

**Ladies and gentlemen of the Lusher Class of 2010, CEO Riedlinger, Principal Ates, Faculty, Family, Friends and Honored Guests:**

What an honor and privilege it is to be here with you tonight and to address the first full 4-year class to graduate from Lusher High School. Also, the class which is graduating the same year our city became a City of World Champions. Our boys in black and gold strove for excellence and set an example for the whole city – just like all of you graduates tonight. Indeed, how fitting is it that your own home field is named after the MVP of our first Super Bowl. For the past year we have all relished in those two wonderful words – WHO DAT – but tonight I have two new words applicable to you – YOU DAT!

I am also so proud to be with you because Lusher is near and dear to my and my family's heart. My youngest son and oldest daughter are proud Lusher Lions, and my youngest daughter will be starting Lusher Elementary in the fall. I have also coached many of the graduates on the baseball diamond at Carrollton, and, before Lusher became Lusher, I spent 1 day every week in your school building mentoring an incredible young man from Fortier who I am proud to say is now a top chef in town.

So what does one say to a group of graduating seniors who, at the start of their eighth grade year, endured the wrath of Hurricane Katrina? And, even more importantly, came back to New Orleans, re-invested in New Orleans and are now making New Orleans so proud.

Well the first thing to say is simply THANK YOU. Thank you parents and teachers for returning to the city that care obviously did NOT forget. Thank you for returning to our city when, in those dark days of 2005 and early 2006, many wondered if there would ever again be a city to come back to. Thank you for helping get our beloved New Orleans back on her feet and allowing us to hold on to all that makes the Crescent City so special, but also unafraid to implement reforms which will pay dividends for all New Orleanians for generations to come. Despite 80% of the city being under water only 4 1/2 years ago, nearly 80% of our people have returned, with more coming back each day. In fact, on this very campus here at Tulane and at universities throughout the city, a record number of applicants are expressing their desire to be part of this special place, which all of us are lucky to call home.

The second thing that came to mind in addressing you is a challenge I would like to make. One of my favorite phrases is TIKKUN OLAM, Hebrew words which mean 'Repairing the World'. Tonight, I challenge you graduates to 'Repair the World', by making it a better place to live, by making it environmentally safe for your children and grandchildren, by combating discrimination and racial and cultural hatred, by eradicating poverty and homelessness, and by safeguarding the bedrock principles of democracy and freedom for which our armed forces are still fighting for around the world. Your TIKKUN OLAM may be in the fields of medicine or law or teaching or in any other profession you choose. But whatever your ultimate field, do it to the best of your ability and always work to make our city, our state, our nation and our world a better place for all.

You are the largest graduating class in Lusher's history...all 102 of you. A class which realized unprecedented success, both in the classroom and on the athletic field. A class which is part of a school recognized not only in Louisiana, but also nationally, as a model of excellence whose graduates tonight are headed to some of the most prestigious universities in the world. But education is earned not only in the classroom, but also through experiences, both good and bad. We learn until the day we die, and I will tell you a secret: Graduation is only one stop on that education train. In fact, every day is a graduation of sorts, a moving forward, a building of your brain, your essence and your character. Never stop experiencing, looking around, absorbing, reading and listening.

And don't be merely a receiver of knowledge. Be someone who imparts it as well. As you tell your friends and teammates goodbye and depart for college, each of you will have the chance to spread your knowledge, to make an impact – indeed, to Repair the World. Does that sound intimidating? I hope not. A wise man once said:

“When I was a young man, I wanted to change the world. I found it was difficult to change the world, so I tried to change my nation. When I found I couldn't change the nation, I began to focus on my town. I couldn't change the town and as an older man, I tried to change my family. Now, as an old man, I realize the only thing I can change is myself, and suddenly I realize that if long ago I had changed myself, I could have made an impact on my family. My family and I could have made an impact on our town. Their impact could have changed the nation and I could have indeed changed the world.”

Each of you has the power to make an impact. And you are expected to do so. Don't be fearful of that expectation. And surely don't be fearful of temporary defeat. Each of you, including your parents and friends, will at some time in life fall down, be disappointed, be hurt, and even wonder why life has dealt you such a tough hand.

In my personal life, my family and I moved to New Orleans 10 years ago for a dream job and the realization of a life long professional goal: running a professional sports team. I loved working for the Saints and, when I lost my position, I was admittedly crushed. But it also made me stronger and allowed me to realize two things: First, always stand up for what is right and just, no matter the consequences. And Second, when hurt occurs, get back on your feet and keep moving forward, both personally and professionally. Because of all of you in the room tonight, I have been humbled and privileged to have had the opportunity to represent you through public service and to play a small role in the recovery and revitalization of this great city. For that I say thank you.

So tonight, graduates, trust yourself and your own heart. Be unafraid to step out of your comfort zone, to dream big and to reach for the stars. In the words of the famous writer Goethe, “Dream no small dreams, for they have no power to move the hearts of men.”

Moreover, always maintain that youthful idealism that often fades with age. It is that idealism that will allow you to change people's lives for the better and to have a sense of personal satisfaction that money can never buy.

Be confident enough in yourself to always do what is ethically just and know that your family, friends and those who truly love you will always have your back. Because of your Lusher experience and what we have been through as a city, you already know how to persevere and to endure. No matter where in the world you might end up, you are a New Orleanian, and as such, we collectively share the common bond of having survived Katrina and all its horror, devastation and loss. But it is exactly because we have survived that you unquestionably possess the strength and moral fortitude to withstand whatever life throws your way! Through your hard work, you took a new public school and redefined it. That is a success story in which you should all take incredible pride!

More than any other generation yours is supremely confident that you are equipped to solve the challenges ahead. And you are. You have faced tremendous adversity, from fallen levees to an ecosystem tonight terribly damaged by oil. These tragedies will strengthen not only your character, but also your resolve to take action, to help your community, to stay involved.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once asked what we would do if the stars only came out once every thousand years. No one would sleep that night, of course. We would be ecstatic and delirious. But, in actuality, the stars come out every night, and the real question is what will we do with the light rays of opportunity bestowed upon us? Tonight, I am asking you to seize that opportunity, to take notice of what's happening around you and to take action. Because we need you!

I believe our city is on the verge of greatness and has the opportunity to realize its incredible untapped potential. And each of you tonight is a big part of not only its past, but more importantly, its future.

Many of you will go to schools outside of our city and have the chance to explore new people and new places. But no matter where you will be, you will always be a New Orleanian. And having experienced our city's most trying, yet most important time, I am asking you tonight to always stay true to New Orleans.

In closing, there is invisible writing on the back of your diploma, and in case you did not bring lemon juice to decode it, I will tell you what it says: **YOU ARE BRILLIANT AND THE EARTH IS HIRING.**

No matter what dorm room you lay your head in next fall, let your brilliance shine on. Bring with you a bit of gumbo, that mix of Who Dat pride and Yes We Can spirit.

Even if you are far from New Orleans, do one thing every day that brings you home, even if it is just in your daydreams. Your good thoughts will keep us buoyed and able to endure the struggle.

You are embarking upon an incredibly exciting journey. Bring New Orleans with you wherever you go and tell the world how valuable this place is, how it deserves to be

protected, cherished and remembered. Tell them the magical feeling of riding in an un-air-conditioned streetcar in 100 degree weather yet not minding the heat because the scenery is so beautiful that you forget the sweat on your brow.

Be an ambassador of New Orleans. Bring CDs of Kermit Ruffins, Dr. and Deacon John and, yes, even Lil' Wayne. Dress in costume before you go to class on Fat Tuesday and let your friends know that a majesty named Rex reigns over city government that day. Watch HBO's Treme on Sunday nights, with a sense of pride that only you can truly understand. Bring Tabasco or Crystal Hot Sauce to spice up the cafeteria food. Heck, even tell stories of our potholes the size of craters. Let the world know that, yes, New Orleans has flaws, but we have a unique spirit unlike any other city.

Of course, don't feel guilty if you move on. But also, don't feel guilty if you want to come home. We need you right here, with your law degrees, your melodic voices, your doctorates and with your future families. Make this always the place you call home, even if it can only be in your heart.

They dance in other cities, but nowhere can you dance in the streets like you can in New Orleans.

They sing in other cities, but nowhere with our rhythm.

It's true that friends will come and go, but this...this sense of family and community...this is New Orleans...this is what you hold on to.

You are our lifeline to what is good, what is ahead. And from here, the future looks pretty wonderful! Tonight is your night. Indeed, it is your YOU DAT! May God bless you, and provide each of you with a life of fulfillment, prosperity and achievement!