Welcome,

I would first like to take this time to acknowledge my parents. It is because of your words of wisdom that I have made it to this pivotal moment in my life, and I thank you for always being there for me. To my sister, all my family and friends sitting out in the audience, for my loved ones who could not make it, thank you and I love you all very much.

On behalf of the graduating class, I would like to thank all of our parents/guardians. It was because of your love and prayers that we are here today.

To the Africana Studies Department, thank you for those precious moments that you’ve dedicated making sure our learning experience was one that will prepare us for whatever career path we may choose. It is with your help that we have grown to be intellectual. We have a clearer understanding about the world we live in, who we are, where we come from, and as a result we know the power that lies within us.

To the class of 2008, I am deeply honored to be on this stage representing you today. We have completed a journey, and will soon begin on a new path. We’ve beaten the odds, rejected the status quo, and surpassed the world’s expectations. We should be proud. We have accomplished much. Through it all, staying up late hours, writing papers, or studying for an exam, we are receiving a degree that lets us know that we are ready to achieve higher heights. Congratulations! We did it! So give yourselves a hand.

In the campaign race to become the next president of the United States of America, candidates have advocated change, which has been a major watchword for each candidate. Well, as many of us know, the quest for change in the African American community is not a new concept. People of African descent have been fighting for change for many years. In fact, it was the demand for change from faculty and students here at SUNY Albany that brought into existence the Africana Studies Department in the 1960s. This quest for a new form of thought in the history of this department is still prevalent today. Through courses such as The Psychology of the Black Experience, we as students engaged in the necessity to critique society’s inputs in an effort to preserve our being-ness. We have for the first time in our academic careers been taught ideas of our nation’s intellectual perspective from an African orientation.

In understanding this, we cannot help but have love and respect for ourselves and for one another. Love is an action word, and we as students have shown this love through community outreach programs such as Save Africa From Aids, mentoring and tutoring economically disadvantaged students, and many other programs where students have spent many hours making sure what was learned in the class room was applied to make this world a better place.
Malcolm X once said, "I for one believe that if you give people a thorough understanding of what confronts them and the basic causes that produce it, they'll create their own program, and when the people create a program, you get action."

In the 1960s the students and faculty here at SUNY Albany did just this. They understood that there was a system in place that was intellectually denying them an opportunity to learn truth and knowledge of their own history. They understood the detrimental impact this could have on the African American community, and so they fought this system and won, creating the Department of Africana Studies. As a result, we are here today. I ask that you, class of 2008, continue to be aware of issues that confront you and your community, use yourself as a human resource to get action. Action is what led to the desegregation of lunch counters in Greensboro, North Carolina; action is what has led to voting rights for African Americans in Salem, Alabama. It is because of action that people of African descent were able to come up out of slavery, master the art of a European centered curriculum, and eventually create their own program. There is power in action.

The degree that we will receive today is a symbol of change, a change of thought, a change of action that will lead to a change in results. By choosing Africana Studies as a major we have made an empowering choice: a choice to see the world through different lens. Lens where we are able to accept, love our African-ness, take pride in who we are and know because we are children of God we are more than conquerors. I know that this program has prepared us with the essential skills necessary to be successful in the work force, but most importantly to be vessels to change our world and empower others.

I want to leave you with a quote by Tom Brokaw that I feel best summarizes our degree that we will receive today. “You are educated. Your certification is in your degree. You may think of it as the ticket to the good life. Let me ask you to think of an alternative. Think of it as your ticket to change the world.”

Once again, congratulations, class of 2008, and God bless.