

# Cornell William Brooks Named 2017 Commencement Speaker

FEBRUARY 27, 2017

NAACP President and CEO Cornell William Brooks will address the class of 2017 at Bennington College's 82nd commencement dinner on Friday, June 2nd, at 7:00 pm on Commons Lawn.



Since assuming the leadership role at the nation's oldest, largest and most widely respected civil rights organization in 2014, Brooks has demonstrated the ways in which activists and advocates play a crucial role in the democratic process. In legislatures, the courts, and the community, Brooks has advanced debates around voter suppression, education reform, racial profiling and police misconduct, and employment opportunities for formerly incarcerated individuals, among many other issues central to the NAACP's civil rights agenda.

"At Bennington, we want our students to come away with the tools, capacities, skills and knowledge to allow them to change the institutions and communities in which they work so that everyone's voices and experiences are accounted for. Cornell Brooks is a person—a force, really—who is doing just that. He's a model of how, if a person has the know-how, the energy, the vision, and the desire to do things differently, they can, quite literally, change the world," said Bennington College President Mariko Silver.

"Now more than ever we need the support of millennials and people who are not afraid of leading today and conquering tomorrow. We know

from experience that movements to change our society have always had young people in the forefront. The generation of today must determine its purpose and in doing so, determine the future of our nation. It is my deepest belief that the students of Bennington College have not only prepared themselves for leadership but have chosen to embrace a path of resistance necessary to change our nation for the better,” said Brooks.

Kat Jagai '17 will be the senior class speaker.

### **About Cornell William Brooks**

Cornell William Brooks is the 18th President and CEO of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). As a civil rights attorney, social justice advocate, fourth generation ordained minister, and coalition builder, Brooks exemplifies the mission of the NAACP to secure political, educational, social and economic equality for all American citizens. Born in El Paso, TX, and raised in Georgetown, SC, he went on to earn a B.A. with honors in political science from Jackson State University, a Master of Divinity from Boston University School of Theology, where he was a Martin Luther King Jr. Scholar; and a J.D. from Yale Law School, where he served as senior editor of the *Yale Law Journal* and member of the *Yale Law and Policy Review*. Prior to his arrival at the NAACP, he headed the Newark-based New Jersey Institute for Social Justice.