



## Illinois Black Alumni Reunion 2022

### President's Closing Remarks

Good Morning -

I am Regina Mosley Stevenson and I am the President of the Black Alumni Network. I earned a BS in Business Administration (Marketing), MBA, and MEd in HRD from the University of Illinois. I am the Executive Director of HR and Administration for a youth development non-profit in Evanston, IL. I own my own management consulting firm called Allaso Performance Solutions, Inc where I work with Entrepreneurs and Small Businesses focusing on organizational development, HR, and strategy. I have launched a second business called ParaElite Lifestyle Management which focuses on service to people from a variety of areas like education, Audio-Visual, personal assistance, etc. I purposely didn't share all of this information at the beginning of the weekend because I wanted to observe the weekend. I wanted to bring together the spirit of the weekend.

There is one word that describes BAN this weekend. FAMILY. And it is the one word that demands attention and application today on campus. FAMILY is not just your orientation and biological family. It is also those whom you allow into your personal space and intentionally build a safe space to belong. You share your story and you will find that there are others who understand your joys and struggles, who have the same interests, who have your back when times get tough and stick with you until you are better.

Our University family began with the additional day of orientation which was a time where we learned from Black administrators about creating a safe space for us on this campus. We were always told to acknowledge one another. Nod your head when you see a Black person walk down the street or appear in your class. When you go out, make sure you have someone with you, especially at night. Find someone to study with and share notes and test banks. Join Black organizations that match your interest or skill but also try something new. The Culture Center, Black House, and now BNAACC was a place where you could relax, cook, watch tv, find information, and get advice. CBSU and BSUs were your connection in housing where you would work with other Black students and gain leadership, and communication, and build programs focused on us. Black Chorus, Omimov, and WBML were places where we could sharpen our creativity with movement, speech, and singing - integral aspects of African American culture that deeply define us and are embedded in us. The Divine 9 engaged us with sisterhood and brotherhood. The Orange, the Underground, and Vending Room were places where you could eat, talk, and connect throughout the day. The Champaign and Urbana community surrounded and supported Black students with housing and home-cooked meals. Black Students knew where to go and whom they could count on. We knew and saw our family.

As I observed the weekend, there were many things to note that concern me and other alumni. Isolation, anxiety, stress. The idea of how to advocate for oneself and each other, the in-person social interactions, lack of career guidance and pathways, available mentors, and the barriers of technology are just a few.

My growth as a person was passed down to me from my grandmother, mother, mentors, church, internships - the sum total of gaining knowledge, building understanding, and applying wisdom. Loving your neighbor as yourself...service to all.

I know my WHY. I know my purpose. Service first and all the things I have accumulated (degrees, skills, abilities, interests, knowledge) have helped me to be who I am today. I am not defined by things but through those with whom I have a relationship...God being first.

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My charge to students.

Put your phones down and interact with people. Please don't sit in a room and FaceTime your friends in the same room. We are all human and crave relationships. We are born to be relational. We can't live in this world without people. The number of "likes" can't help you be successful on this campus. People can. Connect with Black faculty, staff, and YOUR peers. Build FAMILY.

My charge to Black Faculty and Staff.

As a former student and employee in this system of education, I respectfully ask you to take time with Black students. Look for those who need your expertise, to hear your experiences, and to whom you can connect to their next step. I know there is research, teaching, and administrating. But, who can a student connect with other than you? You become the FAMILY the students need.

My charge to the prestigious University of Illinois.

[To the Chancellor - I heard the goals you have set for this campus. We are going to hold you to it.] But I challenge you to also Stop, Look, and Observe that while there have been many ideas implemented, previous programs removed, a slow decline of Black students accepting admission, and much more - what does it gain the University if Black students are not successful or don't want to come back to give in the ways you want us to give. You see FAMILY is not always what you get, it is also what you give. The giving has to accept where you are and give in meaningful ways that mean something to the individual. The cohesive Black Family network on campus is disjointed, competitive, and siloed. It will easily weaken culture if not intentionally strengthened. You see, I did receive a great education here and I connected the dots where colleges, units, and classes could not see the vision of whom I wanted to be and where I wanted to go. The people on campus who poured into me lovingly corrected me and taught me to be great were my FAMILY. You can gain the whole world and lose your soul...the ability to serve and to do the right things when no one is watching.

To the Black Alumni Network -

We need to pivot and be present. If students are not getting what they need, what can we do? They need us to help them connect the dots from getting the degree to getting a job to having a career. They are not receiving this attention that is definitely wanted and needed. We have the wisdom to help them. We look like them and we have been where they are. What will we do? How will we partner? How will we connect and plug in? By Celebrating Black Joy and Resilience: Family, Focus, and Moving Forward, let us be the family that focuses on moving forward despite the circumstances that continue. We are the advocates.

Let's Just Do It!

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