

Light up the world with your luminous allure

Good afternoon.
How is everyone doing today? Good. Good.
So greetings friends, family, faculty, staff, alumni
and the illustrious Class of 2016,
make some noise!
So my name is Donovan Livingston
and I came to address you in the best way
I know how
but you have to forgive me,
I have to take this moment in
for a little while.
When I spoke in my high school graduation
several years ago,
my high school English teacher threatened
to replace me on
the program or cut my microphone
which she found out
that I was interested in
doing a poem as a part
of my remarks.
So I am eternally grateful
for being able to share
this piece of myself
in my most authentic voice
with you this afternoon.
So spoken word poetry,
it insists on participation,
so if you feel so compelled
snap, clap, throw up your
hands, rejoice, celebrate.
Class of 2016
this is your address
and this is your day.

“Education then, beyond all other devices of human origin,
is a great equalizer of the conditions of men.” - Horace Mann, 1848.

At the time of his remarks I couldn't read - couldn't write.

Any attempt to do so, punishable by death.

For generations we have known of knowledge's infinite power.

Yet somehow, we've never questioned the keeper of the keys -
The guardians of information.

Unfortunately, I've seen more dividing and conquering
In this order of operations - a heinous miscalculation of reality.
For some, the only difference between a classroom and a plantation is time.
How many times must we be made to feel like quotas -
Like tokens in coined phrases? -
'Diversity. Inclusion'
There are days I feel like one, like only -
A lonely blossom in a briar patch of broken promises.
But I've always been a thorn in the side of injustice.

Disruptive. Talkative. A distraction.
With a passion that transcends the confines of my consciousness -
Beyond your curriculum, beyond your standards.
I stand here, a manifestation of love and pain,
with veins pumping revolution.
I am the strange fruit that grew too ripe for the poplar tree.
I am a DREAM Act, Dream Deferred incarnate.
I am a movement - an amalgam of memories America would care to forget.
My past, alone won't allow me to sit still.
So my body, like the mind
cannot be contained.



As educators, rather than raising your voices
over the rustling of our chains,
take them off. Un-cuff us.

Unencumbered by the lumbering weight
of poverty and privilege,
policy and ignorance.

I was in the 7th grade, when Ms. Parker told me,
“Donovan, we can put your excess energy to good use!”
And she introduced me to the sound of my own voice.
She gave me a stage. A platform.
She told me that our stories are ladders
that make it easier for us to touch the stars.
So climb and grab them.

Keep climbing. Grab them.

Spill your emotions in the big dipper and pour out your soul.

Light up the world with your luminous allure.

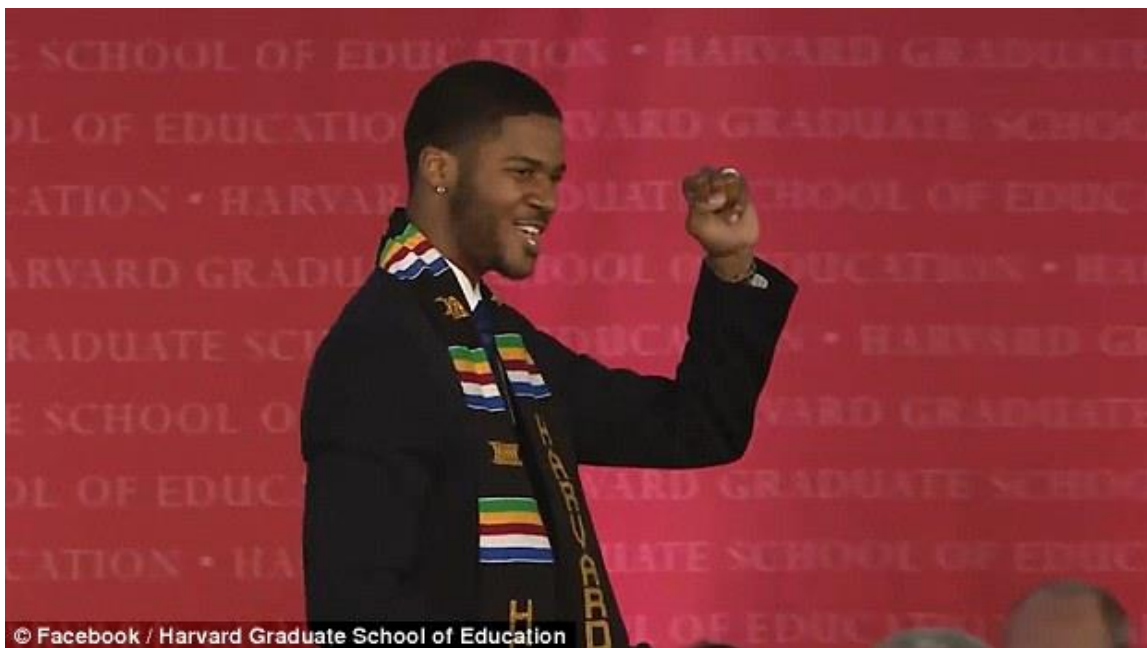
To educate requires Galileo-like patience.

Today, when I look my students in the eyes, all I see are constellations.

If you take the time to connect the dots,

you can plot the true shape of their genius -

Shining in their darkest hour.



I look each of my students in the eyes,
and see the same light that aligned Orion's Belt
and the pyramids of Giza.

I see the same twinkle
that guided Harriet to freedom.

I see them. Beneath their masks and mischief,
Exists an authentic frustration;
An enslavement to your standardized assessments.

At the core, none of us were meant to be common.
We were born to be comets,
darting across space and time -
Leaving our mark as we crash into everything.
A crater is a reminder that something amazing happened here -
An indelible impact that shook up the world.
Are we not astronomers - looking for the next shooting star?
I teach in hopes of turning content, into rocket ships -
tribulations into telescopes,
So a child can see their potential from right where they stand.
An injustice is telling them they are stars
without acknowledging the night that surrounds them.
Injustice is telling them education is the key
while you continue to change the locks.

Education is no equalizer -
Rather, it is the sleep that precedes the American Dream.
So wake up - wake up! Lift your voices
Until you've patched every hole in a child's broken sky.
Wake up every child so they know of their celestial potential.
I've been a Black hole in the classroom for far too long;

Absorbing everything, without allowing my light escape.

But those days are done. I belong among the stars.

And so do you. And so do they.

Together, we can inspire galaxies of greatness

for generations to come.

No, sky is not the limit.

It is only the beginning.

Lift off.

*Ref.: Donovan Livingston delivers his awe-inspiring poem Lift up.docx
May 9, 2019*

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3613934/Donovan-Livingston-s-Harvard-graduation-speech-inspires-America-world-including-Hillary-Clinton-Justin-Timberlake.html>