

To My Fellow Classmates & Citizens:

I feel the need to preface the statements that follow by saying that if you are of a contrary predisposition or an opposing view, then by all means, I encourage you to approach for conversation so that we can learn from each other. That being said, under the present circumstances and the conditions of our existence, we find ourselves at a liminal stage in our lives. And it is at this climacteric period that I ask you the now bromidic, yet elusive, question of who are you? Don't worry, I am also asking myself that very same question. It is not enough to state our names, the flags we carry, the heritage we identify with, or the cultural backdrop that shapes our kinship. These are all variables in a non-optimal equation that is designed to serve as a guide. I have come to the conclusion that we are the sum of our experiences and we are parts of those that we have met in our lives. We are often projections and extensions of — not our own personal attitudes — but of those around us and the times that we live in. The most remarkable characters in history, however, are those that dare not to cling to old ideas. The most remarkable characters in history are those that escape from any external way of thinking that detracts or belies personal character; your own convictions, attitudes, and beliefs are what contribute to the individual that others see in you. And in this ostensibly democratic nation that we value for one reason or another, a nation that allows for free communication, free expression, free assembly, and free interplay of ideas; we are obliged to represent ourselves and whatever ideas or values that we hold dear. This is part of our moral duty and our right as citizens.

There are many people across the world that do not enjoy this privilege and this freedom that allows for self-creation. Believe me when I say this, because it is not an arbitrary belief driven by public opinion. I was born and raised in a country where various forms of oppression dominate the public sphere. I was born and raised in a country where the democratic spirit was a legend that existed in a land far, far away.

In the conditions under which we are living, as classmates, colleagues, brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, fathers, and mothers; we have to be cognizant of the fact that we are fundamentally tied by this democratic spirit. You can call it an abstraction or an ideal that exists only in the history records, if you may. Yet, it is part of our identity. This spirit that fosters our faith for a better world is an identifier that makes this country unique. I cannot hope to conceal that we are in the midst of a crisis that is now becoming clearer with each passing day. Our nation is at war, against the present enemies of democracy and the democratic spirit. Our friends are badly weakened, our homes have been destroyed, our schools are failing, and not to mention, *people* are dying. These are signs of a crisis and a failure on our part. These are signs that can be measured through various statistical means. But, what cannot be measured so easily is the unfathomable and profound impact of injustice that is spreading across our land.

There is a Nigerian proverb that says, “In the moment of crisis, the wise build bridges and the foolish build dams.” In this winter of hardship, let us remember that to build a better future we have to have a willingness to communicate and extend our voices across racial, socio-economic, and political differences. For I am firmly assured that everyone has something to contribute to the conversation and the experiences that will develop the possibilities of human nature. We are greater than all our differences. We are resourceful enough to reach beyond the differences of birth or wealth. And we all have the intelligent capacity to see beyond the veil of society and to see our brothers and sisters, who struggle for a voice in the public sphere.

In every corner we look, there is work to be done. Despite this fact, we have to have faith in our capacity to meet our challenges, because they are not new. This faith can be acquired from our surroundings and the democratic spirit that lies in the core of our shared values. This faith can be acquired from our ability to discuss, conference, and consult in a sincere manner. For no one single experience is the same as another. And no one single experience is greater than another. Thus, your experiences matter and your voices *have* to be heard. To not speak up for yourself (no matter where you stand) and to echo the sentiments of another voice is to commit treason against the democratic faith in human equality. To commit to an idea that is not based on your experiences and your understanding is to misrepresent your own intellectual abilities. That being said, we have to be mindful of not remaining in the shadows. Do not be indifferent. Georg Lichtenberg discerningly stated, “Man is always partial and is quite right to be. Even impartiality is partial.” Therefore, stand for something and hold firm. I don’t care what you stand for but be ready to communicate your reasoning. And be open to new ideas and experiences that may or may not transform your thinking; for wisdom is like fire and people usually take it from others.

Sincerely, from one loving soul to another.