

2013 Student Graduation Speech

Good morning.

This is one of the happiest days of my life, one that I thought I would never see. I'm going to tell you why and I hope my story not only inspires you but also I hope my wisdom will grant you the motivation to move forward and understand why we need change in our lives.

I was chilling with a group of friends on Market Street in Newark, when my boy Tyrone pulled up in a stolen car, "Do you wanna ride?" he asked. Without thinking, I said "yes" and jumped in the back seat. We started driving around looking to get in trouble. I was watching the mirrors looking to see if anyone was following us. I saw a white car about three cars behind us that looked suspicious so Tyrone stepped on the gas and we took off. We turned the corner of a street going about 80 or 90 mph. There was a car pulling out of a drive way, Tyrone tried to avoid hitting it, but we crashed and flipped two times. I was upside down lying on the roof of the car. I was dizzy, I thought I was dreaming but it was tremendously real. When I opened my eyes, my first thought was "I have to get out of here fast!" I looked in front of me and saw Tyrone climbing out the already broken front window. I climbed over the seats and followed him out onto the pavement. My body felt so broken I thought I was going to die. I quickly cleared my head and started to think: I didn't want to get caught, so I started to run, that's when I heard sirens. I was so scared; I knew I was going to get locked up. The only thing I knew for sure is that jail is not for me.

That night, before I went to sleep, I promised myself I would never fall to peer-pressure again. I started paying more attention in school and I knew I had to make up my mind about what I wanted to do with my life. I decided that I wanted to become an architect and design houses. One day, I want my son or daughter to say, "You see that beautiful house, my daddy built it." Thinking about that scenario is a motivation for change. I hope we can all set goals for our selves and at some point reach them. If you really want something it's possible to achieve.

We need to learn to overcome setbacks. We are not criminals, we made our mistakes and I can believe that we learned our lesson. Society might not agree with me but what needs to be understood is that we are the future. It is up to us what we make of it.

I want my words to reach and motivate you. Most importantly I want you to think about the life you have been living. Think about the changes you can make. We as graduates can inspire the world and the fact that society said we couldn't do it, should only motivate us. The people I grew up with were in gangs and sold drugs. My brothers are in prison because of mistakes they made when they were younger.

I will be the first one out of my brothers to go to college and make something of my life. When I look in the mirror I don't see the same kid I use to; the man I see now is determined and ready to jumpstart his future. I no longer have my old habits or desires; that is something of the past.

I will be successful and for those that doubt me, I'll tell them watch and see. All it takes is effort and determination. I realized that if I did not change there would be no hope for

my future. The most valuable things I've learned is the importance of education. As much as I regret to say this, if I didn't get locked up I don't think I would have ever finished high school. Now, I refuse to be another statistic, I will not fail! I want to say thank you to the storeroom staff and social workers in housing unit 9, for all you have done and all the support. The most important thing, I learned was they never gave up on me and I thank them for that.

The Dr. Benjamin Mays, minister, said it best; "I have only just a minute only 60 seconds in it. Forced upon me cant refuse it, didn't seek it, didn't choose it but it's up to me to use it, I must suffer if I lose it give account if I abuse it just a tiny little minute but eternity is in it so ladies and gentlemen, I ask that you use your minute's wisely." If not for ourselves, then for our families and our future generations. With that I conclude my speech.

Thank you and congratulations to all my fellow graduates.

Best of luck to the Class of 2013!