

BOWDOIN COLLEGE

Commencement 1993

BYLLYE YVONNE AVERY, born and raised in the deep south, educated at Talladega College and the University of Florida, visiting fellow at the Harvard School of Public Health, Bowdoin honors you today for breaking the silence and giving voice to the experiences of African American Women. For twenty years you have been a health activist, co-founding a birth center and the Gainesville Women's Health Center. You began the National Black Women's Health Project to create a safe space for African American women so that they can, as you have said, "go inside, touch, and breathe fire, say anything, ask anything." Through this organization you developed the first Center for Black Women's Wellness in cooperation with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, produced a documentary film exploring sexuality and reproduction from the perspective of Black mothers and daughters, created the Avoidable Mortality Cancer Project as a joint endeavor with the Morehouse School of Medicine and the National Cancer Institute, and founded the Florida Healthy Mothers/Healthy Babies Coalition for reduction of statewide infant mortality. Two years ago you came to Bowdoin to deliver the Boothby Lecture and your words breathed fire into our community. Last September you launched your Walking for Wellness campaign in the all-Black town of Eatonville, Florida, to promote health and fitness. You have worked with women's groups in South Africa, East Africa, and the Caribbean. For your many accomplishments you have received awards from the MacArthur Foundation, Essence Magazine, the Children's Defense Fund, and the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights. President Edwards, I am honored to present to you Byllye Yvonne Avery for the degree of DOCTOR OF HUMANE LETTERS, honoris causa.