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Commencement '85

Editorial Staff

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J. C. Hayward



Jacob Lawrence



Frank Snowden, Jr.

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Commencement

Maya Angelou



The Class of '85 accomplished its long but rewarding mission at Howard University on June 12. Approximately 2,000 students who represented the university's 17 schools and colleges received their undergraduate, graduate and professional degrees as well as specialized certificates.

The commencement exercises, the 117th, took place at Howard Stadium on a bright morning in an atmosphere full of joy, smiling faces and, for most, the fulfillment of a long awaited dream.

In addition to the graduates, honorary degrees were awarded to the commencement speaker and the following individuals:

Jacqueline (J. C.) Hayward, news anchor at WDVM-TV, Channel 9, in Washington, D.C.; Jacob Lawrence, acclaimed artist who is based in Seattle, Wash.; Frank M. Snowden, Jr., professor emeritus of classics and a former dean of the College of Liberal Arts at Howard; Stanley Meyer of Santa Monica, Calif., a movie and television producer; Sirjang Lal Tandon of Chatsworth, Calif., president and chief executive officer of a computer hardware company, and Burke Syphax, a surgeon at Howard University Hospital.

Hayward, Lawrence and Snowden received the honorary degree of doctor of humane letters; Meyer and Tandon received the honorary degree of doctor of laws; and Syphax received the honorary doctor of science degree.

Hayward is an alumna of Howard University; Tandon earned a bachelor of science degree in mechanical engineering from Howard in 1962, and Syphax earned both his undergraduate and medical degrees from Howard in 1932 and 1936.

The commencement speaker, author Maya Angelou, who teaches at Wake Forest University, received the honorary degree of doctor of letters. Excerpts from her remarks follow:

You. You have been loved. "When it is finally ours, this liberty, this freedom, this beautiful and terrible thing, needful to the spirit as air, usable as earth" [the quote is a variation of the opening lines of Robert Hayden's famous poem, "Frederick Douglass"], when we realize it [this freedom] it will be because you young men and women

we celebrate today are fleshing out the dream—the dream of Frederick Douglass, of Sojourner Truth, of Frances Harper, the dreams of W.E.B. Du Bois, Kwame Nkrumah, Harriet Tubman. . . .

When that elusive and so-longed for bright tomorrow is in the very air we all breathe, it will be only because you who are graduating today are among those young people all over the world fleshing out the dream — [the dream] of Martin Luther King, of Malcolm X, of Fannie Lou Hamer, of Nelson Mandela, of Bishop [Desmond] Tutu, of Angela Davis, of Mary McLeod Bethune. . . .

Only lovers dare to dream and you have had great dreamers who have loved you and loved you deeply. Your ancestors survived so that you could live to see this day, this day. They survived never knowing your faces or what names you would have. So that you could see this day. Your grandmothers and great-grandfathers took the lash, the branding irons, humiliations and oppression because they dreamed that one day you — you, Kim; you, Daryl; you, Mary; you, Anna Marie; you, Valerie; you, George — would come along and flesh out their dream.

Your presence here today proves that you have been loved. You are excited, enrobed. It also proves that you have worked hard. I'm very pleased. Your people are very pleased. When I say "your people," I mean all your mothers and fathers and grandmothers and grandfathers. I mean they are



Stanley Meyer



Burke Syphax



Sirjang Lal Tandon

ement '85

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very pleased. The uncles and aunts are very pleased. All you have to do is look around at the thousands of people who are here today to see you flesh out the dream. It is a long-lasting dream. We have dreamed it many a year, centuries if you will. And here you have it: the chance to flesh it out.

Now as you begin, it is necessary to remind you that you are obliged to go to work. I know; right now you are ladies and lords of the summer. You are tired after the swift race you have run . . . But you have run it successfully and now you would like to rest a little, to maybe polish up your medals and frame up your diploma and bask in the glorious light of the winner's circle. I encourage you to do so. I encourage you to

bask, strut, and if you just have to, you can boast. Then, then, you have to remember that your work begins now seriously.

James Baldwin tells us "we have all been paid for." We have been paid for. In your working to reach this date, this day, you have begun to pay for someone else. There is a girl of 14 even now at this early morning hour who is preparing to go to 14th Street here in Washington, D. C., to lose herself. You are starting to pay for her now. There is some 12-year-old or 13-year-old boy about to go down to 14th Street or 16th Street to see if he can make a connection so that he can lose himself. You are beginning to pay for him now. Your work begins now.

Someone has to look at South America

and Central America seriously with courage. Courage is the most important of all the virtues because without courage you can't practice any other virtue with consistency. So we need some young, bright minds to look again at South America and Central America.

We need someone to look at South Africa now. We need someone who will understand that it is her job, her responsibility, her charge and his triumph to flesh out the dream that was dreamed by Robert Sobukwe many many years ago, by the men and women who are struggling now under the heel of apartheid. Now. So your work begins as soon as you stop strutting.

We need you to look at the famine in Ethiopia. We need you to look at—young minds, young Black American minds. I make that distinction because I mean people born centuries away from the Continent and thousands of miles from the Continent but still responsible for and to the Continent. So we need you to look at the famine—not just the big stars, not the great rock singers alone. We need you to look at the drought in Central Africa.

Of course all over the world we need you, but here at home we really need you . . . Someone has got to start to address this erosive social cancer of racism. Someone must do it. So there it is for you to do, remembering that you have already been paid for. . . . You have been loved in many ways. . . . You have been loved. □