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Ava DuVernay and Elizabeth Gilbert Urge Women to Reach Outside Their Comfort Zones and Set Priorities at Pennsylvania Conference for Women Over 10,000 Attend Sold-Out Conference at Pennsylvania Convention Center

(October 2, 2019) PHILADELPHIA, PA – Renowned filmmaker and director **Ava DuVernay** told a crowd of over 10,000 people at the Pennsylvania Conference for Women on Wednesday, October 2, that “you are limiting your ability to be great if you think greatness only looks like you.” DuVernay was one of a dynamic and powerful lineup of keynote speakers at the **16th Annual Conference**, one of the nation’s largest women’s conferences, at the **Pennsylvania Convention Center**.

Throughout the two-day event, more than 100 trailblazers shared practical skills and strategies about leadership, personal finance, work-life balance and communication. Headlined by award winning writer, director, and producer, **Ava DuVernay**, New York Times best-selling author, **Elizabeth Gilbert**, and MacArthur Genius, two-time National Book Award winner, novelist, memorist and essayist, **Jesmyn Ward**, the day empowered and inspired many.

An **Academy Award nominee and Emmy award winner**, DuVernay, spoke about her career, the criminal justice system, being a culture leader, and the importance of reaching beyond your own comfort zones. Ava was featured as one of Fortune Magazine’s 50 Greatest Culture Leaders and Time Magazine’s 100 Most Influential People.

The director often is referred to as one of the most fearless of today’s generation. DuVernay responded, “I am not fearless, but I do fear less than I ever have. Everyday I just fear a little less. That is how I interpret and embrace the word “fearless.”

When asked about the inspiring although uncomfortable subjects some of her work revolves around, DuVernay said, “I found the work I do to be a real entry point for conversation. Also, for really instigating imagination around ways to move forward in a more positive manner. It’s always an honor when something I’ve made sparks that dialogue.”

Best-selling Author, **Elizabeth Gilbert**, one of the most-viewed Ted speakers of all time, addressed the importance of prioritizing a small circle of sacred people and things.

“The reality of priorities is that you cannot have very many of them. There's a couple things that you can care about, there's a couple people that you can care about. And if you extend past that, you will break and you will actually be affected, you will actually be unable to do the stuff that matters to you.”

She urged attendees to use three important words to cut through the things in their lives that are not priorities, such as a jam-packed email in-box. “The three most powerful words that a woman can have in her arsenal - I don't care,” she said. “Women are taught that they are supposed to care about everything and everybody and it is a lie.

The nonpartisan, nonprofit conference is part of the largest network of women's conferences in the country, attracting an estimated 50,000 women a year in Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Texas and California. In recent years, it has become one of the nation's top forums for women focused on professional and personal development. The Pennsylvania Conference for Women main day, along with the Workplace Summit the day before and those who purchased tickets to watch the speakers on a Livestream, had a combined attendance of 12,000 people.

“My years in college taught me that success is not the result of making one good choice. Real success requires step after step after step. It requires lifelong education and hunger and patience,” said **Jesmyn Ward**, a MacArthur Genius and two-time National Book Award winner. “Persist, work hard, face rejection.”

The sold-out event's incredible lineup of speakers also included James Clear, New York Times best-selling author of Atomic Habits; Celeste Headlee, communication and human nature expert; **Danielle Weisberg and Carly Zakin**, co-founders and co-CEOs of **theSkimm**, and more. The nonpartisan, nonprofit conference is part of the largest network of women's conferences in the country.

“It is an honor to support this dynamic community of women through this annual conference and all our year-round resources.” said **Leslie Stiles**, President of the Pennsylvania Conference for Women Board. “It's incredibly rewarding to know this event continues to be Pennsylvania's elite women's conference.”

Weisberg, of theSkimm, urged attendees to register to vote and to get to the polls on election day. Although theSkimm is nonpartisan, she said the company persuaded 110,000 women to register to vote in 2016 and 220,000 people to show up at the polls in 2018.

"Our job is not to tell you who to vote for but it is to tell you that you have to vote," Weisberg said. "We are very committed to the idea of being informed, not in a passive way, but doing something with that information. To us, making sure that you show up to vote is a huge way to state that you are someone that's informed and you are someone that's committed to understanding the world around you."

The Pennsylvania Conference for Women is presented by [WSFS Bank](#); and generously sponsored by [Bristol-Myers Squibb](#); [Qurate Retail Group](#); [Target](#); [Cisco](#); [Mastercard](#); [Comcast NBCUniversal](#); [DuPont](#); [GlaxoSmithKline](#); [Independence Blue Cross](#); [Johnson & Johnson](#); [PECO](#); [Prudential](#); [Accenture](#), [AstraZeneca](#); [Drexel University LeBow College of Business](#); [Macquarie Investment Management](#); [Merck & Co.](#), [Penn Medicine](#); [Penn Mutual](#); [Saint Joseph's University](#); [State Street Corporation](#); [Villanova School of Business](#); [Fine Wine & Good Spirits](#); [FMC Corporation](#); [Pepper Hamilton LLP](#); [Philadelphia Foundation](#); [PNC](#); and [Shriners Hospital for Children](#); [United Airlines](#); [Wells Fargo](#); and media partners [6abc WPVI](#); [iHeartMedia](#) and [The Philadelphia Inquirer](#).

To learn more about the Pennsylvania Conference for Women, visit our website at www.paconferenceforwomen.org. Photos of the event are available from [Getty Images](#). Conference b-roll is available in the electronic [press kit](#).

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