First and foremost thank you to everyone who sent in a nomination on my behalf. It really is an honor to be the Class Speaker at today’s stole ceremony.

I want to start by stating that Tufts is more than an institution. It is a journey. It has been a journey of self-discovery, for myself and I assume most of my peers today. It has been a long road of finding ourselves. We find ourselves in failing grades, we find ourselves walking up the hill, we find ourselves skipping class to watch our favorite episodes of our favorite programs. We find ourselves in the struggles but we also find ourselves in our achievements. We find ourselves at the end of our capstones and theses, we find ourselves in job offers, we find ourselves on our way to graduate programs and today we find ourselves at the Africana Stole Ceremony only moments away from graduating after 4 years filled with trials and tribulations.

Today we sit among our friends and family and we have to be thankful for each trying moment and for every day that we were able to witness greatness in ourselves. It has taken a long time to get here, but every moment has been worth it.

I want to share with you all today, a quote that has guided me through the past four years, regardless of whether or not I’ve been able to adhere to its advice. “Love. Live Life. Proceed. Progress.” It’s simple enough, but also a little embarrassing considering that it’s a Lil Wayne lyric, and really the only Lil Wayne lyric I’ve ever paid attention to. But for me I think that it’s packed with so much depth in only five words.

Love. Don’t be afraid to love wholeheartedly and passionately. We’re at a fragile stage in our lives and learning to love is an intricate part of it. We are learning to balance love with school work, love for our jobs, love for our families, love for our friends, love for our crushes and significant others. Love is a balance that takes time. We’re still young, and we get hurt. But we love anyways. We shouldn’t be afraid to say the words I love you, but in saying them understand the power they carry. We shouldn’t be afraid to show affection, but in doing so we must understand the consequences of our action. It is the most beautiful gift you can gift to anyone, so give your love genuinely and also accept love genuinely.

Live Life. Don’t be afraid to live life fiercely. There are reports every day of death and all the tragic experiences that accompany this life. Yet, here we are, seated in the company of our loved ones and those who have cheered us on all this time. We have the chance to live beyond our wildest dreams. Don’t ever forget to live and not simply exist. We are more than just bodies of color meeting a quota at Tufts. We are individuals and we matter. The life we choose to live affects others, and so for every chance you have to breathe understand you carry a great responsibility. Live this life for you and for no one else. It gets hard not to live up to other’s expectations of who you should be and who you will be. But live fiercely and adamantly every single second of every single day.

Proceed. Life continues beyond these four years. It’s hard to let go of the time that we have shared, but we have the memories and the Instagram pictures to prove that they happened. We shouldn’t be afraid of the next phase of our lives. Some of us have already accepted job offers,
some of us will continue on to grad school and others of us are waiting. And to those of us waiting, know that it is okay to wait. Just never stop. Always continue moving forward. Beyond this hill is an entire world worth exploring. Explore it and leave your stamp all over it.

And last but not least, Progress. Every single day is an opportunity to do better than your last. We entered Tufts 4 years ago to grow as students. But I know that we have grown into better friends, better siblings, better daughters and sons because of it. Every day you willingly and intentionally repeat your mistakes is another day you deny yourself the capacity to excel, and even more importantly, happiness. As we progress from undergraduates into the real world never forget to be happy. Happiness is the ultimate marker of progression. If you look forward five years from now I hope that you are happier than you are now. I hope that every year you are given to grow and improve is another year that you fill your life with happiness and joy.

So with all these things in mind I leave you with the overall message from this Lil Wayne song, don’t ever get too comfortable. When we get comfortable we become afraid to risk love, to take risks in life. When we get comfortable we no longer give ourselves the opportunity to live up to our fullest potential. And we have the potential for greatness. As black students in the 21st century from the moment we are born we are showered in an onslaught of visual and verbal abuse that tells us that we should not be sitting here; that our presence at this institution is an anomaly. And sometimes we give in to the hype and get comfortable in the nooks and crannies that the world says is ours. But don’t get comfortable in the shadow when you were meant for the spotlight. Let your black skin enjoy the radiance of the sun and shine. You were meant to do so much more than what you have been told you could do. So do it.

I love you all deeply. You are my peers and whether or not we had the opportunity to become friends your existence has mattered. We traveled down this journey called Tufts together. Thank you for being with me in my many ups and my countless downs. Thank you for encouraging me to take risks academically and personally. Thank you for being with me these past four years, and thank you for being here with me tonight. To Katrina, thank you for your dedication to the Africana community. To Denise thank you for being my rock and advisor during some of my lowest moments. You both have contributed to these four years in ways that we will never truly understand. Thank you for dedicating your work and your time to us. Thank you to my family, my mother and my brother Kacey who motivate me in every possible way. Thank you for letting me go so that could grow into the woman you see before you.

And last but not least thank you to my friends, to the Haskellettes, To MJ’s Room Crew, to BackSwag, To the Fit Girls to London, to ENVY, to my girls and even some of you guys. Thank you for being a part of my life. I may not always show it, but I love you and these years would not have been the same without you.

And once again to the Africana Class of 2014, strive for love, for life and for progression. Make your marks anywhere and everywhere that you can. Take up space, and let your voice be heard. Be a presence in this world. Go forth and never forget these four years and all that it has made you. Never forget this community, and remember to keep in touch from time to time. I love you and I hope that when we meet again in the future you are shining brighter than the brightest star and that you are happier than your wildest dreams.