

COMMENCEMENT SPEECH  
MAY 20, 2011

# Commencement Speech

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A Speech by  
Montgomery College President  
Dr. DeRionne Pollard

Dr. Pollard congratulates and inspires the Class of 2011.

Congratulations, class of 2011! It's wonderful to see so many bright shining smiles here to celebrate . . . and several supporters and elected officials . . . would you please stand as I introduce you . . .

**The Honorable Jennie Forehand**, Maryland State Senator

**The Honorable Sheila Hixson**, Maryland House of Delegates

**The Honorable Christopher Barclay**, Montgomery County Board of Education

**The Honorable Shirley Brandman**, Montgomery County Board of Education

**Ms. Anita Powell**, Montgomery College Alumni Board of Governors

**Ms. Teresa Wright**, 2008 Honorary Degree Recipient

Thank you for joining our celebration!

This is an exhilarating day for all of our students...and it is for me! You will forever be my *first* class of Montgomery College graduates.

In my book, you all have transformed into educational superheroes. You may not yet know how you will use your newfound powers of knowledge, but I can assure you the educational journey you have completed will make an indelible mark on the world around you.

Believe me, the DeRionne who was sitting in your seats years ago— a little further back than I care to admit— was unsure about what I would become, or even the value in going to college. When I was in my late teens, and early twenties—in the position of deciding my future—becoming a college president was not on my radar. Even becoming a college student was barely on my radar.

See, when I was 17, my best friend and I signed up to become Marines. But I needed my father to give his consent since I was not yet 18. My father was proud of my interest in serving our country and fully supportive of that noble dream, *but* he also realized I needed time to mature and take time to decide. So, my father asked me to give college a try—just for a year—until I was 18.

So... I registered at Iowa State University. And it turns out that I fell in love with college and, as you can see, I never left. I even turned that love of learning into a bachelor's degree, a master's degree, and finally a Ph.D. And here I am today – your president.

A college education opens doors you never knew even existed. I cannot promise you won't have challenges down the road—but I can promise you the education you received here

has prepared you. You have become more intelligent, responsible, well-rounded adults. Or, as I said earlier, educational superheroes.

Just look around you. Look at your classmates. Every one of you has triumphed over odds and became a success story.

Take Su Meck. When she was 22 years old with two young children, she suffered a traumatic brain injury that caused her to lose all of her memories. Su had to relearn how to read, write and even care for her family all over again. Now, she is graduating with an associate's degree in music and will head to Smith College in Massachusetts this fall.

Take Seth Lessans, who had a rocky start to his educational journey. In fact, he stopped attending college for a few years. But, Seth graduates today, having earned only a single B during

his time here at MC. He will also realize a dream by attending the Ivy League. He will be at Columbia University in the fall.

And take Tierra Washington. With obstacles at home and a resulting lack of self-confidence, attending college was not guaranteed. But, today, Tierra accomplishes what neither her parents nor her siblings have: a college degree. And another in the future. Tierra will transfer to Frostburg State University with eventual plans to pursue a master's in social work.

These are the stories of Montgomery College. Your Montgomery College. And now, you now wear the badge: Montgomery College alumni.

Armed with your education, you are ready to take on the world and live a rich and full life. But, remember, with your superhero powers comes great responsibility. An American intellectual once said: "We've forgotten that a rich life consists

fundamentally of serving others, trying to leave the world a little better than you found it” and that “social justice is love made public.”

So I leave you with this thought: No matter how many ladders you climb, always remember the feeling of empowerment you have today. Channel that feeling to make a difference. Give back, become a mentor, or lend an extra hand to one of our students.

Being educated members of our society means you now have the power to change not only your own life, but also the lives around you. Embrace it. Make us as proud in the future as you have in this moment.

Now let’s reflect on the past year by watching this inspiring video. And again, congratulations!!