

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

Rukaiyah Adams, M.A., J.D.



RUKAIYAH ADAMS, M.A., J.D. is the chief investment officer at Meyer Memorial Trust. Her job is to grow and use the endowment in ways that align with the values of Meyer Memorial Trust and ensure its long-term financial strength. Beginning in 2017, her team delivered an annual return, placing Meyer in the top 5% of foundations and endowments — where it remains to this day. At the same time, they increased assets managed by diverse managers by more than three times, to 40% of all assets under management (AUM), and women managers by 10 times, to 25% of AUM. In both performance and diversity, the Meyer endowment is among the best in the world.

Before joining Meyer, Adams ran the \$6.5 billion capital markets fund at The Standard, a publicly-traded company. At The Standard, she oversaw six trading desks that included several bond strategies, preferred equities, derivatives and other risk mitigation strategies.

Adams' work touches people throughout the state. From 2017 to 2020, she chaired the prestigious Oregon Investment

Council, which manages approximately \$100 billion of public pension and other assets for the State of Oregon. During her tenure as chair, the Oregon retirement fund delivered some of the best returns in the country. Adams believes competent and equitable stewardship of investment capital is a form of social justice.

Adams serves on the boards of directors of Albina Vision Trust, Self Enhancement, Inc. Foundation, Oregon Public Broadcasting and Oregon Health and Science University. Her 2016 Ted talk, "A Homegirl's Guide to Being Powerful," about her path to becoming a more thoughtful investor has been viewed over 10,000 times. She is known for connecting the dots between the many ways in which we think about capital and investing and the corresponding impacts on the urban form.

Adams holds a bachelor's degree from Carleton College, a Juris Doctorate from Stanford Law School, and a master's degree in Business Administration from the Stanford Graduate School of Business.

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Brett Bigham, M.S. (2002)



BRETT BIGHAM is a graduate of the Portland State University College of Education and was the 2014 Oregon State Teacher of the Year. Bigham has been awarded the prestigious National Education Association Foundation Educator of Excellence award as well as being named the NEA LGBT Teacher Role Model of the Year.

In 2017, Bigham traveled to Bangladesh to mentor the country's first special education teachers. While there, he completed a book to help people with Autism visit the Bangladesh State Museum. Bigham has written more than 170 "Ability Guidebooks" to help visit cultural landmarks and events. These guidebooks began for his own classroom here in Portland, teaching how to visit Portlandia and ride the tram. There are now books in more than 40 countries and include titles such as "I Am Going to Visit the Parthenon," "I am Going to the Apartheid Museum," and "I Am Going to Hear Big Ben."

Bigham was named a Global Education Innovator by the MUGU Foundation of India for this work and was named an Ambassador by the Finnish education group HundrEd.

As a Leading Educator Ambassador of Equity for the Education Civil Rights Alliance, Bigham is a leading voice on equality issues in American education. During his year of service as Oregon Teacher of the Year, he was told by his

supervisor that if he said he was gay publicly, he would be fired. Following the White House Honoring Ceremony, where the Teacher of the Year from each state was honored by President Obama, Brett spoke up as an openly gay teacher for the rights of LGBTQ youth. He was subsequently fired and his fight to retain his job and his rights to free speech went all the way up to the Supreme Court in the form of an Amicus Brief by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Bigham is the co-editor of the National Network of State Teachers of the Year Social Justice Book List, writes an educational column for the Portland State College of Education and has contributed essays to the books "Humans in the Classroom," "One Teacher in Ten in the New Millennium" and "Gender Diversity and LGBTQ Inclusion in K-12 Schools: A Guide to Supporting Students, Changing Lives." Bigham teaches K-5 special education in Portland, Oregon, and he cannot wait to see you out in the schools.

HONORARY DEGREE RECIPIENT

Ronald D. Herndon



RONALD D. HERNDON a veteran Portland civil rights leader, was born in Coffeyville, Kansas, and moved from East Harlem to Portland in 1968 to attend Reed College. At Reed, he earned a B.A. in history in 1970 where he convinced the college to start a Black Studies program. His thesis was titled “Racism in the Portland Public Schools.”

The same year he graduated, Herndon opened the Black Educational Center Portland which offered educational opportunities for Black children in Portland. There, he served as director from 1970 to 1980. His leadership of that organization led to him becoming co-chair of the Portland chapter of the National Black United Front, which he co-founded in 1978, largely in response to the Portland Public School board's failure to implement recommendations by the Community Coalition for School Integration. Herndon is currently the director of Albina Head Start, he has held that position since 1975, and was the chairman of the National Head Start Association from 1993 to 2013. From 1988 to 2000 he served as the Executive Director of the National Association of Schools of Excellence.

Herndon is in his fifth decade fighting for racial and social justice both locally and nationally. Among his many accomplishments is the time he spent in the 1980s and 1990s battling federal plans to end the Head Start program nationally. Locally, he organized a boycott by 4,000

Black students in 1982 to keep Harriet Tubman Middle School open, led a march in support of Nelson Mandela in 1984, and publicly pressured Nike to open a store in Northeast Portland and commit to hiring from the neighborhood. As part of the deal, Nike underwrote a community-development organization that built or rehabbed more than 200 houses. He is the co-founder of 18 Portland community-based organizations including the Black United Fund, Work Force Center, Low Income Housing and Job Training, and the Community Economic Development Coalition.

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

Kali Thorne Ladd, M.A., KairosPDX Executive Director



KALI THORNE LADD is a social entrepreneur who is a passionate advocate for equity and education transformation with a background that spans from teacher to program manager to policy maker over the last 19 years. After spending four years as education director for former mayor Sam Adams, Ladd pursued establishing and co-founding KairosPDX, a non-profit dedicated to closing opportunity and achievement gaps for historically marginalized children.

In May 2012, Ladd won election to the Portland Community College Board of Directors, Oregon's largest higher education institution. She served for seven years and is immediate past chair. In 2016, Ladd was appointed by Governor Kate Brown to the Early Learning Council of Oregon, where she currently serves. Ladd was appointed to the Oregon Community Foundations, Metro Leadership Council in 2017. Kali was also appointed to the James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation board in January 2019. The Miller foundation enhances the quality of life of Oregonians through the support of classroom education and the performing, visual and literary arts.

In addition to her national work, Ladd has worked overseas in South Africa teaching and supporting the development of two community-based projects: a community library and women-owned bakery. In 2018, Ladd was recognized by the Portland Business Journal as a Women of Influence and in 2017 as 40 under 40.

Ladd resides in Portland with her husband, Billy, and two children. For fun, Ladd enjoys running, reading, writing and cooking. Ladd received her bachelor's degree in elementary education and psychology from Boston College and a master's degree in education policy from Harvard University.

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

George Yoshio Nakata



GEORGE YOSHIO NAKATA was born in Portland before World War II and grew up in the “Japantown” section of northwest Portland. His family leased and operated a small hotel on Northwest Second Avenue and his father owned and operated two fruit/vegetable markets on North Columbia Boulevard. Nakata remembers an overall happy childhood playing alongside his sister, Mary, where the children were shielded from much of the existing anti-Japanese sentiment along the West Coast. Japantown was a comfortable environment for a number of Portland-area Japanese families.

On December 7, 1941, the attack on Pearl Harbor started World War II, and an imposed curfew required people of Japanese descent to remain in their homes between the hours of 8 p.m. and 6 a.m., essentially closing down Japantown at the outset of the war. With the signing of Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, eight-year-old Nakata and his family were imprisoned in the Portland Assembly Center for the summer of 1942. In September of 1942 the Nakata family was transferred to the Minidoka War Relocation Camp, where they spent the duration of the war in the Idaho desert.

The Minidoka Camp held some 9,600 Japanese behind barbed wire fences and guard towers, in uninsulated tar-papered

barracks, stripped of their freedom and constitutional rights. An indelible stretch for those imprisoned Japanese that were given a ‘family number’ and treated as ‘enemy aliens.’

Once the concentration camps closed in 1945, Nakata and his family returned to Portland, where they picked berries and beans for their survival. They regained their footing and Nakata graduated from Lincoln High School and later from Lewis & Clark College, where he earned his degree in business administration with honors in 1957. He served in the U.S. Army, with top-secret clearance at Seventh Army Headquarters in Germany (1954–55) and became a successful international business executive with Japanese companies and with the Port of Portland, where he established Far East offices for the Port.

In recent years, Nakata has worked as an international trade consultant and has become a trusted storyteller, sharing his life experiences of incarceration. He has an ongoing desire to have the American public better understand the racial injustices and the imprisonment of thousands of Japanese during those World War II days. A story of a people, a story which few Americans have heard, understand or even believe happened.