



## **Viola Davis Urges Women to “Have Each Other’s Backs” at Virtual Pennsylvania Conference for Women**

*Davis, Tara Westover, and Iyanla Vanzant join power-packed lineup of speakers delivering messages of healing and renewal*

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**PHILADELPHIA (November 13, 2020)** – A week after a divisive election in the throes of a national reckoning on racial injustice, venerated actress Viola Davis called upon women participating in the virtual Pennsylvania Conference for Women to “have each other’s backs because if we don’t move forward together, we don’t move forward.”

Urging women to summon their own strength and that of earlier generations, Davis called this a time to create a world in which all girls and women can thrive. “We have to own our past, and we have to own our present, and we have to imagine our future,” she said. “We now have to become the change that we want to see in the world.”

Davis, who is known for her groundbreaking roles and highly personal advocacy on behalf of underserved communities, added that “we have now woken up to a world where it’s almost a beautiful blank canvas, that we can write our own story and create a world that is great for our past generations, our daughters, our nieces.”

More than 10,000 people participated in the [17<sup>th</sup> annual Conference](#), which in prior years has drawn thousands of attendees to the Pennsylvania Convention Center.

In addition to Davis, this year's event also featured keynote speakers Tara Westover, historian and best-selling author of *Educated*, and Iyanla Vanzant, Emmy Award-winning life coach and author.

Westover addressed the fallout of a contentious national election that has laid bare deep divisions in our nation.

"What we've forgotten is the difference between ignorance and humility," said Westover, who earned a PhD after growing up with parents who did not believe in government institutions including schools. "It's going to have to be something that we think more deliberately about, which is how to develop positive relationships with people that think differently than you so that you can influence them, but also so they can influence you."

Vanzant, a celebrated speaker with the No. 1 reality show on the Oprah Winfrey Network, meanwhile, spoke about using the pause caused by the pandemic as a time for change. She urged women to "embrace the spirit of peaceful change, knowing that all change is preceded by chaos, that things must be torn down before they can be built up."

"We must be willing to be renewed, refreshed, reborn in a new way, in our minds, in our hearts, in our lives," she said.

The Conference came as women are being disproportionately affected by the economic impacts of COVID. The pandemic has resulted in mass layoffs in many industries that typically employ women, such as hospitality and retail. It has increased caregiving responsibilities that often fall upon women and has had a devastating impact on women-owned small businesses. Meanwhile [government data](#) shows that more than 600,000 women left the workforce in September alone, while less than 80,000 men left the workforce in the same time period.

The nonpartisan, nonprofit Pennsylvania Conference for Women – part of the [nation's largest network of women's conferences](#) – featured unique offerings to help women

during these challenging times. The event included sessions on mental health and finances, as well as interactive features for networking, women-owned businesses and resume coaching.

“It is remarkable that 10,000 people, most of them women, have come together for this Conference, and it truly shows the need we have right now for connection and inspiration,” said Pennsylvania Conference for Women Board President Leslie Stiles. “This Conference is about helping women move forward to a better tomorrow.”

To support women-owned businesses, the Pennsylvania Conference for Women has donated \$175,000 in grants to 70 women-owned restaurants from all corners of Pennsylvania. These grants will help pay employees and defray other costs.

“If there ever is a time that women business-owners need a boost, it is now, and we are extremely proud to be able to give back in a meaningful way,” said Laurie Dalton White, Founding Director of the Conferences for Women. “This initiative demonstrates the power of women helping women.”

The Pennsylvania Conference for Women is generously sponsored by [Bristol Myers Squibb](#); [Target](#); [Cisco](#); [Hyundai Motor America](#); [Comcast NBCUniversal](#); [GSK](#); [Independence Blue Cross](#); [Johnson & Johnson](#); [Qurate Retail Group](#); [TD Bank](#); [WSFS Bank](#); [Merck & Co., Inc.](#), [PECO](#); [State Street Corporation](#); [Villanova School of Business](#); [Macquarie Investment Management](#); [Philadelphia Foundation](#); [West Chester University](#); [Women Veterans Rock](#) and media sponsors, [WPVI-TV, 6abc Philadelphia](#); and [iHeartMedia Philadelphia](#).

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