

To Dr. Johnson, the Clark Atlanta University Board of Trustees, faculty, staff, alumni, family, friends and most especially our Salutatorian, Adisha Penn and my fellow scholars:

My name is JaKayla Woolridge and I am the Valedictorian of the 2017 graduating class of Clark Atlanta University.

The Bible teaches us that, “All things work together to the good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose”.

I am a third generation native Atlantan and I am proud to have a connection to this great city; and its rich history in Civil Rights, politics, education, religion, science, the arts and so much more! Thank you to my Mom, my Dad in heaven, my family, my church family, teachers, professors, mentors and all that have poured into my life; and laid the foundation for a lifelong love of learning.

As a 2013 graduate of Carver Early College High School in SE Atlanta, I can only imagine what it was like in 1869 when Clark College was founded and operated out of one room in Leete Hall on Carver’s campus as a training program for teachers. I am grateful to those ancestors, who established black colleges during this time period in the midst of this city’s rise from the ashes of the Civil War. Now, fast forward to 2013, when I attended and graduated from Carver on that very same campus enveloped in the spirit of those ancestors that pioneered Clark College as a beacon...drawing those in their quest for knowledge. Now fast forward again, to today, as I graduate from this beloved institution [now] Clark Atlanta University with a Bachelors of Arts in Early Childhood Education. I am amazed at the Carver-Clark College connection in my life. And I am humbled and honored for the connection linking this University’s rich, historic past to its future.

Some may see today as an end. In a way, it is! But it is only an end to this chapter of our lives. As we leave here today with plans of continuing our studies for advanced degrees or beginning careers, this “commencement” is simply a beginning. We are advancing our connections!

Congratulations to all and best wishes in all that you do! And remember, all things ARE working together for our good!

Thank you.....and Let’s Get It!