WILLIAM S. PITTMAN
GRADUATION CEREMONY

WEDNESDAY, MAY 25, 2022 | 6 P.M. ET
WILLIAM S. PITTMAN

William Sidney Pittman was the first African American graduate from what was then called the Drexel Institute of Art, Science and Industry. Graduating with a diploma in architectural drawing in 1900, Pittman left behind a legacy not just on Drexel’s campus but also for the entire nation.

Pittman, the son of an enslaved father, graduated in 1897 from the Tuskegee Institute, the country’s preeminent historically Black architectural school. Booker T. Washington, the institute’s principal, arranged for Tuskegee to financially support three years of studies for Pittman at the newly created Drexel Institute of Art, Science and Industry if he paid off his debt by teaching at the Tuskegee. Once at Drexel, Pittman worked with President James A. MacAlister and Arthur Truscott, architecture professor and department head, to finish his five-year program in three years through “a very different but more extraordinary and a more elaborate course than usual,” as he wrote to Washington. Pittman earned top grades in architectural design, mechanical drawing, freehand drawing, water coloring, and history at Drexel. He then graduated in 1900, celebrated as one of the “honored” students of the class by MacAlister. Pittman returned to the Tuskegee Institute as head of the department of architectural drawing. He oversaw all campus construction, including the still-standing following campus buildings — Rockefeller Hall and Carnegie Library. Pittman rose to national prominence as a high-profile African American architect and the first to obtain a federal commission.

Ultimately, Pittman designed over 50 buildings across the country, many of which were created for Black communities and were presented as examples for other African American architects to aspire to. Several buildings — including his family home and community buildings — are state or National Historical Landmarks.

Each year since 2016, in William S. Pittman’s honor, Drexel University recognizes all graduates of the African diaspora whose legacy and contributions to their respective fields have paved the way for success of others in their educational, personal, and professional endeavors with our William S. Pittman Graduation Ceremony. It is our honor and privilege to name our ceremony after Mr. Pittman.
THE KENTE CLOTH STOLE

Originating in what is today known as Ghana, West Africa — the word “kente” translates to “handwoven cloth” in the native Twi language. Known for its rich, bold colors, kente cloth grew in popularity in the 12th century. Believed to be originally commissioned as a cloth spun for royal ritual attire, the kente cloth continues to be used as a ceremonial garment that carries a deep, personal significance for the wearer.

Today, wearing the garment as an academic stole at graduation is a moment of pride and carries both historic and personal significance for graduates at schools all around the world. One of the hallmarks of Drexel’s William S. Pittman ceremony is the donning of the Drexel kente cloth stole before the main commencement event by someone important to the graduate. The donning of the Drexel kente stole represents the excellence and contributions of students of the African diaspora at Drexel University.
In 1900, “Lift Every Voice and Sing” was written and composed by the Johnson brothers — James Weldon Johnson and John Rosamond Johnson. These talented artists and influential civil rights activists firmly believed that artistic and cultural excellence was a key to Black advancement in America. Since 1919, this powerful hymn has been recognized as the Black National Anthem.

Lift ev'ry voice and sing,
’Til earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the list’ning skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on ’til victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chastening rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
’Til now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who has by Thy might
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,
Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand,
True to our God,
True to our native land.
MOST OUTSTANDING STUDENT AWARDS

The Stephen R. Cox and Jasmine Y. Wright Awards recognize one undergraduate and one graduate student who have excelled academically and either overcome tremendous odds to be successful or have consistently made contributions that benefit others. Any Drexel community member can nominate any deserving student. Decisions are based on the recipients’ service, leadership, or other distinctive efforts made to improve the campus or local, national, or international community.

THE MR. STEPHEN R. COX MOST OUTSTANDING UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT AWARD

Mr. Stephen R. Cox graduated from Drexel University in 1974 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Physics and Atmospheric Sciences and a Master of Science degree in Biophysics and Biomedical Engineering in 1976. He is the founder and developer of the Greater Philadelphia Region Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (Philadelphia AMP) funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF). Mr. Cox has helped the Alliance to substantially increase its capacity to recruit, develop, and support underrepresented minority STEM graduate students with full tuition and stipend assistance. With over 15 years of service, Mr. Cox has personally mentored Drexel students as undergraduates through their doctoral completion. Currently, he serves as the organization advisor for the Drexel Black Graduate Student Union, is a member of the Center for Black Culture advisory board, and was recognized with an Outstanding Staff Award for his dedication.

THE MS. JASMINE Y. WRIGHT MOST OUTSTANDING GRADUATE STUDENT AWARD

Ms. Jasmine Y. Wright graduated from The Pennsylvania State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Bio Behavioral Health in 2011. Jasmine traveled to Ghana, The Gambia, and Senegal to gain maternal and child health knowledge in an effort to increase her overall understanding of health care and treatment from a global perspective. In 2015, she completed her Master of Public Health degree in Environmental and Occupational Health at Drexel University’s School of Public Health. A charismatic and caring friend who was passionate about social justice issues plaguing minority communities, Jasmine was taken from us only a few short weeks after graduation in 2015. While her physical presence is sorely missed, her contributions to the world will live on through her published research and her family and friends.
ORDER OF CEREMONY

PROCISIONAL

“LIFT EV’RY VOICE AND SING”

OPENING REMARKS
John Fry, President

WELCOME
Subir Sahu, PhD, Senior Vice President for Student Success

DONNING OF THE KENTE
Names read by Kim Gholston, Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer, and Patience Ajoff-Foster, PhD, Executive Director, Diversity and Inclusive Culture

MOST OUTSTANDING STUDENT AWARDS
Presented by Jaara Ndaw, Undergraduate Advisory Board Member, and Tajma Cameron, Doctoral Student, Education Leadership and Policy

KEYNOTE SPEAKER
Maisha Kelly, Director of Athletics

ALUMNI WELCOME
Keyanna Bynum, BS Nursing ’21

RECESSIONAL
Maisha Kelly is the director of Athletics at Drexel University. With a long history of championing the success of student-athletes, Kelly continues her legacy of providing exceptional intercollegiate athletics administration here at Drexel. True to her reputation as a ground-breaking trailblazer, Kelly is the first Black woman to hold this position at a Philadelphia Division I school.

As a native of Philadelphia, Kelly received her undergraduate degree from Saint Joseph’s University, where she was a member of the women’s track and field team, and a master’s degree in sport and recreation administration from Temple University. Kelly is a member of the Women Leaders in College Sports and a graduate of their Executive Institute. She is also a graduate of the NCAA Leadership Institute for Ethnic and Minority Females.

Prior to Drexel, Kelly served as Bucknell University’s senior associate director of athletics and developed a wide breadth of experience during her decade-long tenure there, ranging from sport oversight to partnerships with key campus constituents, the creation of DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) and student-athlete leadership programs, and fundraising. In each of those roles at Bucknell, Kelly fundamentally led with the perspective of holistic support for the university’s more than 750 Division I student-athletes.

During her time at Bucknell, Kelly spearheaded the department’s long-range planning and served as the university’s deputy Title IX coordinator. Kelly also created Bucknell’s first student-athlete leadership development program — the Bucknell Athletics Leadership Institute — in 2011, and organized the Bucknell Athletics Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Council. In April 2018, Kelly was appointed by the NCAA Board of Directors to the NCAA Division I Council, where she represented the Patriot League on important NCAA policy matters.

Kelly arrived at Bucknell from the NCAA headquarters in Indianapolis in 2010, where she served as an assistant director of championships since 2008. Prior to her stint at the NCAA, Kelly spent three years at Rutgers, where she was an athletic academic advisor and tutoring coordinator. She also served as Rutgers’ CHAMPS/Life Skills and Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) advisor, while also sitting on the Rutgers Diversity Council, RU Safe and the Bias Prevention, and the LGBT and Judicial Affairs committees. Kelly was a sixth grade teacher at Waldron Mercy Academy for four years following her undergraduate career.
Kweku Aboagye
Isaac Ackah
Tasha Adison
Shaniika Adkins
David Ajibade
Oluwasijibomi Akinkugbe
Helena Aklilu
Oluwatomi Alabi
Aisha Ali-Ahmad
Jordan Allen
Vanessa R. Altidor
Aziza Amoroso
Carmen Anderson
Ariel Anderson
William Aniagoh
Jane-Janette Ansah
Andrew Antwi
Joey Arnold
Cynthia Aroke
Pagnaa Attah Nantogmah
Kayla Bacon
Oluwatobi Bakare
Tobi Bakare
Believe Bangala
Kennedy Barber
Tanisha Barnes
Thia Baugh
Shahmar Beasley
Al-Halim Belo-Osagie
Alize Berrios
Bianca Best-Laboy
Kimberlyne Bethea
Abdul-Mutaal Bilal
Hope Birdsong
Aderolake Bolarinwa
Nadirah Bowser
Christina Branton-McMillon
Amirah Brew-Syders
Kylie Brinson
Arianna Brown
Tyrone Bullock Jr
Glover Campbell
Joshua Carter
Jyoti Carter
Akiyah Chatman
Anaya Cherry
Mattieu Claude
Rae Coleman
Kevin Coleman
Ashley Coleman
Alexsis Conway
Olivia Cooper
Nylah Crenshaw
Sidney Daniel
Davida R Daniels
Lamar Dargan
Michelle Davis
Katterin De La Cruz
Napalya Dewar
Fatou Diabira
Babila Dinga
Alay'na DiSanto
Diamond Douyon
Lisa Eason
Chelsea Elam
Cheyenne Ellis
Christopher Ellis
Samuel Eshun
Selena Etkins-Allison
Ngozi Fadulu
Gelila Fesseha
Benjamin Folk III
Lawryn Fowler
Talmadge Gaither
Jahdae Gardener
Zenobia Garrison
Jayla Garvin
Line Pascale Gonel
Damon Gray
Katrina Green
Regina Guignard
Montaha Hamad
Christopher Harden
Amaiya Harrell
Madison Harris
Jennette Harrison
Mareo Headley
Yuzza Henderson
Kyla Hodges
Camryn Honesty
Jamiya Honesty
Sydney Hughes
Holly Hughston
Marnae Humphrey
Ekenedilichukwu Illoh
Chiagoziem Jacob
Chelsea James
Alexandra Jerez
Jayda Johnson
Angela Johnson
Jayda Jones
Rochelle Kelly
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