

JUAN M

BU CLASS 2006

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, and thank you for coming out this morning to support the 2006 graduating class. I would like to thank the professors, teachers, education department, Boston University's administration, and my colleagues for making this year's graduation possible. Futhermore, I want to give thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ. He gave me the strength to overcome the struggles in achieving this degree, and the ability to give this speech in public. God knows I fear speaking in public. Before I begin my speech, I want to mention I almost did not come to the ceremony due to personal problems. However, after carefully thinking it through, I have come to understand that character is both developed and revealed by tests, and all of life is a test. With that said, I would like to dedicate this speech to my mother who could not be here today.

VALEDICTORIAN SPEECH

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"As a field, however fertile, cannot be fruitful without cultivation, so it is with a mind without learning". These indelible words from the famous Roman orator Cicero strike me as specifically relevant to our current predicament. Much like the uncultivated field, many of us began this journey with fertile, but unfruitful minds. Before my incarceration, I understood the importance of education and therefore attended a 2 year college searching for success and enlightenment. However, my social setting and lifestyle led me to decisions that prevented me from taking full advantage of this opportunity. As Noel Coward once said, "I over-educated myself in all the things I shouldn't have known at all", and eventually these things landed me in prison.

Coming to prison leaves a lasting impression on one. The negative experience of freedom lost, coupled with feelings of hopelessness, made me feel I would never succeed in life. I labeled myself a failure, but that changed upon entering the Boston University program. I received an opportunity to further my education, but more importantly, a chance to discover myself. My negative experiences and thoughts of prison were transformed into positive experiences of enlightenment - experiences where new-found freedom and hope gave me feelings of success while seeking self-fulfillment. I now realize the importance education will play in my rehabilitation and personal growth. The

Boston University program - more so the professors - provided me with the tools and encouragement; I merely had to till the soil and sow the seed.

Without question, in prison, education is the key to rehabilitation. It provides the means necessary to expand our minds and envision positive goals once unforeseen. In pursuing this valuable gift, our minds transform the benightedness of prison mentality, and emerge to intellectual and spiritual light. As a result, the chains of captivity, brought on by ignorance, gradually break; and freedom flourishes, physically and mentally.

Such enlightenment changes our outlook on life. We no longer see ourselves as incompetent members of society, but rather, individuals who demonstrate to others, integrity and virtue. We stand here today as proof to responsibility, and if we continue to have endurance and perseverance, I am optimistic we will win in life.

I encourage everyone here today that no matter what your personal situation may be, strive to remain on the path of enlightenment and education for the rest of your lives. Those of you who achieve a goal, be sure to quickly set upon another. Use this to springboard yourselves into a great future with many accomplishments. And do not forget to acknowledge the role played by our professors and relatives, who bestow upon us their support and encouragement. They help us to overcome adversity by assisting us in redefining our values and goals. As such, I am elated to acknowledge them for their dedication and devotion.

Graduation is an inspirational and remarkable event in our lives. It is a testimony to all the hard work we endured and

accomplished. Such success will open doors once closed, and give us the opportunity to enjoy prosperity. Earning a degree has many meanings to different individuals. To my family and me, it is especially meaningful. I am the first in my family to receive a Bachelor's degree. This achievement encourages my family to move forward in search of their own enlightenment in life. It provides motivation to my younger siblings, demonstrating to them that no goal is unattainable. And as the Greek philosopher Epictetus once said, "Education is a possession which cannot be taken away".