

Let me start by first extending a humble appreciation to the graduates, family, Thurgood Marshall Academy administration, faculty, staff, alumni, contributors and friends for giving me this surreal opportunity. When Candice Bobo first asked me to be the guest speaker, I thought she was joking, not because I didn't have any wisdom to impart, but rather I thought my bio would not be long enough to fill a page. But upon further reflection I realized I'm perfect for this. Why? Because I'm young, black, about something, and I graduated from TMA in 2005, as part of the first graduating class. Back when I was in your seat, I thought that I had achieved the biggest feat of my life. Let me tell you--you ain't done nothing yet.

Now I'm going to give you the message of the day, which is about *sankofa*. *Sankofa* is a word from the Adinkra language in Ghana, West Africa which means, to take from your past and use what you have learned to progress in the future. Now in the spirit of *sankofa*, students, will you please stand, turn, and thank all those who have helped you to get where you are today. I am here as an embodiment of this very idea. I have used my past, and what TMA has taught me to excel in college. For example, I graduated from TMA as the salutatorian, but when I went to Morehouse, I did not continue to maintain salutatorian grades. In fact, during my sophomore year I thought it

was a wrap. I came home for Christmas break and told my mother that I didn't want to go back. Now parents, you can imagine how upset my mom was, and she was not the only person pushing me to go back. Ms. Bobo, Mrs. Stewart and the faculty at TMA were on my back too. But my mom was relentless, and the whole time I was thinking, she didn't even go to college, how could she understand what I was going through? And she most likely didn't, but as a mom, she had a responsibility, and now I know that I had one too.

Young people before me – I am going to break it down to you. You must understand what you deserve and what you owe. You only deserve one thing, and that is an opportunity. You are graduating from a school named after Thurgood Marshall who very much believed in that ideal. He spent his professional life fighting for equal opportunities. Today, when those opportunities arise, you are free to do whatever you like, but if you think opportunity is going to keep knocking at your door, you are sadly mistaken. When opportunity knocks, you have to be ready and willing to accept the responsibility. When opportunity doesn't knock, it is your obligation to find opportunity's address, get to the house and kick in the door. Because you owe it to yourselves, your parents, your teachers, and men like Thurgood Marshall. You owe your thanks, progression, desire, confidence, vision, respect, reverence, passion, social and moral values, and patience, just to name a few.

Now when I'm talking about opportunity, I am not talking about the Everest College commercial. You know the one that starts, "Are you just sitting on the couch?" and then advertises all the great courses you could take. Whoever came up with that marketing idea should be rich right now. Of course if I am watching the commercial, I'm mostly likely sitting on the couch. But the thing to remember is that watching the commercial is not the opportunity, but applying and enrolling and studying and graduating...now that is taking opportunity, making it your own and achieving success. Take the opportunities that you get, excel in those, and the possibilities are endless.

The road that many of you all are about to embark on will be anything but easy, and talent alone will not get you everything. Take Kobe Bryant and Lebron James. Kobe is a hard worker and Lebron came out the womb with an NBA body. Kobe has 4 NBA titles; Lebron has none. If you want to be the best, you have to have substance in your game. I'm sure Kobe learned a thing or two from those old Lakers greats to help perfect his game, while Lebron relies on his talent alone. In the last two minutes of the game, Lebron is going to drive to the basket, because he is built for it. Kobe will use whatever move, in whatever situation, to try and will his team to victory. It's like Lebron has one move and Kobe has an array of options. Now, do you want to be the one who

only has one patented move or the one who has multiple avenues to go? Life is like a basketball game--you need options. When times get tough, you need to be able to dribble left and right, shoot lay-ups and three-pointers, play defense and elicit the help of people on your team. If two people were going on an interview for their dream job, who do you think would get the position -- the one who says he works hard or the one who says, I was born with talent? It is the one who has done the hard work who will move forward and succeed in life. I am a college graduate not because of my talent, but because of my hard work. I saw people go home after getting their shot blocked doing the same move over and over. But I developed my game like Kobe. When a 2.00 GPA tried to defend me, I pumped faked and went around him. When my major was outrebounding me, I had to box him out, and when I faced the best defender, Abnormal Psychology, I used every move in my play book which is why I stand before you today with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Morehouse College.

Graduates, I used *sankofa*, I am *sankofa*, and I am bestowing *sankofa* upon you. I was in Atlanta by myself for the most part--if I needed my mom or dad for something, their support could come only via a phone call. I had to use what I already knew and the past that I had experienced, to discern the path best for my future. I choose to give back today by speaking with you all. I have

accepted the responsibility that I owe to my past, and I deserve the opportunity to speak with you. Think back to the last time that someone asked you to envision yourself in 5 years. I bet you answered, but I bet you weren't fully sure either. Do you think that 5 years ago I said, "I just graduated from Morehouse College, I'm going to give the graduation address at TMA and present my research across the country." Yeah right! But in the last 5 years I am glad that I was open to all of the opportunities I was given, I worked hard, and believed in learning from those before me. This is my *sankofa*-- now go get yours.