

**Raymond B. Kaniu**

**Maxwell Convocation Speech**

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, our honorable speaker Samantha Power, Dean Steinberg, faculty, staff, and the entire Maxwell administration. Allow me to begin by congratulating the promising class of 2013. Against all odds, including that persistent Syracuse winter, we have made it. It almost feels like yesterday when it all began, we were neophytes, convinced of our resolve to finish what would become our passionate affair at Maxwell. Like any other passion, we had our moments that filled the spectrum that runs from discontentment to satisfaction. We arrived from all corners of the world, bringing vast experiences from our respective fields, and adding on to a Maxwell legacy that boasts some of the best leaders the world has ever seen. Our feet have graced the paths of Maxwell and Eggers, our time, generously spent in the Academic Village, Grad Bays, and inside the bowels of the University's enchanting buildings while our nights, well, our nights were spent drowning in research papers. However, as William Henley eloquently put it; in the fell clutch of circumstance we neither winced nor cried aloud, under the bludgeonings of chance, our heads are bloody, but unbowed. Thankfully, through our interactions we cultivated relationships and gathered invaluable information that will last a lifetime. For that, we are forever in your debt.

A closer examination will reveal that though I come from a small village in Central Kenya my story is not that different from yours. Our paths leading to this very moment bear common threads of submission, self-denial, and diligent work. The terrible conditions of rural Africa exposed me to a seasoned taste of survival bearing witness to the calamities and disparities of my fellow people. Taking the trusted advice of my late grandfather, I subjected myself to the instructions of a scholarly order gathering information through school and traditional channels. While shepherding livestock, I sought refuge in the pages of books and the expanse of the savannah and shared my evenings by crackling fires listening to the elders. The proverbial child raised by a village, I saw the sacrifice that my family gave so that I could have what was denied to them. Their sacrifice weighs heavily on my shoulders and a victory for me is a victory for them. It is for this reason that we share this very moment with those whose unrelenting and undying support has got us to this point.

Indeed, the theater of life is never short on spectacles. A bit of everything to test each individual's strength from the burst of laughter to the agony of tears, divinely constructed to serve as lessons for the nearest observer and self. We have got into the habit of strongly identifying with these scenes, but are careful not to overlap our experiences with those of others forgetting that we all are subject to the same set of conditions. Look at the world around us. It is changing more rapidly than we can adjust to meet increasing challenges such as corruption, famines, natural disasters, climate change, and the duality of technological and innovational

advancement. Nevertheless, there is an opportunity to work together. Connectivity is guaranteed in our generation, from social media to the global stock markets, yet for all the great things technology can do, it still cannot make our choices for us. Our generation will be challenged more than any other before us. Don't we owe it to ourselves and to those that will come after us to leave this world a better place than we found it? Marie Curie, a survivor in her own right during harsher times, intoned that nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood, now is the time to understand more so that we may fear less. We all play an integral part of our society, and in the midst of dire circumstances much more will be demanded from us. As we part ways it leads me to wonder, are we part and parcel of this fabric that has taken years to weave? Are we the very strands that enter into the complex tapestry of our future? Time will weigh our actions, but my dear friends what are our actions if they bear no fruits and what are our motives if they are not pure? Let it be our greatest desire to be vessels of change, voices for the weak, and champions of equality.

I am compelled to reach out to you just like I reached out to my fellow graduates last year because most of the things I said still ring true. I echo Balzac's sentiments when he said that to know the infinite of our deepest feelings we must in youth cast our lead into those great lakes upon whose shores we live. Therefore, as we stand here today to endure yet another trial, we must be aware of the world in which we have been thrust into; a world ripe with change begging for great representation, wisdom, and the right dose of mental toughness to lead us to the next phase. We are students and citizens of the world and as such no one should be absolved from the responsibility to act. A German poet and diplomat once said that if you treat an individual as he is, he will remain as he is. But if you treat him as if he were what he ought and could be, he will become what he ought to be and could be. Finally, I urge you all to apply yourselves unsparingly and affirm as Hemingway did that there is nothing noble in being superior to your fellow men, true nobility is being superior to your former self. It is an honor to share this day with you. Let us in unison proudly raise the flag of victory. We deserve every second of this joyous occasion. Gather yourselves, these moments define us. Thank you!