

COMMENCEMENT
May 18, 2012

Change the Odds

A Speech by
Montgomery College President
Dr. DeRionne Pollard

Please be seated.

Good morning class of 2012!

And good morning family and friends of graduates, as well as faculty, staff, and, of course, our distinguished guests. Thank you for being here!

I am so pleased that Montgomery County Councilmember and Education Chair Valerie Ervin joined us today. Additionally, I want to acknowledge the members of our Montgomery County Board of Education here with us today: Mr. Christopher Barclay and Dr. Judith Docca. Thank you to Montgomery College Foundation members Mrs. Camille Kendall and Mr. Michael Yuen, and Foundation member and former Trustee Ms. Bobbi Shulman, as well as members of our alumni association board of governors- Ms. Carol Leahy, Ms. Esther Newman, and Ms. Anita Neal Powell. A special hello also to Ms. Teresa Wright, a previous Honorary Degree Recipient.

Now to the stars of today: our graduates!

As you look around you, you will notice splashes of our new colors..

It is especially fitting that one of these colors is purple—the color of royalty.

Today, you wear your own crown of sorts—a mortarboard—and you will become part of a sovereign group: college graduate.

It is a title to celebrate and to wear proudly.

But it also is a title that comes with great responsibility.

Look around at the five people nearest you.

In this county, the odds are that one of six live in poverty. One in six.

Now look at three people around you.

In Montgomery County, the odds are that one out of four have only a high school degree— if that.

But by being here today—at your college graduation—you are changing the odds.

You are changing the trajectory of your own lives, and the lives of everyone around you.

In fact, isn't that what Montgomery College is all about? We all come together as a single college to empower students to change their lives and to enrich the life of our community.

Think about that last part- to enrich the life of our community.

A number of students this year have embraced that call to action and started the Changing the Odds movement. Its goal is to spawn compassion and empathy through the mutuality of our common experience.

Our actions are inextricably tied to one another. By bettering yourself, you are enriching your community.

But it goes beyond that.

With the power of a college degree, you have the ability, and dare I say, the responsibility to change the world.

To change the odds.

Just think about the collective power of our graduates.

There are more than 8-hundred of you processing today, 2-thousand other students eligible to graduate, including five of our student Changing the Odds founders—Antoine Battle, Fanta Kaba, Veronica Mason, Tsholofelo Motshwane, and Sairam Nagulapalli.

You bring a wide variety of skills...with specialties ranging from anthropology, to engineering, to air conditioning repair. Of the 29-hundred students eligible to graduate, more than 3- hundred are younger than 21, while 17 are older than 60 years old.

798 are graduating with GPAs of 3.4 or above, 61 with 4.0s!

And this is but one year of Montgomery College graduates.

You are joining an even bigger network of alumni.

You are inextricably linked to each other.

Being part of this special group is not about a certificate on your wall, or new letters behind your name—although both are nice. But, being part of this community college, *our* community college, is about more.

The Changing the Odds group highlighted a quote by renowned Anthropologist Margaret Mead.

She said “never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it’s the only thing that ever has.”

You may have noticed a small token on your seats. I hope you will wear those bracelets proudly to remind you of the power you have to change the odds now that you can say “I am a college graduate.”

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Today, you are a college graduate. Today, you become a mighty group of thoughtful, committed citizens who can change the world...who can change the odds for yourself, your family, your community, your country. Go do it!

Congratulations Class of 2012!

Now, I ask you to turn your attention to the video screens around the room, to take one last look back at this academic year and some of the lives empowered at Montgomery College.