



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 19, 2015
CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

**RUSH TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT BROOKLYN TECHNICAL
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION CEREMONY**

Mayor Bill de Blasio: Thank you so much, Randy. And thank you for your extraordinary leadership of this school, which you have only made greater in your time here. I want to thank two folks who have done so much for this school, who I also consider dear friends – two folks from the Alumni Foundation – Liz Sciabarra and Mike Weiss – thanks for their leadership. And to Borough President Adams – thanks for his powerful voice today in support of all of you.

Graduates, we are so proud of you. Congratulations to each and every one of you.

[Applause]

I am so grateful to have this chance to address you, and for many reasons – perhaps the most important of which is that Dante de Blasio will have to listen to me for the next ten minutes without interrupting.

[Laughter]

I also want to say – I want to thank Dante because he added to my remarks at the last moment by texting me and reminding to say to all our Muslim brothers and sisters here in attendance, Ramadan Mubarak.

[Applause]

Now, graduates, long before Brooklyn Tech, there was your family. Your family stood by you. Your parents, your grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins – they all stood by you, and they helped you in a lot of ways that you saw, and in many ways you did not see.

Now, a moment ago, you were asked to applaud them, and it was pretty anemic, if I may say. So I'm going to give you another chance, after I say the following statement, to actually applaud your family with energy and vigor. So for all the visible and invisible love and support and sacrifice and encouragement, graduates, please give a loud round of applause to your families.

[Applause]

Much better.

Now, I want to speak to my fellow parents. Parents, we are feeling a lot today, aren't we? We have so much we want to say to our children. Well, I want to make it a little simpler for all of us, so we're going to do this as a group for a moment, okay? I want you to repeat after me. I want you to first start with the name of your child. So I'm going to say Dante. Everyone say the name of your child.

[Audience speaks]

All right. I'm now going to ask you to repeat four lines with me. Ready?

You make me proud.

[Audience repeats]

You give me such joy.

[Audience repeats]

You turned out all right.

[Audience repeats]

Your future is bright.

[Audience repeats]

We've said it all, parents.

[Applause]

Now, graduates, so many things we could say in praise of you – your intelligence, your achievements, your energy – but I want to focus very quickly on the fact that you worked very, very hard, because you are Technites. This place demanded so much – long hours of studying, no sleep whatsoever – isn't that a great Brooklyn Tech tradition?

[Laughter]

So you learned the Brooklyn Tech way of working without sleep – of studying, of writing, of thinking all the time.

Graduates, there is no college that you're not already ready for, because you went to Brooklyn Tech.

[Applause]

And this school is not only one of the jewels in the crown of our city school system. It is also – and this is a fact – one of the greatest high schools in the United States of America, and you have a lot to be proud of.

[Applause]

And we want to thank the teachers, we want to thank the staff – everyone – the custodians, the school safety agents – everyone who made Tech what it was for you. Thank them all now.

[Applause]

And for the rest of your lives, you will be able to say you came from the coolest, most diverse, most fascinating place on the planet, called Brooklyn. Let's get a shout out for Brooklyn!

[Applause]

Now, graduates, I imagine many of you had a teacher or several teachers who really awoke you to a great passion, to a great idea, to a dream you had, to something great that you could believe in. These teachers

fundamentally changed your life, and for the better. And graduates, you have helped each other to grow as well in so many ways.

Now, I'm going to tell you a little story. My disclaimer up front – Dante de Blasio will dispute this story. But he's not here to dispute it right now – he's way over there. My wife – my wife Chirlane and I remember a day – it was a few weeks into Dante's sophomore year, he had joined the debate team, and he came from school one day – he walked in the door and he said without any introduction, he simply said, "I have a community." And he meant that by meeting this debate team and the people in it and feeling connected to them, something had changed in his life. He didn't say, "I have new friends." He didn't say, "I met some cool people." He said, "I have a community."

Chirlane and I have been so proud of our son, but we've also been proud of the whole community that he grew up with. We watched them grow together. We watched them get stronger. We watched them go at their debate adversaries. We watched them beat their debate adversaries.

[Applause]

And when we were still living in Park Slope, I had the habit, many days, of driving Dante to school. And before he was on the debate team, we used to just have a nice chat in the morning – it was very amicable. And then he joined the debate team, and suddenly our morning chats turned into these, like, mega blowout debates.

And you can guess who won most of the time – the guy who will be crossing this stage in his flip-flops, that's who.

[Laughter]

Dante's flip-flops have been outed.

So let me speak to you about this moment in life you have reached. And the best way I can speak to you authentically and honestly about the moment in life you have reached is to tell you what I felt at that very same moment – which, for me, was in June of 1979.

And at that moment, I honestly didn't know what to do with so many things in life, but particularly with my hopes and beliefs, my dreams for our society, my hopes for myself. I didn't know what to do with them.

Today, I consider myself a very optimistic person, a very driven person. But it may surprise you to know that when I was at the exact same point you are at, I didn't feel that way at all. And I certainly wasn't sure if I could do something of value – if I could find a way to fight for what was right, and actually have an impact. I didn't know if it was realistic to fight for what was right. I didn't know if it could lead anywhere.

Around the time I was your age, I found myself grappling and debating and trying to figure out the conflicting poles of optimism and pessimism. I was having plenty of other challenges, including in my family life.

And I looked at the world around me, and I saw a lot of injustice. And I saw a lot of suffering – some right where I live, some far away – but so much of it unanswered. And I felt very frustrated. So I wondered what could be done. And I imagine many of you feel this sometimes as well.

And this is a moment where it's hard not to feel that – some unthinkable, unspeakable things happening. We heard the horrible news just two days ago from Charleston, South Carolina. Something that is impossible for our minds to take in – how nine people could be cut down in a house of worship.

It would not be unfair for you to feel cynical or angry or frustrated by some of these realities. And it wouldn't be unfair to ask yourself what I asked myself at that moment in 1979. Are we stuck? Are we stuck in a world of injustice – a world of greed, a world of prejudice? Are these things unmovable?

And I asked myself that question. On graduation day, I asked myself that question – and for years after. And then, finally, something called to me. Something got clearer. And I had an urge to go out and seek change where it was happening – to believe it was there, to be met and engaged. And when I did, I found a real sense of the possible. And I came to understand the role we can and should play as actors in our society.

For me, I found it in the social movements of the 1980s, and most especially in the movement to end decades of United States intervention in Central America. And when I found my sense of the possible, I also found my people. I found my community.

If you think about today – if you think about communities making change today and the power of change today, you think about Black Lives Matter. You think about the power of the Black Lives Matter movement as one example. And that movement stands for so much. And the very words indicate an idea we should not have to assert. It should be self-evident in this society – and yet, it has to be fought for, like every other form of justice.

There's been tragic violence this last year against black men and women in America. It's one of the many challenges we face. And it's an example of the kind of choice each and every one of you ultimately gets to make. Do you resign yourself to a problem – a problem that's been with us for a long time – or do you see it as an opportunity to change things – to be a part of an extraordinary American tradition of resisting those things that don't conform with our values? In other words – in the face of violence and injustice, should we be depressed, or should we engage?

Well, in this last year, hundreds of thousands of people chose to engage. They chose to do something. And their voices, their demands have been heard, and seen, and felt – and are causing real change. They did it peacefully. They did it democratically. And it is working.

And I, over my life's journey, increasingly have come to the conclusion that using the tools of democracy is not only a noble act – it's the only available option. If you reject injustice, silence is not an option. Passivity is not an option. Resignation is not an option.

I'll give you another way of thinking about it – very clearly – from the great French writer Albert Camus. He said this – he said, “The only way to deal with an unfree world is to become so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion.”

Your freedom – your freedom is your ability to act – to be self-empowered. And you have the tools. You have such extraordinary skills. The members of this graduating class bring so much to this society. Your family and your teachers have done so much to help you grow. You're hard working. You are intrepid. You are creative. You are intellectually curious. And you're very, very smart. And you can be the agents of something better.

You're also clear-eyed. You're clear-eyed about the challenges of this world.

And now, use those gifts. Correct that injustice and that inequality. I call upon you. As leaders, I call upon your leadership to make the difference we need.

I praise you for all you've achieved, but I also have a demand for you. Do not stand idly by – because your talents are so great, and change is needed so badly.

Go out in the world, and go with purpose. And when you encounter something that feels wrong, or unjust, do not cower in its face. Use that moment. Use it to reshape society in some way – big or small. As you go forward into the next phase of your life – in this city, or anywhere else in this country or this world – don't ever doubt what a difference you can make.

And I'll conclude with this simple idea from the great anthropologist Margaret Mead. She said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." She's talking about all 1,320 of you.

Thank you. And God bless you all.

###