Good evening. First I must give all honor and praise to Jesus Christ who is truly the head of my life. My deep gratitude and love to the two most beautiful and incredible women that I know, my mother and sister who are here with me for their continuous love and support. My mother who singlehandedly raised my sister and me and sacrificed so many of her wants and needs so that we could have not only what we needed, but also what we wanted. Last, but not least I would like to thank the faculty and staff of the Department of Africana Studies at this fine institution for such a wonderful experience, and especially to Dr. Sutherland for the opportunity to speak before you today.

Class of 2011 congratulations! You have made it to the end of your journey. You have accomplished what many did not. Anyone can say that they are going to reach a goal, but those that actually accomplish the goal show true integrity and character. You stayed the course. You finished the race. You endured. Therefore, give yourselves a round of applause.

You can now be considered as members of the Talented Tenth that DuBois so passionately believed in as being the trailblazers that would reach back to elevate the rest of the race. From this day onward you are members of the group of scholars who will propel your generation forward, lifting them to a level of incomparability. You are the shining examples of what accomplishment looks like, especially in a world that believes that our generation is full of people who are not hard working, ambitious, serious or moral. Today alone many have been proven wrong. And because of you, today many are eating their words.

Although in this moment we are extremely proud of ourselves, we must remember to maintain a level of humility. For if we do not, all that we have learned will have been in vain. Why? Because people will merely hear us. We need people to listen. So I say, humility is of the utmost importance. Be proud of what you have accomplished, but understand that people are more willing to learn from you when you are approachable. Sometimes it is easy for people to forget where they came from and who they were before they walked the halls of academia. We should never seek to make others feel inferior.

The faculty of this Department has shown us this with their gracious demeanors. Allowing us to drink until we were quenched from their wells of knowledge, gently shaping our minds, and honestly answering our questions. On a national scale the finest example of brilliance coupled with humility is President Obama. I believe that we can all learn a thing or two from his character. Simply stated, it is imperative that we remember to be balanced scholars, who are confident and powerful yet also humble.
We are now torchbearers and if we are to teach the world of the injustices that have been done to the descendants of the African Diaspora: the Maafa, the horrors of colonialism, Jim Crow, apartheid, the contemporary effects of hundreds of years of enslavement, discrimination, forced assimilation, and the environmental injustices that continue to plague people of color worldwide; then we mustn’t give people any excuse not to listen. We must give them no other choice than to listen!

Now it is left up to you to decide what you will do with what you have achieved and all that you have learned. The world is at your feet. What will you do with it? Will you be selfish with your knowledge or will you be selfless? I charge you to be the latter. With your feet firmly planted in an African centered worldview conquer the world. Prove that the study of African peoples is imperative and just as important as any other field of study; that it is worthy of learning about. That it does cause you to analyze history and the current world from a more critical viewpoint. That it does cause you to delve deep within yourself and question all that you have ever known to be factual in this life. Allowing you to no longer be naive, but wise. Leaving you no other choice than to acknowledge prejudice and discrimination for what they are and the injustice that they always lead to. In other words, you cannot leave this program without being convicted to make a difference.

Make the difference that so many served prison time for, begged for, bled for, and died for. Let not our ancestors’ struggle have been in vain. Take hatred up by its root of ignorance, and kill any chance of it flourishing. Somebody has to do it, why not you? Yes…you. You are capable. You have been equipped with the knowledge. Do not be mistaken, leaders in this day and age are still necessary which means that followers are inevitable. Whether you decide to pursue another degree, launch a business, teach, write literature, travel the world, or perfect your craft to become a respected artist. Whatever it is, do it and do it well. Just remember not to compare your journey to anyone else’s; hear advice but listen to your own heart. Dance to the beat of your own African drum.

And when someone asks you why you are dancing so strangely to such a unique tune, tell them that it is because you embody the ghosts of your ancestors still and they have forbidden you to keep quiet.

Thank you.