

Franklin Cummings Tech Installation Ceremony, May 13, 2022 [on YouTube](#)

Installation of President and CEO Aisha Francis

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Benjamin Franklin Cummings Institute of Technology is 114 years old with a historical line that goes directly back to Benjamin Franklin himself. The Investiture of a college president establishes a milestone and an institution's history while also marking a new era. Today's investor in Dr. Francis, the first woman and the first person of color to head BFC. It has historical significance. And given the vision Dr. Francis has already put into action. Today's investiture surely also marks a new era for Benjamin Franklin Cummings Institute of Technology. Dr. Francis, will you please come forward? By the authority of the Board of Trustees in the enthusiastic approval of the faculty, staff and students, alumni, and those who have joined us here tonight, I present to you you're keeping the charter of Benjamin Franklin Cummings Institute of Technology. Dr. Francis, I also present to you the medallion that symbolizes the high office you now hold and I invest you with all the rights, privileges and responsibilities of the Office of President.

58:22

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, it is my pleasure to recognize the president of Benjamin Franklin Cummings Institute of Technology, Dr. Aisha Francis.

Dr. Aisha Francis 58:47

Thank you all so much. I have practice you know, being here standing here because those of you who know me know I am really, really, really famous for waterworks. And I was doing so well. Until that's all I was doing so well. But thank you all so much for being here to my parents, mommy, daddy, and my brother, and to my husband, Clayton, my children may see and Christopher Mommy loves you. I'm so grateful to be here and to be standing before you. I deeply appreciate all of those who are watching from afar. So to my family in Cleveland and Nashville, Atlanta, Florida, all of my peeps in California and other places. Hi. Thank you all for sending me love and sunshine when it's been cold here. I've always felt like I've had Wind Beneath My Wings and my friends and family are a huge part of that. So I really I relish the opportunity to be the leader of Benjamin Franklin Cummings Institute of Technology, the 13th. President, I'm so proud to stand before you with that title officially bestowed. And I am very, very proud to lead a group of scholars, faculty and staff who have chosen this institution. Everybody

knows people have a lot of choice these days. So people could be anywhere. And the fact that I get to lead a team of people who are helping to make some of the things that you heard about tonight happen is a privilege and I don't take it lightly. But it does have a certain ring to it to be the precedent.

Dr. Aisha Francis 1:01:01

So under typical circumstances, this installation would have happened months ago, and I would have talked to you all about, you know, what I learned on my 90 day listening tour and dreams and things that I had set forth for the college. But as it stands, we're really 18 months into our strategic planning process, which is is not the process but the plan itself, which is future forward. And you've heard about some of the things that we're most proud of. We totally in total, over the past 18 months have raised \$20 million.

Dr. Aisha Francis 1:01:44

Yes, anchored by the Bill and Joyce gift Cummings gift. Thank you, Bill, for being here. And we're moving to Roxbury folks in case you haven't heard.

Dr. Aisha Francis 1:02:04

And we're not just declaring it. So it's important to declare things but we are actually doing it. Right. So, you know, with thanks for the state and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for an investment of brownfield remediation funds, we have started our demolition, our permitting will be completed by the end of this month, we're moving forward. It's an exciting time. And we've been in the news for good things. And you can chart our progress in print. And I really can't imagine a better way to really tell the story then through the press, which since we were founded, by the most think memorable printmaker, internationally, Benjamin Franklin himself. And so I'm glad that you can chart our shifts over the past year, especially through the press. It's important. As someone who spends a lot of time charting genealogy and looking in newspapers and historical archives for stories of my family, I am so proud to know that the story of this institution from 2020, you know, during my tenure will be a good one. And so since this isn't a traditional installation, I decided to take as my theme reflecting on the past to create a bold future and really answer a question that people asked me mostly privately, which is, why did you take this job? Honestly, people asked me that. And, you know, I usually say why not? I don't usually have time to go into it. But I'm gonna take my time now. Yeah. So these pictures, I hope that I'm queuing a photo are side by side picture of two people. I'm going to talk a bit about today. As as inspiration for why I'm here honestly, one is Benjamin Franklin, the founding father that you've heard about tonight, and the other is my great, great aunt, Georgia over 10 cash buyers, and are you all seeing that picture? Isn't that awesome? So for you all back here, I'll just send it to you later. Okay. But trust me, it's there. So first, Benjamin Franklin, the founding father to whom we owe the existence of this institution, and I want to take some time to actually just uncover a bit for all of us what exactly he was investing in, because he was a forward thinker. You know, Pastor Gloria talked about cathedral builder, he had a long term 200 year vision. And so I'm just going to read from the cost of sale of his will this is 1790 A bit. I have considered that among all artisans good apprentices are most likely to make good citizens. And having myself been bred to a manual art of printmaking in my native town, and afterwards assist it to set up my

business and Philadelphia by kind of loans of money from two friends there, which was the foundation of my fortune. And because I wish to be useful even after my death, if possible, in forming and advancing other young men that may be serviceable to their country. To this end, I give 1000 pounds to the inhabitants of the town of Boston, for the uses intents and purposes, here in after mentioned and declared. That's what it says. And so what were those purposes now, I'm not going to read all of that, but I'm going to tell you what they were. The purposes were initially a revolving loan fund. Money could be lent out at the interest rate of 5%, in the amounts of 15 to 60 pounds per person, but to whom and for what, to married men, and parenthesis white, just being a real under the age of 25, who had already served an apprenticeship in Boston and had completed their time of indenture who could get to Bostonians to write letters of recommendation to vouch for their character, and who promised that they intent that they were going to use the money for was to build their business shakin for entrepreneurship. Why for self sufficiency, right? That was and what was his goal? What was his purpose, altruism, purely altruism, he literally wrote that he hoped 200 years later, that his investment would have been found to have good effect.

Dr. Aisha Francis 1:07:06

I believe we have been found to have good effect.

Dr. Aisha Francis 1:07:17

We have so much to crow, about 57% of our students are first generation college students. Most of our students are people who never saw themselves necessarily in college, we are a place of opportunity. And even though the people who attended Benjamin Franklin Cummings Institute of Technology, by and large, don't look like the type of person that Benjamin Franklin envisioned, benefiting from those funds. I think that we and what we are doing is the perfect the perfect expectation of what he intended. And that's why we will continue to make hard choices, and really deepen our commitment to eliminating the gaps in performance based on household income, gender, or ethnicity, these arbitrary things, right and ways that we categorize ourselves. And what I appreciate most about the legacy of Benjamin Franklin is the way in which it inspires people to come to us to think about their own altruism. And now to my aunt, Georgia, another animating historic figure, although you don't know anything about her, you will a second source of inspiration for me. So some of you all also know that I love genealogy. I'm from Nashville on my mom's side, and from the Dominican Republic on Daddy side. And the thing is, I was raised in this multi generational household and community. And I knew my great grandmother. And I would listen to her and was never shooed away. And I took all of those things that I learned and heard, and sometimes it write down on index cards as a teenager. And I've been with the New England Genealogical Society and my own just, you know, research from graduate school diving into these figures of my past. And recently, the picture that you see here of Georgia is actually one that I've inherited. So it was my great grandmother's picture. And she just said, you know, this isn't Georgia and her husband, Thomas, and on Georgia was a teacher. That's all she shared. So I knew those things, and had been looking her up and looking her up. And then I found that in 1914, she was a principal of a little school in Nashville called The Rock Hill School, segregated school. Wonderful, lovely, great story, kept looking, kept looking, and then I saw a little clip of it. actually a someone else's death certificate. And it said that she was a

superintendent, but didn't say of what, like, oh, superintendent, I want to know, you know, she was leading things, what was she doing. And then very recently as and last Friday, seven days ago, I received this file that verified that she wasn't just a superintendent of something. She was actually her title is the superintendent of industrial education for what was then called the Negro school division of Davidson County Schools. So let me just break this down. She ran voc tech education for the entire county.

Dr. Aisha Francis 1:11:08

And she held that role from 1936 to 1943. Depression times, tough times. She oversaw 37 schools 35 schools, and two high schools and by my Nashvillians you know, those high schools, Pearl and Hanes all my family went to pearl in Haines. And the next slide you see is an example of a weekly report that she had to submit to what would then have been, you know, a Jeff Riley type. Seriously, every week. And these reports, detail her life. It's like a journal, but it was for work. She worked seven days a week. I've only made it through year one. I've only made it through 1936. So, you know, in my copious time last week, I couldn't get through the other like 200 pages. But what I've learned just from that is that she was remarkable. Her weekly reports covered four areas. The schools visited, work tasks emphasized among the teachers under her supervision. The meetings held and attended, and funds raised. Cannot make this up. Every week, she reported on these things. It sounds like a board agenda meeting, you know, for the for the board meetings that I'm running now. And I am not an advocate of workaholism. But you know, sometimes people Kevin, like you make me tired just looking at you. And I don't mean to work in that way doesn't feel like work, right? It just feels like the things that you need to do. And I'm looking at her daily catalog, like how work like her. So she really didn't take much time off. She loved her Sunday activities, even most of the time it would say at church period, and then visiting. So she would spend her Sundays visiting the bereaved and the ill teachers or the students in her communities who have fallen on hard times. She criss crossed the county and the state actually she attended professional development conferences at Tennessee State University in Tuskegee, and places in Clarksville. Amari, that Clarksville is for you. But it's really true. This stuff is in her in her reports and she stated that her favorite subjects were sewing for the girls and woodworking for the boys. These regular reports have sections detailing her fundraising prowess. What was she raising money for? For school buildings. For book funds for renovations, what types of renovations electrification and plumbing because the schools needed it. The funds raised where did they come from? They came from the individuals in the community. Otter Creek, Lake Providence, I'm saying this more for the people on the other side of that live stream. Good Goodlettsville places that we know today if you're from Nashville and are still there. So The people in those communities, the black people in those communities who were attending the segregated schools. She raised money from nationally known philanthropists like Julius Rosenwald. And she raised money from the state and from the federal government, because the WPA was in the midst of a once in a lifetime investment in the infrastructure of education. And today, we are living in the midst of a once in a lifetime investment in the infrastructure of our nation and in the infrastructure of education. She managed WPA funds. She managed the distribution of those funds across the 37 schools that she oversaw, just like we are actively managing ARPA and her funds today, in the wake of COVID Relief legislation. I'm just

so moved by the fact that my life is very much like Georgia. Georgia was born in 1917, might have been 1914.

Dr. Aisha Francis 1:16:11

And now no 1914 is when she was the principal excuse me, oh, I want to get this right. And George was born in 19, in 1872 1872, to her parents, Hiram and Evelyn, who were enslaved on a plantation that's called Travelers Rest is still there. In Nashville, it's maintained actively as a historic site and a place where you can have a wedding, if you would like. She was their sixth child, the third born after emancipation. And Hiram is considered the patriarch of our family. But this really isn't high rum story, I just wanted to at least mention their names. This is really about the connection between history and life and what happens when you're living out your purpose, because I did not know these things about her until seven days ago. The last thing I'll just tell you in terms of parallels about on Georgia is that she had these external affairs goals that she would read write down. And among them were to establish community partnerships with the YMCA in the Red Cross, and to set up PTAs at all 37 supper schools with the what we now call KPIs of making sure that there were at least 10 families 10 active families in each school. So much of what she did is what I'm doing today. She and the teachers in her charge, maintain the clothing closet, no, no Jackie and Sally and the student affairs folks a clothing closet for shoes, and clothes, because the fact that people that students didn't have that was contributing to high absenteeism. And where did most of that money come from? It mostly came from the teachers themselves. So I'm saying all that to say that I was so moved by the parallels. And then the more I thought about it, the more I also became frustrated. Why is it that 86 years later? I feel like I could have written her reports. Why is it that I'm running a minority serving institution in Georgia was navigating segregated schools. And so much of what she shared is similar. It's too close to home really. So she was talking about Davidson County, some areas rural, some urban, and I'm talking about Greater Boston, she was talking about 1936 And we're working in 2022. We have work to do. So back to the beginning of why am I here and why did I take this job I'm here because I have a vested interest in helping to dismantle systemic inequities.

Dr. Aisha Francis 1:19:44

I'm here because reading these reports from 1936 should not sound like my board meetings from 20 to 2022. But they do and yet I do have optimism that we can change that reality, it's incumbent upon us to do so. And we need to ensure that the Benjamin Franklin Cummings Institute of tomorrow lives up to the ideals that Benjamin Franklin himself imagined to have an even greater effect, and that it's much more equitable than Benjamin Franklin could have ever envisioned. And so, I'm going to spend and have been spending most of my time gathering the resources we need to do that. That's the focus of my tenure, it must be so I believe you understand, why aren't Georgia understood why and that was in 1936. We need all of us working together to really chart the course forward for future forward for the Benjamin Franklin Cummings Institute of Technology. So I draw my inspiration both from Benjamin Franklin and from my family from great, great art in Georgia to the other people who I haven't uncovered yet, but I'm coming for them, I'm going to uncover them. And so I'll just leave you with some leadership lessons that are much closer to the present. From my parents, and my grandparents both sets to know who you are, and who's who are. from Dr. Sheila Smith McCoy, who is

another advisor at Vanderbilt. Pastor Gloria mentioned Cecilia Tishy. But my dissertation advisor was Sheila Smith McCoy, who has become a lifelong friend. And she taught me to never accept the limitations that others placed on you. When I entered graduate school, there were 13 of us in my cohort, and after the first year, we were down to 11. And then as time went on, you know, eight, and seven, and finally, there were six. And I remember there being this sense, among the faculty that you know, another one was leaving. And sometimes people would talk to me and say, you know, it's okay, if you stop this and get on with your life. So no, but this is my life. This is what I'm called to do. I want to do this, I want to get my PhD and Sheila never did that. Not only did she say you can do this, she said she would help me. And I'm so affirmed by the fact that the faculty and staff and Benjamin Franklin Cummings Institute do that now. They instill in the students who are here, the fact that they can do it, and they will help them. From Norman Stein, who hired me at Boston Medical Center and is responsible for bringing me to Boston in August of 2005, he took a chance on someone who had a newly minted PhD and told him for whatever reason, I didn't want to use it in a traditional way. I learned not to let perfect be the enemy of good. Norman started up the fundraising effort at BMC from I don't know 500k to however many millions they raised before he retired. And I try to recall this, I really do when I have that last urge to tweak something else. Jackie, wherever you are, was telling me today this afternoon, I hope you're not making too many more changes to the text. I really do think about that. From Sandy Sadaqa and Ariadne Vasana was at the JFK Library and Foundation I learned the power of ruthless recognition. And it's important to know that we choose to go to the moon. This one is from John F. Kennedy himself, not because it's easy, but because it is hard. We are living in a moment right now for this institution. We have this moonshot moment. We have a moonshot moment, we're gonna take it. We want squandering our move from the south into Roxbury is our moonshot opportunity.

Dr. Aisha Francis 1:23:53

And from Ed 100, my leadership Sherpa at Harvard Medical School, where I was before I became Chief of Staff here I've learned how to build and nurture coalition's as if my very success depends on it, because it does. And also saw firsthand and I didn't know it would come in handy that it is possible to revise an entire curriculum undergo significant renovations of a very old building and complete a re accreditation process all in the same year. Because he did it and because I had seen it happen, I believed we could do it here too. And we're doing it and so now you know, just how inspired I am by the past to walk into a more emboldened future. And so when you hear me out and about and people are asking, you know, why did I take this job if I say why not you all will know the full why. But we have work to do. We know what the assignment is. And I invite you to join me and leading by example, in learning from the past, and even when, or I should say, especially when times get tough. I know that together we'll find a way or make one.