

Turning Passion into Action

KAANJI IRBY '91 WEARS MANY HATS:
ATTORNEY, FOUNDER, ADVOCATE,
CERTIFIED DEI CONSULTANT, COACH,
PODCASTER, AND BEST OF ALL, MOM

To know **Kaanji Irby '91** is to witness passion translated into action: “I had a meeting with the mayor and police department at 7:00am, now I’m meeting with you, then I’ll finish up work at 6:00pm, and I’ll record a new episode of my podcast at 6:30pm,” she asserts with a glow of determination.

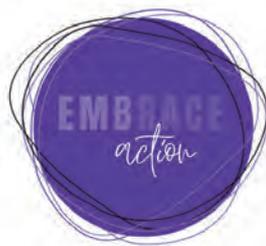
A practicing attorney at a financial institution outside of Dallas, Texas, Kaanji is also the founder and Executive Director of **EMBRACE Action (Empowering Mothers to Battle Racism and Confront inEquality)**, an antiracism advocacy and awareness non-profit organization. If that is not enough, Kaanji recently became a certified Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) consultant; is an acclaimed executive coach; produces a podcast on the intersection of motherhood, culture, and race; and is the mom of a pre-teen son.

“Everything I’ve done has been rooted in my passion and represented who I was at a certain time or phase in my life.” When graduating from Castilleja, Kaanji felt pressure to follow what she saw as the expected path—one that would lead to a high-achieving career. She relays that in addition to that pressure, she was made to feel that she didn’t fit the Castilleja mold. She explains, “It was hard for me because I was a lower income student, because of the color of my skin, and because people didn’t believe I was a Castilleja student.” Once a policeman along Embarcadero Road stopped her, doubting that she was a Castilleja student though she was wearing her uniform. Still, rather than letting biases and expectations define her, Kaanji forged her own path by following what called to her. Her love of teaching Spanish propelled her to join Teach for America after college. Before law school, wanting to explore the world, she became a flight attendant. Her commitment to learn and lead is what has shaped Kaanji’s rich set of experiences. It’s also what allowed her to find her purpose.

As the mother of a Black son on the verge of adolescence, Kaanji understands the urgent need to spread awareness of racial inequality. Her drive to create a safer, more just world, not only for her son but for every child, is what gave rise to her organization essentially overnight. “I woke up and googled ‘how to start a nonprofit organization,’”



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Kaanji's non-profit and podcast

Kaanji laughs. Now, EMBRACE Action is launching a book drive to give local students access to books with diverse characters and themes so that they can see and celebrate themselves in literature.

Kaanji’s determination stands as proof that it’s possible to achieve your purpose whether through your career or elsewhere. “My purpose is to use my voice to work for racial equality, social justice, and social change, which is hard because my paid job is to be an attorney for a financial institution,” she says. “But my soul requires that I do this work for my son, and for every child, because we’re just not the world that we should be.”

Kaanji has recently added mentoring Castilleja alumnae to her long list of pursuits. **Tevah Gevelber '20** interned for Kaanji’s podcast, *Motherhood in Black and White*, and **Michal Goldstein '20** is currently EMBRACE Action’s communications, marketing, and social media intern. “It’s so heartening to see the caliber and quality of young women who are coming behind us,” Kaanji says. Remembering her own evolution, Kaanji sees through her fellow alums that Castilleja is evolving as well. “Castilleja is intentionally and purposely shining a light on social justice and using their platform to be an institution that is putting support behind justice initiatives.” Moving forward, she hopes Castilleja students seek to follow her footsteps in translating passion into action.