

Class of 2019, I send you greetings only the way that you have asked of me throughout the school year.

I say to you,

“Good Evening.”...

“Heeeeeey girl!”

“Hi cuzzinnnn!”

The in classic style and a head nod...”What’s good, doh?”

And for my soccer team, “What’s up, Mane!”

I am so blessed to have this opportunity to be your commencement speaker this evening, and I want you to know I didn’t start this moment by focusing on you graduates because you wouldn’t have made it without these people who surround you this evening.

As much as you want this moment to focus just on you, it’s time to understand that rarely in this life do you need to receive all the glory. This is a fantastic moment for you, and we will celebrate it in only the style that CA can because there is nothing like a CA commencement/party, but you will need many of these people for other, more vital moments in your life. Also keep in mind that if this is your most significant moment in life, there is something seriously wrong.

This ain’t the mountaintop children.

But as you continue to climb, and have more significant moments, and many from this network that surrounds you will forever be your fuel. Never forget who charges your soul.

In the past couple years, I have been blessed with so many opportunities and awards, and the first group that I ever shared my happy news with was the Class of 2019. You have been my cheerleaders in this phase of life, and I hope to be yours today and always.

So today, I hope that I can give you some words and advice that you can take with you because I know that you are activists, you are world changers, and you are the light that this world so desperately needs.

Many times, commencement speakers quote great words from presidents, famous individuals, and millionaires. Attendees, your children who have invited me to speak this evening would tell you that doing that would NOT be my style.

The Class of 2019 is expecting truth, honesty, and realness because that is how we have always communicated with one another.

I thought that tonight, I would speak to you and give you advice from the wisest group of women to walk the face of the Earth. My quotes and guidance will come only from the wise words of black mamas.

Now, before you start questioning my actions or think about reaching out to administration saying “All Mamas Matter,” I want you to think of why black mamas deserve to be our focus.

They are the ultimate symbol of persistence in life.

These women started their existence in this country by suffering on cramped slave ships, conquered diseases, and survived the Middle Passage. They lost their native tongues and learned another in secret to share knowledge of how to survive for future generations. Black mama figures were: forced to work for free, watched over and guide their children and the overseers’, warned young ones about the rules and regulations of Jim Crow, kept an eye out for the KKK, took megaphones in protest, marched in dress shoes, refused to give up bus seats, grew to be the highest percentage of graduates in college, became the most educated first lady in our history, and somehow a black mama figure ended up being a regional teacher of the year for the state of Michigan.

The thing is, these women have surrounded and helped ALL of you throughout this whole process. A black mama is your counselor. A CA black mama taught you how to budget your money. Black mamas figures slid you that little bit extra on your plate in the cafeteria. Black mama figures watched you play sports, clapped when you took a bow on stage and have been there to feed you at a friend’s house.

They had graded you, supported you, worked with you, cared for you, cleaned up for you when you left a mess on lunch tables and littered in hallways, and has been EVERYONE IN HERE’S LIFELINE.

They always have an opinion and have gotten on your nerves, but they have found a way. *I want to spend tonight reinforcing some of their*

*messages so that you will be stronger, smarter, and braver as you head into this next phase.*

So that means, I can't talk to you tonight wearing this outfit...

Because, my ancestors, the black mothers of this world (many of them are here tonight) made the best speeches and gave me the best advice...in their housecoat. The housecoat is the real robe of advice and guidance, not a commencement gown.

Class of 2019, I am going to give you seven classic Black Mama phrases to live by in this world. I am sure that many of you didn't pay attention to the real messages behind them, so I am going to break it down for you so that when you use it in life, you are passing on the knowledge and power behind these words.

First is a secure phrase that every mama has said since you were able to walk, talk, and develop your independence.

### **Stop it!**

Now, the phrase itself is not original, but the way black mamas speak it makes it one that you must remember.

The tone...the face...the fear.

Your mama figure said this to you in that style because this is the time where you need to stay the phrase to yourself whenever you find yourself being destructive. She can't continue to do this for you. Boss up and say it to yourself.

That moment when you want to stay in bed instead of going to class...

Stop it!

That moment when you realize you are with the wrong man or woman who is destroying your life and your relationship isn't healthy...

Stop it!

That moment that you want to post that picture of you that is going to ruin your career five years from now...

Stop it!

When you insert that needle, turn up that umpteenth bottle, snort that line, and start to lose all sense of existence.

Stop it!

This phrase is NOT a warning from Black Mama figures. This phrase means you have reached the brink of insanity. It is the last cry out to save you. If you are honest with the choices you have made during this school year, there is something that you need to say “Stop it” to right now. Stop being in denial. Change. Remember that you can stop it and change for the better. If you ignore this phrase, you are only hurting yourself.

**Phrase #2: “I’m not one of yo’ little friends.”**

Know who your friends are. Not your classmates, not your associates, not your co-workers. Not your haters. Create a circle of like-minded people to surround yourself with. You will leave this place and take pictures and eagerly wait for your “friends” to spend the summer with you. Most of those individuals are not your friends. Some of these individuals are actually your biggest haters.

The phrase “I’m not one of yo’ little friends” truly means to not get confused in identifying and classifying who people are in your life.

If someone is not your supporter, distance yourself. If someone is not there to lift you up with things are at their worse, let them go. Your circle will not be as large as the people who surround you at this moment. It will shrink, and soon you will count your friends on one hand if you are lucky. But with the shrinking of your circle, your soul and heart will grow.

Your black mama figure was trying to make you focus on who really has your back-because she always will. If you allow people to disguise themselves as your friends, and they are actually your haters, you will have unnecessary stress and conflict. I can tell you that there are two places that haters can never be in my quest to be great in this world: they will never be in front of me, and a hater will never dwell within me. It took time to figure that out, but my mama, who is in the audience knew this long before I could process what she was saying to me.

**Phrase #3: “Do you have McDonald’s money?”**

The struggle is coming. No one in this space is exempted from the struggle. In times of struggle, you have to make the best choice of what is right for you not only at that moment but down the road. When you were bugging your mother about McDonald's, she was focused on the long run. She knows struggle. Fighting bills, stress, thinking on if it was better to give you instant gratification or lasting substance. You will do the same when you become a caregiver.

In thinking of your McDonald's money, be wise, and avoid the traps of previous generations. Budget your money. Own a house. Invest in something you love. Travel! If you want to understand this world, travel as soon as you can and talk to people in the space that you are a visitor. But always build up your McDonald's money. While thinking about your money, also think of phrase #4:

**“When we get in this store there are two rules: Don't touch nothin' and don't ask for nothin'.”**

Everything isn't for you. You need to know the difference between wants and needs. You might want to spend thousands of dollars on a wedding, but you need a house that you own to pass on to your children. You may want that expensive bag, but you need to put that money in your savings for when disaster hits. You might want that A, but you need to take honor in that C+ in that college class because deep down you know that you were a slacker and others worked harder than you.

Everything...isn't yours... Sometimes blessings have to go to someone else. Sometimes your blessings come in forms you never expected, but you get so caught up on being the next hot topic that you are not focused on what you need in your life.

The thing that I love most from this quote is the reminder of don't ask for something during specific moments. Quit beggin' for handouts! If you have become the person that everyone turn and walks in another direction because you are always begging for a dollar, pay folks back and build up your own wallets.

If you are the person who begs your mama to start calling people to to save you, examine yourself and think about why you don't put the work in to get what you deserve. Stop reaching for everything. Pause, think, and build yourself up instead of relying on others. When things become

too much to handle, then you reach out and touch someone to get something, but don't make it a constant habit.

**Phrase #5: "Fix yo' face before I fix it for you!"**

Usually, this phrase happened when you were crying and starving for pity and attention. Nobody has time to waste in this world constantly giving you attention. And the sad thing is so many of you starve for it. With petty comments on Twitter to side comments that you are not bold enough to say to others faces, it is a plague that is destroying your generation.

When you constantly do negative these things, you are constantly making your face and soul ugly. The world has enough broke down, frowning faces filled with fake tears.

We don't need more of that.

Fix yo' face means to change your attitude. Outside of CA, if you are a poisonous person who won't change your attitude, and there are more dangerous people in the world that will fix it for you other than your mama.

Always remember, change your mindset if you want to be a leader. The change starts with you.

**Phrase #6: "Stop crying before I give you something to cry about!"**

Your mama figure never told you not to cry. She told you to stop crying because there are more serious things that deserve your tears. Plenty is going on in this world that deserves all of our real tears, and there will be plenty of things in this process of life that will move you emotionally.

Again, too many of you think that you should cry all the time. You cry because things don't go your way. You cry because people demand more from you. You cry because you didn't get the grade you wanted and you cry because someone won't put up with your nonsense.

Let me give you some real things to cry about:

Almost 15,000 children are being held in detention centers, and they might never see their parents again.

There are concentration camps (similar to what we learned about in class) in China for people just because they are Muslims.

Some people's last words were: "I can't breathe" and "I don't have a gun. Stop shooting."

A 17-year-old walked into a school on Valentine's Day of 2018, carrying flowers and an idea of a date for his girlfriend and took his last breath in front of his creative writing classroom.

It's been 1861 days without clean water from the tap, and there is still suffering in our community.

Shed tears. Shed them for humanity. Shed them when tragedy hits. Shed them and think about how we, as a society, can make changes for the better.

### **Lastly, Phrase #7: "Because I said so!"**

The most arrogant of black mama phrases. The one that ends all arguments. The one said with such satisfaction that there is no need for rebuttal. This is the phrase that also speaks things into existence. This phrase calls out to the heavens that thy will be done. So, these are my final words, Class of 2019.

You are meant to be great.

You are meant to change the world.

You are meant to challenge the system that suppresses you.

You are meant to create new laws for all people, and make this world a friendlier and more welcoming place.

You are meant to fail and raise right back up.

You are meant to make mistakes and work hard to make things right.

You are meant to speak loud when you need to be listened to, but you are meant to speak just as loud when you apologize.

You are someone who deserves the best, but you must work hard every single moment to achieve what you deserve because the world doubts us because of where we are from.

You are here to break generational curses.

You are to demand change, but don't be afraid to make change for yourself.

You are special.

You are some of the reasons I get up every day and work to be a better person even after you leave CA.

You will shake up the world.

You aren't ready, but your best teacher, LIFE, will make you ready.

You are activists.

You are world changers.

The world needs you in it.

You know how I can say all this and know that it's true?

Because I am forever your black mama figure of CA, and because I SAID SO.

PERIODT!