**GRADUATION SPEECH**

**FOR**

**CHENDRA DUPREE**

Hello everyone!!! To family and friends, students and teachers, distinguished guests.... especially our Board President Mr. Daryl Morton, Board Members, Our zone Board Member Dr. Thelma Dillard, the 2018 National Superintendent of the Year and our Superintendent Dr. Curtis L. Jones and other dignitaries, and of course, to all of you graduates, Welcome!! Wow!! That was quite a lot, but you know what? It is a gift that we have so many eager, enthusiastic, and engaged people actively rooting for, and supporting, the students of Central High (**please correct if this is not accurate**). We also have to acknowledge that it’s been quite a year.... even longer.... and just to be able to be here is a recognizable achievement! Graduates, although I have been with this class from the beginning... having started as Assistant Principal four years ago, as most of you started your high school career, to see all of you here, at the finish line, having completed your courses admirably, leaves me, your teachers, and all of us that have taught, mentored, guided, and assisted you to get to this point, well, we are especially proud!!!

I don’t think any of us were on line to pick up the memo, “How to handle yourself in a global pandemic!!” There has been no rule book.... no checklist... no basis of real experience to usher us through the crisis we have all endured and continue to navigate, but graduates, you **MADE IT**!!! Whether you realize it or not, we all lived through very trying times and managed to learn priceless life lessons. We learned what we valued in life and we let go of what we weren’t able to justify or manage. We’re now learning that persistence, self confidence, being aware of surroundings, and how to best protect ourselves, looking out for our neighbors as though they were our own family, and all the while, through it **ALL**, the greatest lesson we can learn is how to sustain ourselves.... how to plough through consideration and fear, how to focus through distraction, how to recognize what is truly important, and to continue to push through adversity... knowing this... and **DOING** it...quite simply, has unlocked for you, **the secret of life**. If you were able to get through 2020, you **REALLY** can do **ANYTHING**!! I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the students and classmates that, through circumstances beyond their control, have not graduated today. Those students had to make hard choices... and when it came down to it, they chose what would be best for themselves and their families. Those students may not have graduated today, but the lessons and experience they take with them, having also survived the global crisis, will hopefully continue to have a positive effect... to remind them to be strong.... to make them aware that every day there are tough decisions to be made, and that they are not alone. They’ve chosen different paths... roads down which they will still learn and develop as valuable members of the community. Remember that the learning never stops.... we will never know **EVERYTHING**... and every situation really is a teachable moment.

For those of you that may not know, you see me standing before you today, or observing classes and functions, interacting with the administration and faculty, but you may not know much about my history. I didn’t have a traditional upbringing. My parents divorced when I was five years old. I saw my mother struggle to make ends meet. I also saw her determination to give her family **VISION**. I knew from the time I was a little girl that I would keep going and become the person I would... and **could**... be proud of. Your education doesn’t end today, in fact, it’s just **BEGINNING**. I invite you to find that flame within you. Keep that “pilot light” on... think of those you admire and build a life so that others will learn from you. I recently found a quote by a man named Frank Outlaw, and it really hit a chord within me...know that your words and actions **mean something**. People are watching and listening, even when you think they’re not. Live your lives with purpose, and remember....

“Watch your thoughts, they become words;

watch your words, they become actions;

watch your actions, they become habits;

watch your habits, they become character;

watch your character, for it becomes your destiny.”

Speaking of living a life with purpose, while I am relatively knew as your Principal, there is someone that has been with you... guided you... watched over you and cheered you on. He means so much to all of us and this commencement ceremony would not be complete without a few words of encouragement and “cheer” from someone whose name is synonymous with Central High... Mr. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, please come up and lead us in a round of... **YOU KNOW WHAT**.... “Whose House???? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ !!!”Congratulations graduates and thank you!!