

Introduction of Ms. Omorogbe, Henry Graduation speaker for the Class of 2012:

Jasmine J. Omorogbe is a proud Patriot at heart. Originally from North Minneapolis, Jasmine, graduated from Patrick Henry High School in 2006. Four years later, she received a Bachelor of Arts degree with the Latin distinction, Summa Cum Laude, from the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Minnesota. During her undergraduate career, Jasmine held several leadership positions in student organizations and was the recipient of numerous awards recognizing her leadership and accomplishments. After graduation, she became a University of Minnesota Admissions Counselor and the Coordinator of African American Recruitment. In this role, Jasmine worked with the Minneapolis Public Schools, including Patrick Henry, to assist students in applying and preparing for college. Currently, Jasmine is the Coordinator of Events and Campus-Community Partnerships at the University of Minnesota's Multicultural Center for Academic Excellence. She is passionate about community work, higher education, and student success. This fall, Jasmine will begin her graduate career at Harvard University where she will pursue a Master of Education degree.

Commencement Address by Ms. Omorogbe:

Good evening everyone!

Is the Patrick Henry Class of 2012 in the building?!

Congratulations to you all on your accomplishments!

It is truly an honor to be here with you today. Thank you to Principal Daniels and Mr. Bonds for providing me with this opportunity. Only 6 years ago, I remember sitting in these same seats, in the same bright red robes, waiting for the ceremony to end so that everyone could see my outfit and we could all leave for the senior overnight.

Don't worry, I won't hold you long.

First, I would like to acknowledge the hard work of Patrick Henry teachers and administrators, without them, we would not be where we are today.

I would also like to thank the parents and families that are here today.

Thank you for the support, love, and encouragement that you have given to your students. I hope that you all are beaming with pride as many of their accomplishments are also yours to share.

Graduates, let's take a moment to thank the Henry staff and your families with a big round of applause.

When Mr. Bonds first asked me to speak, the years since I graduated flashed through my mind and many questions arose.

What have I done with my life?

Aren't I too young for this?

Graduation speakers are supposed to be celebrities!

And although I do have over **400** Twitter followers, I figured that hardly counted me in the ranks of the worthy. However, after all those thoughts, I realized that I actually have been a few places, learned a couple things and am extremely grateful for the opportunity to speak with you today.

Growing up on the Northside, I unfortunately saw many examples of what I did NOT want to be. I knew that I wanted a better life; one where struggling from month to month was not inevitable, one where there were no ceilings, no external limits on what I could achieve.

My father taught me the value of education at a young age. He would always say that “**education is the greatest equalizer**”. He instilled in me that with proper education, I could write my own ticket. As a Nigerian immigrant who came to the US with very little, he was the perfect example of someone who did that.

I certainly wasn't born with a silver spoon in my mouth. My father, mother, and stepmother became successful only through **hard work, dedication and sacrifice**. It was watching them and hearing the stories of where they'd come from that inspired me. I knew I *had* to go to college; I had to *become something* and help the world in some way.

I started my academic journey at La Creche Preschool, and then continued on to Bryn Mawr, Olson, and Henry. I have many fond memories of my days in the Henry hallways. I was an IB diploma candidate and was involved in several groups such as the National Honor Society, and Link Crew. I remember screaming my lungs out at pep fests,

crossing my fingers for wins at homecoming football games, and of course, practicing my skills for alllllllllll the dances.

I joke, but I feel that Patrick Henry is an amazing school and certainly prepared me to be successful. The fact that I am a Henry graduate is one of the reasons that amidst all the negative publicity that the Northside gets, I stand before you today as just one of the many examples that good things DO come from the Northside.

I am not the first, nor will I be the last Henry graduate headed to Harvard. I am not the first, nor the last Patriot that has big goals and is working to achieve them. I personally know of Henry students across the nation who are following their passions, graduating from top colleges, and truly upholding Henry's legacy of success.

In 2006, when I left Henry to go on to the University of Minnesota, I felt prepared for the next chapter in my journey. I was blessed in that I received several significant scholarships and did not have to pay a dime for my undergraduate degree. I headed to the U ready to get involved, meet new people, and begin the college life I had dreamed of. My hard work from kindergarten through senior year had paid off. Once there, everything was not all roses. I learned a few lessons about time

management, diversity, and leadership while there, but that is indeed the reason I went, to advance academically, but also to develop personally.

While in college, I got to do things I had never imagined, such as studying abroad in Jamaica and London. Doing so allowed me to see how we fit into the world's scope and helped me to become a better global citizen.

Additionally, I was able to conduct research with nationally known professors, be a part of student groups that hosted major events, and connect with a variety of students from all across the world.

It was an awesome experience for me and definitely pushed me to set my sights higher, hence my desire to go to graduate school to obtain a Master's degree and at some point, to receive a Ph.D. Every step helps to prepare for the next. Henry prepared me for the U of M, which prepared me for Harvard, now who knows what Harvard will prepare me for? I am excited to find out.

I am not here to brag about myself or to tell you to follow my path. I know that college is not the path for every graduate here, it may never be or it may be later in life when the time is right. However, I AM here to tell you that I was once in your shoes, and I set goals to get where I wanted to be and am still working hard to achieve them. You can do the same thing, however nothing is handed to you, you have to go out and

CREATE the life that you want to live. You can do that by connecting with the right people, keeping a positive outlook, taking advantage of all available resources and making good choices.

Throughout life, I have learned that you cannot allow people or the status quo to dictate your life. The statistics show that the Northside has work to do, which is indeed true.

Is every senior student at every Minneapolis Public School graduating this year? No, but YOU are. YOU are helping to illustrate that there ARE students who are successful, there ARE proud community members, they ARE young people who will go out and do amazing things.

In my life, I have been the exception to the rule in many cases. Sometimes things only seem impossible until someone does them. Your story is still being written, you are now turning over a fresh page, so YOU have to take the pen. Just because everyone else hasn't done XYZ yet, doesn't mean you can't. BUT, what you cannot afford to do is to allow news stories, stereotypes, or those who aren't doing anything to hold you back. BE THE EXCEPTION. PROVE THE NEGATIVE FORCES WRONG and be an inspiration to the next generation. You can determine what your life looks like through the choices that you make now. For some of you, life after graduation will be a new opportunity for you to move into your

adult life making better decisions than you have in the past. Now is the time to begin thinking about who you are and where you are headed.

Recently, I am sure that people have bombarded you with questions –

“So what are you doing after high school?

What college are you going to do?

How are you going to save the world?”

It can be a lot of pressure. Well-intentioned people can make you feel like the weight of the world is on your shoulders, but it ISN'T.

Each of you will probably go on to do something great, but in your own time and in your own way. Everyone is not purposed to be a doctor or a lawyer, but you can use whatever talents you DO have to make a difference. The world has many areas that need improving, figure out what you love to do and where you fit, and let that be your contribution. The world does need what you have to offer.

I would like to end with a short story by Waangari Mathhai about taking action. There once was a forest being consumed by a huge fire. All of the animals were watching the blaze, feeling helpless and totally overwhelmed. There was one tiny hummingbird who decided to act. You all know how small a hummingbird is, right? This hummingbird flew to the pond and sipped up one little drop of water, which is all his beak

could fit, and went back to drop it on the fire. Then, he quickly went back and forth for more.

As the other animals stood around watching, they laughed at him and said “You are so small and this fire is so big! How do you think you’re going to help?” The hummingbird replied – “I am doing the best that I can,” and at least he was doing *something*.

As you begin your journey after today, I challenge you to be hummingbirds. Note that you may not be able to solve all of the world’s problems, but don’t sit around letting life pass you by. Be the best that you can at whatever it is that you decide to do. Know that you are a Patrick Henry Patriot and that, in itself, means that you have the potential and capability to be great. Look to those who have come before you and continue to pave the way for those who will come after you. Thank you and once again, congratulations to the Patrick Henry class of 2012!