

Wilberforce University Cancels Over \$375,000 in Debt for 2020, 2021 Graduates

"Remember, God said, 'I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.' I wish for each of you all the very best life has to offer, and always every day God's love, God's grace and God's mercy."

These were the words Wilberforce University President Elfred Anthony Pinkard spoke over the graduating classes of 2020 and 2021 at their commencement. Immediately following this proclamation of blessing, the students received news that caused them to erupt in cheers and celebration.

President Pinkard announced their student debt to the school would be forgiven in full.

"Because you have shown that you are capable of doing work under difficult circumstances, because you represent the best of your generation, we wish to give you a fresh start," said Pinkard. "So therefore the Wilberforce University board of trustees has authorized me to forgive any debt."

"Your accounts have been cleared and you don't owe Wilberforce anything. Congratulations," Pinkard concluded.

The historically Black university affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal Church said the 166 new alumnus would be forgiven of more than \$375,000 in debt owed to the school. The university clarified in a statement Memorial Day that the students' debt to outside sources, such as state and federal student loans, would not be included in the forgiveness clearance.

Scholarships and other institutionally funded initiatives made this generosity possible, the statement said. Numerous news outlets report that United Negro College Fund, Inc. and Jack and Jill, Inc. contributed, as well as the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund established through the CARES Act.

Black college graduates have an average of \$52,000 in student loan debt, an average of \$25,000 more than their white peers, according to data from the National Center for Education Statistics.

“I couldn’t believe it when he said it,” recent grad Rodman Allen said. “It’s a blessing. I know God will be with me. I’m not worried. I can use that money and invest it into my future.” {eoa}

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