Dear Pitt alumni,

When abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass delivered his famous “West India Emancipation” speech August 3, 1857, he declared, “Let me give you a word of the philosophy of reform. The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims have been born of earnest struggle. The conflict has been exciting, agitating, all-absorbing, and for the time being, putting all other tumults to silence. It must do this, or it does nothing. If there is no struggle there is no progress.”

A key date in the struggle for diversity at the University of Pittsburgh is January 15, 1968—the day the Black Action Society (BAS) took a bold stand regarding its goals relative to Black students, faculty, administrators, and studies at the University. Over the subsequent 50 years, the University has progressed greatly in terms of making Pitt more diverse in terms of race, religion, sexual orientation, social class, and nationality. Evidence of this progress is reflected in the most recent class of students, which was the most diverse in the history of the University.

Just as it is important to be mindful that progress often flows from struggle, we should also keep in mind the traditional African concept of Sankofa—the need to look back on one’s history, to interpret it correctly and to use lessons learned to guide the future.

The AAAC, in partnership with the University, will host “Fifty Years: Pride, Progress, and Partnership”, a yearlong celebration of our past, present, and future at Pitt. The celebration will begin with the 2018 Sankofa Homecoming weekend, when we will celebrate the founding of the Black Action Society (BAS) in 1968, as well as the IMPACT Engineering Program (Now EXCEL); the former University Community Education Project (UCEP); Project A, and other programs that proved vital in advancing progress over the past 50 years for African Americans on campus and beyond.

Recognizing the significance of campus activism in the late 60s, Homecoming 2019 will focus on the 1969 Computer Center takeover and other significant events that launched a new era of African American campus and community life at the University of Pittsburgh. In January 2019, we will celebrate with an event to mark the watershed moment of the computer center takeover, which was the catalyst for progressive educational, social, and political changes at Pitt. During Black History Month in 2019, we will celebrate distinguished African American alumni, and in June we will honor fifty years of African American athletes, with a “Slave Ship to Championship” Letter of Distinction honor.
We need your attendance and participation to help make this memorable celebration a success! To honor the 50th Anniversary and to assist in making a lasting impact on the lives of students we ask that you consider contributing to the AAAC 2018 Golden 50 Scholarship Campaign. All money raised will go toward the existing AAAC Endowed Fund held at the University and will be earmarked toward providing financial assistance to our current and future students. It is a vehicle to give back to your community and to ensure a sustainable future for students who remind you of yourself. Follow this link for additional information, or to make your gift.

Please join me and other alums, beginning at Homecoming 2018, as we journey to our past, speak to our present, and build towards our future. A tentative list of our Homecoming events can be found here.

And don’t forget to reserve your hotel today.

Meet me at Homecoming 2018, and Hail to Pitt!

Sincerely,

Vaughn Clagette MD, MBA
(A&S ’89, MED ’93)