

For Immediate Release

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Noted Author Jacqueline Woodson and Longtime Nonprofit Leader Joan Wallace-Benjamin to Speak at 2018 Simmons College Commencement May 18

BOSTON (April 17, 2018) – Simmons College is proud to announce that nationally decorated author Jacqueline Woodson and former President and CEO of the Home for Little Wanderers and the Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts Joan Wallace-Benjamin will serve as keynote speakers during its 113th Commencement ceremonies Friday, May 18 at the Blue Hills Pavilion in Boston.

Woodson is the speaker for the undergraduate ceremony at 9:30 am. Wallace-Benjamin is the speaker for master’s and doctoral students at 2:30 pm.

“We are fortunate to welcome two trailblazing women to address our graduates this year, both of whom have distinguished themselves in their chosen fields,” said Simmons College President Helen Drinan. “Jacqueline Woodson is a prolific author who has become a leading voice for young people struggling with the profound social issues of our time. Joan Wallace-Benjamin has been among Boston’s most effective leaders in the nonprofit sector, bringing hope and opportunity for some of the most vulnerable citizens in the city.”

The college will be live tweeting from the ceremony at @SimmonsCollege #SIMS18.

Woodson is a prolific, dynamic, and decorated author. To date, she has published 33 books ranging in genre from adult novels, children’s picture books, poetry, and young adult fiction. Woodson’s texts often weave in her personal journey growing up in Greenville, South Carolina until age seven and her subsequent move to Brooklyn, New York. She brings keen insight into issues that impact our lives including race, culture, language, and status. She is a four-time Newbery Honor winner, a National Book Award finalist, a two-time Coretta Scott King Award winner, and an NAACP Image Award winner. She is the Library of Congress’s 2018-2019 National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature.

Wallace-Benjamin is a highly respected authority in the field of child and family services. Prior to her retirement this January, for 15 years she led the Home for Little Wanderers as President and CEO, transforming it into a leader in innovative programming for underserved populations. Previously, Wallace-Benjamin served as President and CEO of The Urban League of Eastern Massachusetts, Director of Operations for the Boys and Girls Clubs of Boston, and Deputy Director of ABCD Head Start. Her service to the citizens of Massachusetts also includes her selection as Chief of Staff to Governor Deval Patrick.

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Both Woodson and Wallace-Benjamin will receive honorary degrees from Simmons.

Receiving an honorary degree at the afternoon graduate degree ceremony is the Honorable Leslie E. Harris, Associate Justice, Suffolk Juvenile Court (Ret.). Justice Harris is being honored for his dynamic career and dedication to social justice. Growing up in the south side of Chicago, Harris saw first hand the struggles young people in America face. His professional journey started as a counselor to gang members in Chicago and led to such roles as: a third and fourth grade teacher, college lecturer, social worker, program director for METCO, hearing examiner for a local rent control board, public defender, probation officer, and division chief in a District Attorney's Office. In September 1994, Massachusetts Governor William F. Weld appointed him Associate Justice of the Suffolk Juvenile Court, where he served for two decades and where he was a determined advocate, through the Detention Diversion Advocacy Project, for alternatives to youth incarceration.

Receiving an honorary degree at the morning undergraduate degree ceremony is Frieda Garcia. Ms. Garcia is being honored for being a pioneer in the City of Boston. Her legacy of more than five decades of innovative, staunch, and effective advocacy to provide housing rights for tenants and to bring much needed services to poor and working class people in Boston has cemented her status as one of the most effective change agents in city history. Her career path as founding director of La Alianza Hispana, leader of United South End Settlements, and board chair of key advocacy organizations, reflects the dedication to the causes she cares so deeply about. When the John Hancock Company donated a park to the City of Boston at Clarendon and Stanhope Streets it was named in her honor.

Simmons College (www.simmons.edu) is a nationally recognized private university located in the heart of Boston. Founded in 1899, Simmons is the only undergraduate women's college in Boston, and maintains a history of visionary thinking and a focus on social responsibility. The college offers world-class coeducational graduate programs in nursing and health sciences, including physical therapy and nutrition; education; behavior analysis; library and information science; management; and social work. Follow Simmons on Twitter at [@SimmonsCollege](https://twitter.com/SimmonsCollege) and [@SimmonsNews](https://twitter.com/SimmonsNews).