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Denzel Washington gives Dillard University students four life goals in commencement speech

Sue Strachan **MAY 9, 2015 - 10:00 PM**

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Salutatorian Dannielle Thomas, Denzel Washington and Valedictorian Ariel Lucius at the Dillard Commencement featuring Denzel Washington at Dillard University. Saturday, May 9, 2015. (Josh Brasted Photo)

Denzel and Dillard: A successful partnership that on Saturday (May 9) made for a special **commencement for Dillard University's Class of 2015.**

The commencement took place at the university's Rosa Freeman Keller Avenue of the Oaks, where 218 students received diplomas for their degrees from the College of Business, College of Arts and Sciences, and Nursing. The highlight of the ceremony featured Academy and Tony award-winning actor **Denzel Washington** as the keynote speaker.

Introduced by senior class vice president **Joy Semien**, Washington took to the podium to impart four goals for graduating seniors, and for the audience, as well: "Congratulations to all of you... **First: Put God first ... Second: Fail big ...** a dream without goals, is just a dream ... **Third: You will never see a U-Haul behind a hearse ...** and **Four: Say thank-you in advance for what is already yours.**" He concluded with, "**Don't aspire to make a living, aspire to make a difference.**" (Also during the speech, Washington very candidly said he once had a 1.7 grade point average in college.)

Afterward, Washington was bestowed an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters, before he had to leave early to give another commencement speech at Wiley College in Marshall, Texas; like Dillard, an HBCU

(historically black colleges and universities). Other luminaries who received Honorary Doctorates of Humane Letters were **Dr. Victoria H. Barbosa, David J. Dennis Sr.** ('68) and **Alden J. McDonald Jr.**, president of Liberty Bank.

Washington's connection to the university is through a scholarship program he set up for students in the theater department, eight of whom were graduating. The program is the oldest among HBCU. **Valedictorian Ariel Lucius**, who spoke, was a recipient of a scholarship set up by Washington.

More awards were given out, including the Presidential Medal of Honor presented by university **President Walter M. Kimbrough** to **Joyce M. Roche** ('70).

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