



# ROYAL SINCE BIRTH





# PROGRAM MESSAGE

## **Congratulations to the Class of 2026!**

On behalf of the Pan African Student Resource Center (PASRC) and the Cross Cultural Centers, we proudly welcome you to the Black Cultural Graduation Celebration. Today, we honor your academic achievements, resilience, and the legacy you carry as members of the Black diaspora.

This year's theme, Royal Since Birth, was created by the Black Grad 2026 Planning Committee to reflect the power, beauty, and greatness that has always existed within Black people across the African diaspora. Far too often, history has attempted to erase, distort, or hide the legacies of Black communities—the stories of innovators, leaders, revolutionaries, scholars, creators, and civilizations that shaped the world. Yet despite these attempts, our roots remain powerful, undeniable, and deeply connected to who we are today.

Royal Since Birth is a reminder that our brilliance and worth are not something we had to earn—they have always belonged to us. When we know our roots and understand where we come from, we walk with confidence, purpose, and power.

The Pan African Student Resource Center was founded on these very principles. The term Pan African represents the unity of Black people across the diaspora while honoring our shared African roots, histories, and cultures. It acknowledges the richness of our ancestors, the greatness of ancient African civilizations, and the generations who fought to preserve our stories and create opportunities for us to thrive.

As graduates, you are continuing that legacy. Black Grad is not only a celebration of degrees earned, but a celebration of culture, community, perseverance, and the future each of you will help shape.

To the Class of 2026: continue to walk boldly in your purpose, knowing you come from greatness. **You have always been royal.**

Coordinator,  
Imani Thomas

The 2026 Black Graduates Planning Committee,  
The Pan African Student Resource Center, and  
Cross Cultural Centers of the University-Student Union  
at California State University, Los Angeles

*Present:*



The 39th Annual  
California State University,  
Los Angeles  
Celebration of Black Graduates  
Two Thousand Twenty-Six



Saturday, May 16, 2026  
Cal State LA – University Gym

# PROGRAM

## University Welcome

*Patrick Day, Vice President of Student*

*Affairs and Enrollment Management*

## Processional of Graduates

## Welcome Remarks and Land

## Acknowledgement

*Akela Oneal, MC*

## Black National Anthem

*Lay Jointer*

## Libation

*Dr. Amiri Mahnzili*

## Young Gifted and Talented Performance

## Welcome Skit

*Za'ir Jackson & Zaria Jackson*

## Undergraduate Student Speaker

*Ashanti Gaither*

## Rap/Spoken Word Performance

*Donavan Williams*

## Graduate Student Speaker

*Brenda Drew*

## Presentation of the Class of 2026

## Closing Remarks

*Imani Thomas*

# BLACK NATIONAL ANTHEM LIFT EV'RY VOICE AND SING

Lift every 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

## Undergraduate Student Speaker



### Ashanti Imani Gaither

*Bachelor of Science in Mathematics with a Minor  
in Pan African Studies*

Ashanti Gaither is a graduating senior earning her Bachelor of Science in Mathematics with a minor in Pan-African Studies, while also completing her single-subject teaching credential. As a Mathematics major with an integrated teaching focus, she is committed to becoming an educator who empowers and uplifts the next generation.

During her time on campus, Ashanti has been actively involved in the Black Student Union, the National Pan-Hellenic Council, and Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. She has contributed to initiatives such as the Black Women's Film Festival, campus clean-up efforts—for which her team received recognition—and the organization of middle school campus tours. She is also a dedicated tutor and has worked closely with programs like Young Gifted and Talented and Dream Big at Hughes Middle School. Ashanti's leadership and impact have been recognized through honors including the 2025 Outstanding Student Leader (CSI Award) and Collegiate Soror of the Year (Delta Sigma Theta). Grounded in leadership, advocacy, and a passion for education, she represents the excellence and legacy reflected in this year's theme, "Royal Since Birth."

## Graduate Student Speaker



### Brenda Elizabeth Drew

*Masters of Arts in Pan African Studies*

Brenda Drew is a graduating Master's student in Pan African Studies who will be pursuing their PhD in Afro-American Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst in the fall. They hold two bachelor's degrees in History and Africana Studies from San Diego State University (SDSU), where they were deeply involved in the Black queer community through work centered on education, empowerment, safe sex and gender affirming health initiatives, and the emerging Ballroom scene. They have maintained close ties to the SD community throughout their masters program as secretary for San Diego Black Pride. During their time at CSULA however, Brenda served as President of the Black Student Union, a Resident Assistant with the Halisi Scholars housing team, and a Graduate Assistant for the Pan African Studies Department. Brenda's master's thesis examines the impact of fatphobia on plus-sized Black womxn and femmes, a line of research they plan to continue at the doctoral level. They are passionate about advancing Black liberation, uplifting queer and disabled voices, and centering community, love, and laughter in all that they do.



# MASTER'S DEGREES



## AJA WHITTEN

*Pan African Studies, MA*

Gratitude to my ancestors, village, and family.  
Peace and Power!



## AUTUMN MARTIN

*Educational Technology, MA*

*Online Teaching and Learning (COTL)*

I want to thank my family, my boyfriend, mentors and everyone who supported and helped me on my journey. I could not have done it without you all.



## AVALON MAJENTA ARTIS

*Educational Technology, MA*

*Online Teaching and Learning (COTL)*

I would like to thank my family and friends for their consistent encouragement during my time at Cal State LA. Earning my master's degree has challenged me and helped me grow but it also reminds me that I belong in every room I enter. As someone who is biracial, this moment honors every part of who I am and the history that shaped me. I am proud and grateful for everyone who supported me.



### **BRANDY DALEY**

#### *Business Administration, MS*

I thank God for carrying me through this journey. To my two sons, you are my purpose and my daily motivation. To my mom, my sisters, my dad, and all my family, your love, support, and belief in me kept me moving forward. This MBA belongs to all of us. I'm proud of how far I've come, and I'll continue rising, growing, and reaching for the stars.



### **CHRISTIAN OBINNA AHAMBA**

#### *Information Systems, MS*

I am deeply grateful to my family, and friends whose encouragement has guided me throughout my journey at Cal State LA. Their unwavering support gave me strength during challenging moments and inspired me to keep striving for excellence. I also appreciate the faculty and colleagues who contributed to my growth, both academically and personally. This experience has shaped me in meaningful ways, and I look forward to carrying these lessons into the future.



### **BRENDA ELIZABETH DREW**

#### *Pan African Studies, MA*

This is for all of my siblings across the country and diaspora who should be here. My work is for you, I will keep striving for you. I would like to thank my family and chosen family. Without you all, I would not be here.



### **CLARKE CATHERINE CURRY**

#### *Business Administration, MS*

First, I thank God for guiding me through this journey. I am deeply grateful to my parents and sister for their constant love, encouragement, and belief in me. Thank you for standing by me during both my undergraduate and master's journey. I am also thankful for my friends who always cheered me on and lifted my spirits. A special thank you to my boyfriend for studying with me and reminding me of my strength.



### **CHRISTINA GABRIELLE ANDERSON**

#### *Special Education, MA*

First, I would like to honor God, who carried me through this momentous accomplishment. Though I faced many setbacks along the way, He gave me the strength to persevere. Secondly, I would like to thank my parents, Tahitia and Percy, for pouring into me the love of education as a child. I am deeply grateful for my grandparents and my siblings. I am extremely proud to now add Master's Graduate to our family's generational blessings.



### **DENISE M PANTON**

#### *Social Work, MSW*

To my family thank you for being my safe place throughout this journey. Your encouragement, patience, and belief in me gave me the strength to keep going when it felt overwhelming. Your support during stressful semesters, your understanding and your constant faith in me gave me the courage to keep going. Earning my MSW meant missing holidays, special events, and precious time together. I will always appreciate the grace and understanding you showed me.



### **KALISHA JAMES**

*Social Work, MSW*

I will not let what I can't do interfere with what I can do.



### **PAMELA TERESA MORGAN**

*Pan African Studies, MA*

I received more than I expected from my graduate work in Pan African Studies at CSULA. Learning African history, embracing Pan Africanism and documenting Black happenings, I am grateful. This amazing journey was made possible by academic collaboration, hard work, my mother's encouragement, my brothers' support, the love of my Godchildren, nieces and nephews, sisters-in-law, sisters in prayer and sorority. And the eternal love of my ancestors Daddy, EJ, Erin, Linnie, LaTasha and all. Ase'



### **KRISTEN FLEMING**

*Accounting, MS*

I want to take a moment to express my deep gratitude to my grandmother, whose unwavering support has provided the foundation for my journey. I also want to thank my professors at Cal State LA for their guidance and encouragement. I cherish the values, traditions, and resilience that my family has instilled in me through the generations. As I celebrate this milestone, I feel a profound sense of pride in honoring my culture and heritage.



### **PAUL POMMELLS**

*Social Work, MSW*

First, I want to acknowledge my mom because without her I wouldn't be who I am today. Mom, thank you for everything. Next, I want to thank my family and friends for being with me, believing in me and pointing me to opportunities when some doors closed. I also want to thank my professors and mentors with the ABSW. Thank you for your guidance and support. Harambee.



### **ORENTHEUS A HUTCHERSON**

*Pan African Studies, MA*

I would like to thank my family and friends and professors for their support throughout my time here at Cal State LA. It was very much needed and appreciated. I'm grateful for the support that I got. Thank you.

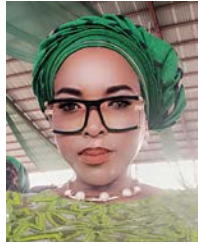


### **SIERRA MADISON NICHOLE LOWE**

*Business Administration, MS*

*Computer Information Systems*

I would like to sincerely thank my friends, family, and line sisters for their unwavering support, love, and encouragement throughout this journey. Your prayers, reassurance, laughter, and belief in me have carried me through every challenge and celebration. I am deeply grateful for your constant presence, sacrifices, and strength. I would not be where I am today without each of you. Thank you for standing beside me always.



**STACEY MOSUNMOLA BALOGUN**

*Healthcare Management, MS*

*Healthcare Leadership*

The journey of over five years, it's being one challenge or the other. Had to yield for my second and third to finish their respective degree and pursue their careers. Due to financial burdens. But all glory ascribed to my Lord and Savior that saw my second child and third graduated in 2020. Now my fourth and myself graduating in June together by His Grace. Baba God, I give it ALL to you, your Majesty.



**STEPHANIE YVONNE WILSON**

*Pan African Studies, MA*

I am taking this opportunity to acknowledge the talent and grace I have learned from my other mothers, cohort friends, and Pan African Studies professors. Many thanks to my ancestors, who awakened me at 5:30 AM every morning to chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo, always reminding me of the great good fortune I have to say I'm Black and I'm Proud! Special thanks to Dr. Bush, Dr. McDougal, Professor Zama, and Dr. Janice Robinson.



**VANESSA ABENA AMOAH**

*Communication Studies, MA*

I dedicate my degree to my family, friends, and mentors who have pushed me to challenge myself in this season. I thank God for giving me such a loving community, and I pray that the Lord continues to guide me in truth and love. I am excited to use my education to contribute to the liberation and healing of current and future generations, and I am so grateful for the opportunity to do so.



**BACHELOR'S  
DEGREES**





### **AKELA ONEAL WROTEN**

*Pan African Studies, BA*

All honor and glory to the Most High God, through the teachings of Jesus (Yeshua). To my ancestors who have watched over me and guided me when I was lost, thank you. I also thank my family, friends, and mentors who poured wisdom, correction, and love into me. To my Tribe: you are my greatest motivation. This is for the children, for the community, and for the culture. The job isn't finished. Amen and Ashe.



### **AKIM MUMEIN EVANS**

*Psychology, BA*

I would like to thank my haters. They became my motivators.



### **AKIYAH JAZZY MARIE THURSTON**

*Psychology, BA*

I chose psychology because I'm passionate about understanding behavior, emotion, and perception. Shaped by my family, culture, and experiences, I saw how mental health, relationships, & access to resources shape people's well-being and life outcomes. These experiences motivated me to apply my knowledge to support and uplift my community. Studying psychology allows me to challenge misconceptions, foster resilience, and create spaces where communities thrive. Thank you to my family for always supporting me. WE DID IT!!

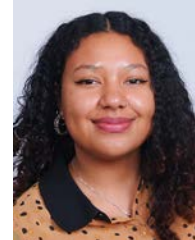


### **ALAHNNA ST. JULES**

*Sociology, BA*

*Social Media*

I would like to thank those who encouraged me throughout my college career. I thank the ears that listened while I ranted. The friends that made me laugh after a low test grade. And my sisters who give me a reason to want to be great. Today, I followed in the footsteps of my mom. Today, I am a black grad. Today, I am fulfilled and surrounded by black excellence.



### **ALEXCIA MARIE GARCIA**

*Biology, BS*

I would like to acknowledge my family and friends for their constant support throughout my journey at Cal State LA. Every experience I've had, whether good or challenging, has been meaningful and has shaped me into who I am today. I would not have accomplished my goals without their encouragement and belief in me. As I move forward, I will continue striving toward new opportunities and growth.



### **AMANI NICOLE DAVENPORT**

*Applied Science, BS*

*Pan-African Studies*

I want to express my deepest gratitude to my family for their unwavering support and constant encouragement throughout my college journey; I truly couldn't have done this without you. To my friends: thank you for being by my side and turning every challenge into a shared memory. This achievement belongs to all of us.



**AMIRAH ANDREA MYLES**

*Television, Film, and Media Studies, BA  
Marketing*

I would like to thank my family for believing in me when I moved from Fresno to Los Angeles to follow my dreams. Thank you to my friends, professors, and community at Cal State LA who encouraged my creativity and growth. Every challenge shaped me into a stronger storyteller, and I carry that with me into the future. #quacholote



**ASHANTI IMANI GAITHER**

*Mathematics, BS  
Pan-African Studies*

I would like to thank God for getting me this far and for keeping me grounded throughout this journey. Through every challenge and success, His guidance has carried me. To my family and friends, thank you for your constant support, love, and encouragement. To my professors and mentors, thank you for your patience and guidance. I am truly grateful to everyone who helped me reach this milestone.



**ANNIE OKORO**

*Public Health, BS*

I would like to thank my lord and savior Jesus Christ for all his grace, love and mercy over the years. Through faith and trust I made it here giving it all back to him. Special thanks to my parents, my family and my fiancé who believed in me and supported me along the way.



**ASHLEY BRIANNA JACKSON**

*Communicative Disorders, BA  
Pan-African Studies*

I am AND will continue to be my ancestors' wildest dream. I want to personally thank my Grandmother, Mother, Father, Aunts, Uncle, Siblings, Sister-Cousins and all other important figures/mentors in my life for their endless love and support. I am deeply grateful to all my family and ancestors who came before me this achievement is because of you. Love you all ALWAYS, Ashley.



**ANTHONY ISSAC NEWMAN**

*Criminal Justice, BS*

I dedicate this achievement to my mother, my best friend, who did everything to ensure I reached this milestone. Your unwavering support and sacrifices are the reason I am here today; I could not have done this without you. I also thank the Cal State LA faculty for their guidance. As I prepare for law school, I am grateful for the foundation built here. Thank you for believing in me.



**ASHLEY TAYLOR PALMER**

*Psychology, BA*

I want to thank my mom for her unwavering love and belief in me, even when I doubted myself. Her wisdom carries me, and my success is as much hers as it is mine. I honor my ancestors and the Black leaders whose courage and resilience paved the way for me. Psychology has taught me mindfulness, understanding, and healing, and I am grateful for professors who truly see their students. Lastly, I thank God.



**AYAH KAMAL ZEINELABDIN**

*Criminal Justice, BS*

I would like to thank God the Almighty for pushing me through all the obstacles I've faced during my journey and I'd also love to thank my loving parents who supported me all the way from home (the bay area). Also, for the select few bonds that I've watched grow over the years to people who I can now call lifelong friends. Most of all I'd like to thank ME for showing up for me!



**CASSHAJNEA PIERCE**

*Psychology, BA*

College has been a challenging yet transformative journey. Throughout my academic journey, I have faced difficulties that tested me, but each obstacle ultimately strengthened my determination to succeed. I am super grateful for my support system that has been there for me for the past few years and helped me stay focused on my goals. Shoutout to the several departments that I came across that led me in the right direction of success!



**AYJAH MILAN LANDERS**

*Psychology, BA*

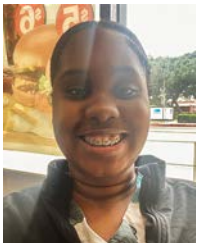
I would like to thank my friends (teammates) and family for supporting me through the highs and lows of my college experience. I am grateful for all the long and late-night conversations that guided me through the most important moments in my life. I also want to thank God for giving me the strength and perseverance to finish my athletic and academic journey. If it weren't for you all, I wouldn't be here today. Thank you.



**CRYSTAL SHANNEL HUFF**

*Child Development, BA*

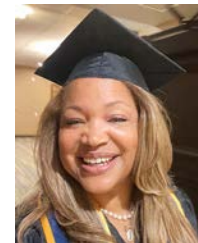
Son, this one's for you! To my friends and family, thank you all for the love and support you have given me throughout this journey. Your faith in me turned my dreams into reality! Most importantly Thank you God. (Philippians 4:13)



**BLESSING AJOKU**

*Public Health, BS*

I would like to thank my family and friends everyone who believed in me and prayed for me and made it possible for me to achieve all my dreams today.



**DANICA MARYSE JAMIESON**

*Nursing, BS*

With a grateful heart, I want to thank my wonderful family (my brilliant & loving mother, my amazing children who honor me by simply being their 'mom' and my best friend & eternal soulmate, Brad.) Your love, support and encouragement throughout my nursing school journey have been the wind beneath my wings.



### DEMARIYON DASHAWN DAVIS

#### *Journalism, BA*

I'd like to express my deepest appreciation to each and every person who has helped, supported, and guided me through this chapter of my life at Cal State LA. Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to make something of myself and for supporting me when I was stressed.



### DONAVAN JACOB WILLIAMS

#### *Television, Film, and Media Studies, BA Pan-African Studies*

Toast to those who've rose above all occasions. Through the trials & tribulations. Through newly fostered relations... it's about damn time we have our vacation! 'Ankles been aching walking on this long road. Never threw a towel in and you can bet I won't fold!' - Don



### DESTINY DORIS DURANT

#### *Journalism, BA*

I would like to thank my parents, my boyfriend, Dr. Conney, and all my professors at Cal State LA for their support throughout my journey. Without their guidance, belief in me, and help opening opportunities. I like working for the university, assisting with Diablos Media, and landing my first internship with Ed Source. I wouldn't have accomplished so much while welcoming my first son. I am grateful for all the lessons, memories, and love I've received.



### ERIK J. THOMAS

#### *Electrical Engineering, BS Pan-African Studies*

My loving sister, guiding mother, inspiring children, friends that will not let you quit, teachers that give grace relayed with empathy, and those with kind hearts able to give out of the humanistic kindness of their heart. I would like to thank you and acknowledge your gratitude.



### DJAIRA LEEZANDRA JOHNSON

#### *Child Development, BA*

I want to thank my parents for supporting me and teaching me resilience, especially during the many stressors life has thrown my way. You have always reminded me to stay positive and strong through difficult times. I am mostly deeply grateful to my friends for providing a safe space and consistently showing me care, understanding, and encouragement. I love you all so much.



### GABRIELLE ALEXIS STEVENSON

#### *Communication, BA Pan-African Studies*

I would like to sincerely thank my parents, my friends, and my girlfriend for their constant love, support, and encouragement throughout my academic journey. During the most challenging moments, they stood by me, believed in me, and reminded me of my strength and potential. Their patience, motivation, and unwavering support gave me the confidence to overcome obstacles and stay focused on achieving my goals. I am truly grateful for everything they have done for me.



### **GINIA RUTHIE GOODS**

#### *Kinesiology, BS*

As a proud Black woman, I am deeply grateful for this accomplishment and the journey it represents. This milestone is a testament to God's guidance, strength, and unwavering favor throughout every challenge and triumph. I am especially thankful for the constant love, encouragement, and sacrifices of my family, whose support sustained me. This achievement belongs not only to me, but to everyone who believed in me and prayed for my success.



### **GIZELLE TALIA MERCADO-REYNOLDS**

#### *Biology, BS*

I would like to thank my family for their unwavering support throughout my college journey. I am so thankful for all the friends that I made throughout college and all the memories we made.



### **GLORIAN FAITH GASKINS**

#### *Business Administration, BS*

#### *Option in Marketing*

I would like to thank my parents, my siblings, my boyfriend and friends for their support and motivation throughout my journey at Cal State LA. You guys are my why and I do this for you. I am grateful for all the wonderful memories and experiences I've made that have built me to be the person I am today. As my dad always says 'You Better Recognize.'



### **GOVANNA RENEE FRANKLIN**

#### *Urban Learning, BA*

I would like to thank my mom and loved ones who I know are watching me from above encouraging me to keep going. I would also like to thank my daughter for allowing me to lead by example and showing her the greatness that we possess as black women. My family and friends for their love and encouragement. I thank God for guiding me and blessing me throughout this journey. Look Mama I made it!



### **IMANI CHRISTINA RENEE JOHNSON**

#### *English, BA*

#### *Pan-African Studies*

I want to thank Jesus for carrying me through this journey at Cal State LA, my family and friends for supporting me even in our grief, and my Chaffey Umoja family for giving me the confidence to apply to university. Without them, I would not be here. I am grateful for all the wonderful memories and friends I made at this university, and I will keep striving for the next big thing.



### **ISAIAH SOLOMON**

#### *Biology, BS*

#### *Healthcare Management*

Glory be to God!!! I want to give a BIG shoutout to my mom for the love and energy she poured into me throughout this 4 years. Thank you so much mom for everything. I would like to big THANK YOU to my girlfriend, Yamani. Thank you so much for your love, support and for being there for me. Thank you to my friends as well for making this 4 years memorable!!



### **JAELAH CARRUTH**

*Public Health, BS*

*Pan-African Studies*

First and foremost, I give all glory to God for carrying me through every high and low. I thank my parents for their sacrifices, and my friends for their support. To my daughter, you are my reason to rise and keep pushing. I stand proud as a Black woman and mother, walking boldly in purpose. This journey proves it's not how you start, but how you finish.



### **JESSICA CHRISTINA DORAT**

*Psychology, BA*

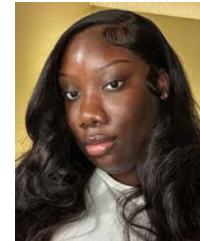
I would like to thank my mom for being my constant source of strength, love, and encouragement throughout my academic journey. Her sacrifices, resilience, and belief in me gave me the courage to keep going, even during the most challenging moments. I would not be where I am today without her support. This chapter of my life has shaped me in powerful ways, and I am proud of the person I am becoming.



### **JAMES MUNDIA KAHIGA**

*Psychology, BA*

I want to express gratitude to my family, friends, and support system for endeavoring this journey with me. Let's savour the moment; however the job is not finished. Thank you, Cal State LA.



### **JOSIE ANSAH BROWN**

*Child Development, BA*

*Pan-African Studies*

I would like to thank my mom for supporting me throughout my 5 years at Cal State LA. Also never forget my Dad who started me off and supports me still even though he is not here anymore. Remembering how important me completing University was to him kept me going.



### **JANELLE LATRICE POTTER**

*Communicative Disorders, BA*

All glory to Jehovah, the Most High. I'm deeply grateful to my daughter Jade, my sister Shancee, and finally my ride or die sistas Alexis, Quita, Wynona, and Yuvi, who have shown me a deeper meaning of the word 'family.' They've all lifted me up in countless ways through this academic journey. As I prepare to pursue a Doctor of Audiology, I pray they continue to put up with me. I love you so much!



### **JUANITA WILLIAMS**

*Psychology, BA*

I would like to sincerely thank my husband and my two sons for their unconditional love, patience, and constant encouragement throughout this journey. I am who I am today because of you. Your support means everything to me. I am also deeply grateful to Professor Kimmy (Khanh Nguyen), Professor Dylan Aguirre, and Dr. Haas for your guidance, dedication, and belief in me. Thank you all for helping me reach this important milestone.



### **KAMAL VALADEZ**

*Social Work, BA*

All praise is due to Allah. We seek His help, we seek His forgiveness, and we seek refuge in Allah from the evil within ourselves and our evil deeds. Whoever Allah guides, there is none to misguide him. Whoever Allah leads astray, there is none to guide him. I testify there is no God but Allah alone, without any partners, and that Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, is His servant and His messenger.



### **KUDUS ADETORO EDU**

*Psychology, BA*

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my family for their unwavering support, patience, and encouragement throughout my journey at Cal State LA. Their belief in me sustained my motivation during challenging periods. I am also deeply appreciative of my friends, classmates, and professors, whose contributions fostered my personal and academic growth and enriched this experience. The lessons and memories I have gained here will continue to guide me in the future.



### **KANSTANCE DEVYNMARIE FORD**

*Criminal Justice, BS*

I want to first thank God for carrying me through these past four years, and second, I want to express my gratitude to my Mommy, my family, and my Best Friend, Shaylah, for listening to all my school rants over the years. I am ready for the next chapter! GOD is great!



### **KYLA CARTER**

*Pan African Studies, BA*

To be a researcher is to be a practitioner of Sankofa. It's an ongoing practice that requires intellectual rigor to go back and do the work to produce work that frees us. I'm grateful for following my intuition and going back to school. Thank you to my people that held and grounded me as I found more beautiful parts of myself.



### **KOREDE SHITTU**

*Biology, BS*

*Pan-African Studies*

Will do later



### **LAKIESHA MARIE MCCOLLUM**

*Psychology, BA*

*Applied Behavior Analysis*

First, I would like to say thank you to Allah for allowing me to have the knowledge to go back to school. I would like to thank my husband for holding down the family and the encouragement to finish school. My kids who are my motivation and reason why I went back to school.



### **LA SHANA P. AVERY**

*Business Administration, BS  
Management*

I would like to thank God first and foremost for guiding my path in furthering my education. I would like to thank my family for being here with me every step of the way and know I love you all unconditionally. Last but not least I would like to thank my daughter Journey for being the reason for me coming back to school to further my education. I love you and let this be motivation.



### **LETICIA CHAREE MITCHELL**

*Communicative Disorders, BA  
Pan-African Studies*

I would like to Thank my children Tyler & Tyson for supporting my Academic Dream. Mr. Casey & Dr. Opong for seeing greatness in me that I did not see in myself. Dr. Bush & Mrs. Jill for Always Being There For me whenever I needed anything. Love you guys.



### **LAIYA SIMONE SHEPPARD**

*Biology, BS*

I want to thank my mother for supporting me throughout my entire time in school and for listening to me cry on the phone, stressed about classes. I would also like to thank my friends I met in school for all the laughs and late-night talks to keep me sane.



### **LEYONAH MESHELL JONES**

*Biology, BS*

First and foremost, I thank God for guiding and blessing me through every trial. I thank my parents for their love, time, and sacrifices this degree belongs to them as much as it does to me. Lastly, thank you to the Black community at Cal State LA for the laughter and support along the way. This journey is only the beginning, and I carry everyone who supported me into the next chapter.



### **LAYLA SIMONE DAVIS**

*Business Administration, BS  
Option in Marketing*

I would like to thank my parents and family for their constant love, encouragement and unwavering support throughout my college journey. I love you all deeply and am endlessly grateful for your sacrifices, patience, and belief in me, even when I did not believe in myself. Shoutout to my parents, sister, grandma, Auntie Tosha, Steve, the Bonners, Aunt Sherri and my godparents.



### **MARY JO CRUZ DUNCAN**

*Public Health, BS*

I would like to thank myself first of all for making this happen for me and my future career goals and achieving more beyond my education in my degree getting my masters degree. I would also like to thank my mom for being very well involved in my schooling and where I wanted to go she made it possible for me being able to achieve more than she has ever did.



### **MIA VICTORIA SALGADO**

*Psychology, BA  
Pan-African Studies*

I would like to thank my family for always supporting me through my academic endeavors. I especially appreciate my mom for doing everything she could to make my life easier so I could just focus on my studies, which has certainly paid off. I wouldn't have been able to get to this moment without the love and encouragement of my family. I love you all very much!



### **RAFAEL TYLER SMITH**

*Business Administration, BS  
Option in Business Economics*

From the moment I took my first breath, my family has showered me with affection. Whether you know it or not, each and every one of you has helped me in your own unique way. The indefatigable conviviality, ebullience, magnanimity, amity, joie de vivre, and hugs you've shared will not be taken for granted. I love and cherish you all deeply.



### **MICAH LYNN BROOKS**

*English, BA*

I believe in the African philosophy of Ubuntu: 'I am because we are.' To my family, friends, and amazing partner who are all congratulating me today, congratulate yourselves as well. Without your love, support, and encouragement I wouldn't only be where I am, I wouldn't be who I am. I love you with my whole heart.



### **RAYMOND AUSTIN HAYWOOD**

*Sociology, BA*

I would like to thank my family and friends, especially my mom, for always believing in me and believing in my future. As it was a difficult journey from getting sick my freshman year to now. And just being able to say I am a college graduate makes me so happy and proud.



### **NYTIA YAZZIE YORK**

*Communication, BA*

There are not enough words to express my gratitude for what I got to accomplish. This is thanks to my mom, dad, sisters, brother, and more. I am here in spite of the challenges I faced and this is a step towards my successful journey.



### **ROFIAT ADEOLA LAWAL**

*Psychology, BA  
Pan-African Studies*

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to God for His blessings and guidance throughout my academic journey. I am deeply thankful to my mother, whose constant love, sacrifices, and encouragement have been my greatest strength. I also sincerely thank my family, teachers, and friends for their guidance, support, and motivation, which helped me successfully complete my graduation.



**ROSE EBUBECHUKWU IKECHI**

*Criminal Justice, BS  
Prelegal Studies*

I pay homage to the Nigerian women in my lineage who were not able to receive a formal education. They were still brilliant, business-savvy and knew how to make ends meet. I do this for them.



**SHANNON NE'COLE JONES**

*Sociology, BA  
Natural Science*

Giving honor & glory to God for carrying me through this journey, especially after losing my son last January. To my family & friends, thank you for standing beside me with your love and support. Without you, I would not have reached this milestone. I am grateful for the relationships & memories I built at Cal State LA. I am devoted to honoring those who poured into me. Thanks for believing in me. This achievement is ours.



**SAMUEL MUMO MAINGI**

*Computer Information Systems, BS  
Business Intelligence*

I would like to thank my mother, Hellen, and Nancy Stevens for their immense support and part in helping me reach the graduation stage. I would also like to thank friends, family, and instructors for their encouragement and belief in me. The cornerstone of my success can only be attributed to their support. I am unceasingly grateful for the friendships, lessons, and memories made on this journey at Cal State LA. Now, I am ready.



**SHAYLAH LENA E DUBOSE**

*Psychology, BA*

I would like to thank my family and friends for all of their support throughout these last four years. I don't know where I would be without them. I am beyond grateful to have made it this far and I can't wait to see where my journey takes me next. Congratulations to my fellow graduates and I wish you all good luck on your future endeavors.



**SARISHA ELIAS ROBY**

*Social Work, BA*

First and foremost, I thank God Almighty for His grace and guidance. I am grateful for Prophet Lovy, my spiritual father at Revelation Church, for strengthening my faith. My Grandma Roby for seeing something in me I didn't see in myself. I thank my parents for giving me life, and everyone else who supported my journey. Most of all, I cherish my children and grandbabies, whose love keeps me going. I am truly thankful.



**SHEARLENA CEOLA-ANN DUTY**

*Sociology, BA*

I would like to thank my parents and grandparents for always encouraging me to continue my academics as well as my close friends who always supported me throughout my life. Your love and support is greatly appreciated!



### **SHILAH RODGERS**

*Psychology, BA*

I would like to thank my mom for her unconditional love and support. I would not have been able to accomplish my goals without her sacrifices. I would also like to thank my guardian angels who could not physically be here for this moment. They have carried me through this journey and I will continue to let their legacy shine through me.



### **STEVEN WILLIAM JOHNSON**

*Rehabilitation Services, BS  
Real Estate*

Thank you to my family, professors, and friends for believing in me. Your support made this moment possible. I am proud of how far I've come and excited for what comes next. Also, I would like to thank the USAF for allowing me to continue my pursuit of higher education.



### **SINAIAH J POINTER**

*Communication, BA  
Pan-African Studies*

I would like to extend gratitude to my parents for support and belief in me throughout my college career. To the CSULA Track & Field team, thank you for the constant camaraderie and being my chosen college family. I would also like to acknowledge my own dedication, resilience, and hard work that has been impactful in my journey. This accomplishment is a testament to our collective effort and the needed push for me to excel.



### **SYDNEY WAMBUI WANGUHU**

*Journalism, BA  
Pan-African Studies*

I want to thank my parents, Michael Wanguhu and Annette Ruah, for making it possible for me to finish my degree through their constant love and support. They showed me that chasing your dreams takes courage and there's nothing wrong with leaning on your village. I truly wouldn't be here without my friends and family especially my little sister Alexis. I'm really grateful for everyone who's poured into me. I'm excited to see what's next.



### **STACEY FAYDEAN MADDOX**

*Business Administration, BS  
Option in Healthcare Administration*

I want to thank my mom for her love and unwavering support, and my dad for his wisdom, strength, and values that continue to guide me. Thank you to my children Randy, Harmony, James, and Kobi Gianna who give my life purpose, joy, and perspective. And to my husband, thank you for standing beside me. I also thank myself for enduring, believing, and accomplishing a dream deferred with courage and grace.



### **TAHLEYA DIOR NEWBORN**

*Theatre, BA*

I would like to thank my parents and family for all their unwavering support during my time at Cal State LA. I would also like to thank those close to me for their encouragement of all my endeavors and to jump at any opportunity. Thank you to Ms. Jill as well for being an amazing mentor and someone who continuously speaks life into me and other students.



### **TANIGHI K VENABLE**

*Television, Film, and Media Studies, BA*

I would like to thank the people I have met along the way here. And being a black individual on the campus was hard but I got to learn and make mistakes along the way. Thank you.



### **TRACEY DONNELL DAVIS**

*Business Administration, BS*

*Option in Human Resources Management*

This moment is bigger than a degree it's a testament to perseverance faith and support. I thank my family for holding me down and believing in me throughout my journey at Cal State LA. Your love and sacrifices kept me pushing when things got tough. I'm grateful for the professors who challenged me, friends who supported me, and every lesson learned. Being an Eagle shaped my strength, growth, and confidence. This milestone is for us.



### **TATIANA MILLER**

*Public Health, BS*

I want to say thank you to my support system throughout my journey here at Cal State LA. Without you all I would have no one to listen to my rants all while making good memories to get through the years. I can't wait to continue my journey and celebrate with you all.



### **WILLIAM VALEN CORREA**

*Business Administration, BS*

*Option in International Business*

I want to thank everyone whom has supported me through my academic return. Being a returning student has been an opportunity for me to positively reflect the priceless sacrifices and investments of my family and close friends. This has been a beautiful journey. As I take the next steps in my academic career, I'd like to pave the road for the next generation of professionals with inspiration, and motivation.



### **TIYA SELESHI MENGESHA**

*Art, BA*

*Marketing*

Thank you to the faculty, especially Professor Carol and Veronica Ahmed, who supported me, poured into me lessons and knowledge, and strengthened my confidence in my voice and what I offer the world. Thank you to my friends, mentors, partner, and most importantly, my mom, Endalu, whose love and strength carried me. I am beyond grateful for my sacrifices and dedication. Thank you to God, and I wish prosperity for everyone here to soar high.



### **WILLIE DEWITT HALL**

*Television, Film, and Media Studies, BA*

All glory to God for me getting through four years of essays, projects, and deciding what I want to do for my future. Thank you to my parents, and family for supporting me. Big shout to my big sis Danielle who was with me every step of the way applying to colleges and making sure I'm reaching my requirements to graduate. I am truly grateful for you. This is not the end but the beginning.

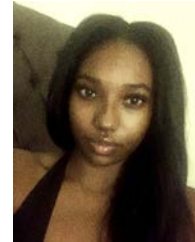


## **YAMANI ZAMORA SCOGGINS**

*Theatre, BA*

*Pan-African Studies*

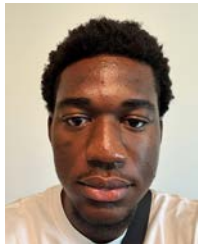
We did ittt! I am so blessed to be sitting in this room filled with so much black excellence. I wouldn't have made it here if it weren't for my right hand, my mother, auntie, and grandma. I love you all so much, and I appreciate you welding me into the woman I am today. Thank you to my college sweetheart, Isaiah, for sticking beside me through this journey and the late nights. I love you!



## **ZENI CHIANNE PURGE**

*Kinesiology, BS*

I will like to first thank God for the walk I have taken in each year of college. I will like to thank my mom and my grandma for busting their butts for me to graduate and I will like to thank my family and friends for being with me every step of the way. With the really tough times and really proud moments and of course birthdays God bless all.



## **YVAN KEMSSEU**

*Computer Science, BS*

I came from Cameroon with big dreams and determination. At Cal State LA, I not only earned a degree but also gained unforgettable experiences and friendships that became true brothers and sisters to me. I am grateful for the amazing mentors who guided me and the opportunities that shaped my growth. The support, memories, and lessons I gained here have left a footprint on my life that will last forever.



## **ZA'IR JACKSON**

*Business Administration, BS*

I wouldn't have been able to stand here before you all without the support of my loved ones for their constant support in this hefty journey. Standing here I hold memories that will forever live dear in my essence. They will shape me for who I continue to become. Greatness doesn't end here for me! This is just the last time yall will be this close enough to shake my hand before I'm a billionaire.



## **ZARIA IYANA JACKSON**

*Business Administration, BS*

*Option in Human Resources Management*

*Pan-African Studies*

First, I thank God for carrying me through every season of this journey and for reminding me that my purpose is greater than fear. To my family and friends, thank you for your love and prayers that gave me strength. To my professors and mentors who believed in me, thank you for your guidance, patience, and encouragement. I leave you with this scripture, Proverbs 3:5-6, which has guided me throughout this journey.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the Black Grad 2026 Planning Committee for your dedication, time, and commitment to making this celebration possible.

*Jill Grayson  
Akela Oneal  
Erika Magala  
Donavan Williams  
Zyaire Jones  
James Kahiga  
Za'ir Jackson  
Zaria Jackson  
Brenda Drew  
Kharisma Taylor  
Ashanti Gaither  
Tracey Davis  
Rose Ikechi  
Amani Cruz  
Ayah Zeinelabd  
LaShana P. Bell  
Omokorede Shittu  
Nneoma Ajawara*



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*U-SU Graffix*

*University-Student Union*


*Division of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management*

*Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging*

*Office of the President*

## Special Acknowledgement

*We would like to sincerely thank Vanessa T. Stout for their generous contribution in support of Black Grad 2026. We are truly grateful for your investment in our community.*





# BLACK GRADUATION



UNIVERSITY  
STUDENT UNION

