

STUDENT COMMENCEMENT SPEECH 2009

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Good Afternoon,

Welcome, to all of the friends and family of the Class of 2009. Your love and support have made it possible for us to reach this point in our lives. Thank-you.

And a special thank-you to my mother, who also graduated from the Africana Studies Department, and encouraged me to strive for excellence and fostered my intellectual curiosity. And to my sister, for her love and support that has enabled me to reach for my dreams.

Gratitude is a simple yet profound gift. And as a representative for the class of 2009, I am honored to give thanks to the faculty and staff of the Africana Studies Department who have helped us attain this goal.

Thank-you for challenging us to be our best, to excel and explore our intellectual pursuits. You have opened our minds to new ways of thinking, to writers of the past and present who have shed light on so many of the situations that impact our community today. We have learned immeasurable lessons in all of our courses, from Pan-Africanism to Black Social and Political Thought and more. The department is truly an asset to the University at Albany and the study of African American and African society. You have offered us the opportunity to learn first-hand about Africa, whether through study abroad in Ghana or participating in the Model African Union, and to discuss our research through symposiums. We began here as students, but are leaving as scholars. We are grateful for your guidance and support.

To the Class of 2009, Congratulations! Today we are receiving the reward for our hard work and perseverance. We came to the University at Albany from all different geographic regions and academic fields, but we have been brought together by our quest, our desire to gain a deeper understanding of our ancestry. The Masters and Baccalaureate degrees are new milestones in our academic careers, representing the many lessons that we have learned, and will always look back on and appreciate. I have had the privilege of getting to know many of you and of your service to your communities, whether by volunteering, tutoring, or mentoring and know that you will continue to give back in whatever field you enter. Whatever your path, I know that you will bring the same tenacity, energy, and intellect to achieving your new goals that you did to Africana Studies.

We have been a class that has seen history unfold before our eyes with the election of the first U.S. president of African descent, President Barack Obama. We now know that feeling that past generations have felt during history-making events. When we are asked about his election, we will be able to say we voted, and we made change happen. I am confident that we will take this spirit and apply it to our communities and to history.

It has been the desire, the drive and the quest "to know thy self" that has pushed academia to change and expand to become more inclusive, acknowledging that more than one worldview exists, and it is equally valid. Just as there are multiple interpretations of history. It was in this spirit that the Africana Studies department was founded, forty years ago. The need of Black students for their own academic discipline was the call, and this department was the response. It has continued to push for change and encourage the study of African and African-American culture, Politics, History and Literature. The quest for self-knowledge has prompted the department to reach out to its' students, the surrounding community, and internationally with humanitarian efforts to turns words into action. As students we are very proud to be a part of this tradition.

Africana Studies is a diverse field, reflective of our society. I urge this class to strive for and seek out diverse environments and be accepting of differences within your communities as well as outside of them. Be

adventurous or as John Steinbeck said be, "peripatetic"--- allow yourself to wonder intellectually and experience new things. Keep your goals in sight and your journey in mind. Maria Mitchell, the early American astronomer said: "We have a hunger of the mind which asks for knowledge of all around us, and the more we gain, the more is our desire; the more we see, the more we are capable of seeing." Always remember that the person sitting next to you is more than a former classmate they are now your colleagues and your best resources as go out into the world.

I leave you with the words of the legendary civil rights leader and U.S. Representative John Lewis: "As graduates of this great institution, the world knows you are smart and talented. The world expects much of you. You have the power to lead; the power to change the social, economic and political structures around you. You have the power to lead a revolution of values and ideas taking place not just in America but around the globe. If you use that power, if you continue to pursue a standard of excellence in your daily lives, then a new and better world---a Beloved Community---is yours to build. So I say to You---Now is your turn to walk in the wind. Let the Spirit of History be your guide."

So again Congratulations! Class of 2009!