 30% of the world’s population of high school graduates but that number has shrunk to 14% and continues to fall. She told the graduates that the state of education in the United States is declining, and that they have the tall task of reviving the positive reputation of American education.

“Education and a productive society walk hand in hand,” Ms. Biggins said. “The entire economic base of the United States is shifting...Our core problem is that our education and training systems were built for another era--an era in which most workers needed only a rudimentary education.”

Savannah Mayor Dr. Otis Johnson, who delivered the City of Savannah’s Welcoming Remarks, also spoke to the graduates about the important role they now play in the community and the influential role they play in molding the lives of the children they teach in the classroom.

The Commencement was an emotionally charged celebration of academic excellence. The ceremony included two graduates who performed moving and inspirational songs which were greeted by standing ovations. Dante Charles, who received his Bachelor of Arts in Multidisciplinary Studies, sang “Open Up Our Heart” followed by Isaac Cleveland, a CAGS graduate, who sang “The Impossible Dream.” Even more moving were the success stories told through the graduate reflections delivered by CAGS graduate Idamay Denny, a native of Barbados, and M.Ed. graduate Lamita Jo Harvey.

Ms. Denny said: “I have a dream that one day our fellow men will rise up and give us the standing ovation we deserve for turning out citizens about whom our nations can be justly proud, but we must

invest in the development of our human capital to be in the vanguard of those who help to realize that dream. I fervently believe that our tenure as educators will be judged not by the test scores of our students, but by the quality of the character they develop and the kind of men and women they become. If we always place that at the forefront of what is happening in our classrooms, then the future of our nations is assured.”

Ms. Biggins and Mayor Johnson both received honorary doctorates from Cambridge College for their outstanding work and public service. They join the ranks of many distinguished Cambridge College honorary degree recipients, including former Vice President Al Gore, NBA legend Bill Russell, Congressman John Lewis, National Urban League President Hugh B. Price, Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton, Black Enterprise Magazine Founder Earl G. Graves, Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin, former Coca-Cola Executive and NBA referee Ken Hudson, retired UPS Chief Operating Officer Cal Darden, and Black Entertainment Television Co-founder Sheila Crump Johnson.

Plans are being made for Commencement celebrations in Chesapeake, Virginia on May 20th and in Cambridge, Massachusetts on June 10th. Details will be posted on the Cambridge College website as they become available.