

Jasmine Okafor

This is the 5th or 6th year I've had the honor of giving a speech on behalf of an honor society inductee. But this year is a special one because I've known some of these inductees since they were little boys and girls. The first time I came to know the next inductee was through a class presentation she had to give in, I think it was 2nd grade, at Forest Avenue school. Each student had to pick a famous person and give a presentation while pretending to be that person. The presentations were recorded on a rectangular object called a VHS videocassette tape. The kids wore costumes to pretend to be their subject, and as you'd expect a lot of kids picked athletes and performers.

Jasmine Okafor decided to pick a performing artist, the country recording artist Shania Twain and her project was the best one by a long shot. I developed a theory then that when God made this little girl, he gave her an extra portion of courage, two extra portions of heart, and about 10 extra portions of personality. After having the pleasure of having Jasmine as a student this year, my theory has been fully validated.

So roll the clock ahead 9 years from Jasmine's country music debut and I'm sitting across the table from her and her classmates on the Fed Challenge team. I'm volunteering as a judge for one of the team's practice sessions. The Fed Challenge Team is a team of students who compete against other schools and play the role of monetary policymakers at the Federal Reserve by analyzing current economic conditions and recommending a course for monetary policy. As I listened to Jasmine's cogent arguments on monetary easing, the Fed Funds rate, and the housing recovery, I thought about how far this young woman had come since 2nd grade. Although the Fed Challenge team did not win the competition, Jasmine and her teammates did become the first team from VHS to ever compete in the competition, held at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. So I am sure Jasmine will be back on next year's Fed Challenge Team, and if she can work in some Shania Twain into her monetary policy presentation, she and her fellow hillbilly economists will surely bring home the top prize.

This year, I've had the pleasure of being Jasmine's teacher in AP Computer Science. She dove right into one of the most challenging classes we have to offer with the joy and enthusiasm of a 9-year old working on her biography project. Jasmine's enthusiasm for learning is infectious. She is fearless in class. Sometimes when I offer up a difficult question in class, wait for an answer, but hear only silence or crickets chirping, that silence will quickly be broken by Jasmine's cheerful voice, offering up her answer, which is almost always the correct answer. Jasmine is a selfless team player in class, a collaborative learner, who does as much work helping her classmates learn as she does for herself.

Jasmine, we are very proud of your high achievement in your academic work at VHS, but we are even more proud of the intelligent, kind, and thoughtful young woman you have become.

It is now my pleasure to induct Jasmine Okafor into the National Honor Society.