



**Dr. Sylvia Washington Ba '58**  
*Response Upon Receipt of Honorary Degree*  
October 29, 2022

Amy Freeman, Chair of the Board  
Members of the Board of Trustees  
Fellow honorees  
Faculty  
Students, especially the Senior Class of 2023  
and all distinguished guests

I am greatly honored by this prestigious recognition and express my sincere gratitude to the Board of Trustees for bestowing upon me an honorary doctor of letters on the occasion of this 125th anniversary celebration.

This degree honors also this institution: Trinity College now Trinity Washington University which has played such a foundational role in my education.

First of all, I recall the period between 1954 and 1958 when Trinity College counted a total enrollment of about 500 female liberal arts students, when all instruction took place in Main (except for that in the Science Building) and the entire library was also in Main. And all of my professors, except for my major French professor and the priests who taught theology, were Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur.

The watchword was excellence: a belief, a mission, a goal and results. One thinks first of academic excellence but today I want to speak of other manifestations of excellence that I personally benefited from. A certain number of prized qualities possessed by the best educators: such as perspicacity and cultural competency evidenced in the administration's implementation of my financial aid package: my assignment was work in the library. Saturdays 12 to 6 on the Reserve Desk and 2 months of summer vacation on general assignments -- an invaluable preparation for the researcher I would become. I refer also to the wise mentorship and guidance, often from professors whose courses I did not take. Upon graduation I was confident that I had been more than adequately prepared for study in France and graduate school at Fordham University.

A final postscriptum concerning excellence: just a few words about a later serious challenge to excellence during the first few years of teaching at the Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, Senegal where I went in 1973. Senegal had been an independent country for only 6 years and until Independence the then University of Dakar granted degrees equal to those granted by universities in metropolitan France. Even after Independence there was a substantial French presence in the former colony and excellence was not a quality associated with American scholarship unless it came from Harvard or Yale. I abridge: excellence won out with time and I retired after almost 30 richly rewarding years.

So, to you Seniors, donning today for the first time cap and gown, a symbol of past achievement and a promise of future realization, I say forge ahead, seize all opportunities and believe in yourself. You will be ready.