Before I start, I'd like to say thank you to you all for having me here today. Thank you to parents, families, and friends here to support your graduates. A huge thank you to Katrina and Denise for facilitating my visit. Thank you to you students for inviting me. I am shocked and humbled that you thought of me. The stole ceremony, that is to say black graduation, was memorable for me and I hope that you will remember it fondly as well.

But I gotta say-- there's something I've been asking myself since I first received the invitation to speak: where do y'all know me from?? We never overlapped in school. In fact, I graduated from tufts as you all graduated from high school. And I suppose the basic answer to that is because grad school was easy and the economy is awful resulting in me having an awful lot of free time. But the next question is why oh why would I spend that time back here at tufts? Because despite all the nonsense, the work, the microagressions, the outright aggression, there are things about tufts that I cannot forget and that I am hugely grateful for.

Firstly my communities, Africana being the most prominent. In the black community I found comfort and familiarity-- people who weren't phased by my ever changing hair (from fro to braids to press and curl and right back), people who just plain understood why I need that extra three feet of space to dance when it's carnivale or any soca song by destra Garcia came on at a party, and people who know the glory that is jollof rice with a side of fried plantains. I also had my musical community. I had the privilege of performing with the lovely ladies of Essence a cappella, and have continued making music with the newer ladies in the years since. The Tufts Third Day Gospel Choir was the cornerstone of my Tufts experience; I took Gospel Choir class every single semester and that community kept me happy and healthy. After all, it is his will that every need be supplied. My dance and theatre community, SoC. and my colored girls who had considered suicide but have moved to the ends of our own rainbows because we held our heads like they were ruby, sapphire. And of course the community of West Hall 2010 Engineers that as a thoroughly liberal arts major, I had no business being a part of.

Second of the things I cannot forget about Tufts is my creativity which was fostered within many of the groups I just mentioned. My ability to create, arrange, design, and perform was tapped and honed during my time at Tufts. From Ryan Saunders, former Manger of music events who first hired me and taught me how to use Photoshop to Pearl Robinson for whom I had the privilege of designing a logo, Tufts has offered me opportunities to express an achieve in my arts. My creativity has undoubtedly made me a more interesting, and hopefully a better, person. I am truly indebted to those who saw that potential in me.

Bringing me to my final point: the people who cared. There were many people at Tufts who failed me as educators and as advocates. But the people who fought for me, taught me, hired me, and loved me make up for that in a heartbeat. People like Francine Chew who upon finding out I had no internet access for the first 6 months of my freshman year made it her mission to get IT and maintenance in my room within the week. People like Katrina Moore who didn't see my emotionality as a weakness and let me cry on her couch when I failed organic chemistry and then let me cry some more when in the middle of my second attempt, a friend of mine took his life. People like David Coleman whose daughter Aimee turned 10 last week and it has been my
privilege to have watched grown up over the last 8 years. When I have stories like those, the negative memories fall by the wayside. Don't get me wrong I have tons of awful stories if you ever want to hear them, but those are not for today. Today is about celebration. Celebrating you all and your graduation and impending departure from Tufts. So I'd like to give you some advice that will hopefully help you manage the days to come. Both the good and the bad. And the advice I'd like to share before you go ties in to those three reasons I keep coming back.

First: maintain your tufts communities and endeavor to find new ones. Leaving Tufts will leave your communities scattered. The person you used to choreograph with will be on the other side of the country from you or your scandal watching crew will all live in Harlem and you'll be in alone in Brooklyn tired after a long day, way too tired to make that 1 hr trip on the subway. And that's just life. But do your best to maintain those relationships, despite the barriers, get on Skype and dance, and make good use of your smart phones to keep up in other ways. Join the Tufts Black Alumni Association and groups like it on Facebook and LinkedIn. Tufts Black Alumni have June regional get together which are a wonderful opportunity to reconnect with those who are too far for regular visits. And they're a wonderful way to maintain your Link to the Tufts community. You're only a tufts student for a few years, but you're an alum for the rest of your life. We as the black community have a legacy to build at this institution and we can only do that if we stay connected.

But you'll also need to make new connections and join new communities which will be much more difficult outside an institution full of people ready to learn and make new friends. Finding friends at work is an obvious option but you're limiting yourself if you only make friends with the people your boss provides. My advice here is to volunteer, something I know many of you have already dedicated significant portions of your lives to. I encourage you to keep up those activities post-college. You'll have the opportunity to meet new people who care about the same issues you do while improving the neighborhood, perhaps your own neighborhood. Plus if you haven't already experienced it, as one of my mentors (David Coleman) told me and my experiences have since confirmed, you'll find that serving others will encourage and fuel you in a way nothing else will.

My second piece of advice is to maintain that creativity! Do not leave tufts and never sing/dance/act/paint/write/perform ever again! Being a "real" person doesn't mean you have to be "real" boring. Just like you had your major whether it was in biology or American studies, you also had your creative outlets— you stepped in envy or blackout, you danced in soc or the African dance collective, you planned culture shows to share Caribbean and African culture with a school in desperate need, you sang with third day, Essence, s-factor, you acted in yellowman and rent, you wrote in your journal or maybe you wrote for the Huffington Post, who knows. Find a job or an activity that will allow you to continue doing those creative and fun things. This will keep you young even as the real world does it's best to put some stress lines in your forehead by keeping you away from you dream job or forcing you to move back in with your loving parents. A friend from the class of 2010 shared the following story:

Tufts' student fund caller: "so what did you major in while at Tufts?"

Me: "international relations and economics with a minor in Italian"
Student: "cool! What are you doing now?!!"

Me: "teaching kindergarten"

**Awkward silence**

Student: "...cool"

Yes, yes it is cool

And she can be so cool because she's in a job that allows her to use her imagination to make a difference in the lives of other imaginative little people.

Another example from two of my best friends, both engineers, one who spent every moment he was not studying dancing, and the other a young lady who for the most part just studied some more. After graduation the dancing machine continued finding opportunities to dance while working full time in not quite his ideal job. He even had the chance to make dance a second job, teaching hip-hop to kids. The studious sister got an amazing job at a high level firm but felt thoroughly unfulfilled by it, knowing there was something missing from her life. And it was that chance to create something that could make people feel the things that you are feeling in a moment. A way to express yourself that can aid in healing one emotionally, spiritually, and socially. Creativity is how I've survived this great big jobless world, doing everything from dance classes to auditioning for Broadway earlier this year. I even started designing logos, turning my drawing and Photoshop skills into a veritable side hustle. So as another of my mentors (Monica White-Ndounou) told me, know that creativity can give you health, happiness, and so much more. Please, keep creating.

And finally, say thank you. Thank your family, thank your parents. Go on. Take the time to say thank you to the people who've brought you this far.
To the friends who suffered and celebrated with you. The friends you traveled across the world with you. The friends who kept you awake while you were writing that final paper. The friends who supported you at concert after concert and show after show. And the friends that traveled across campus in the Massachusetts winter to have dinner with you at Dewick out of goodness of their hearts and the flexibility of your meal plan.
To the adults and mentors who supported and guided you. Who wrote recommendations due the next day after a desperate email from you at 10 pm the night before. Who bought you a meal on days Bank of America told you nope.
And say thank you to those professors who taught you invaluable knowledge, both through the words in their lectures and through the strength of their presence, knowledge that you will carry and cherish for years to come. With your graduations, these mentors and professors have the potential to become friends and colleagues, so remember this and thank them often.
As much as tufts was a trial it was also a test and as you are sitting here having triumphed there are people to thank, and I implore you to do so. Because you're about to be sent out into the world, but because of the people you met here, you will not have to do it alone.
To conclude, my overarching message here is this: Avail yourself of all of your resources. Your communities, your ability to create and innovate, and the individuals who care about you are all paramount to your success and your happiness in this post-college life. You are all on your way to amazing futures but you must remember the best of who and what you experienced here and let the impression of those people, activities, and events, guide you.