

I think I had a less than average path into the history major. I went through high school hating all of the history classes I had taken. Nothing made sense and the endless rehashing of American history left me falling asleep in classes. When I came to UCSC I entered as a biology major and after two quarters realized that something wasn't right. I was failing classes every quarter and losing the already low amount of confidence I had in my right to be here. I had bad experiences with counselors and I can honestly say I was lost. In the midst of this I decided maybe getting GE's out of the way was the best option. I saw a class being offered about the making of modern Africa with Professor Anthony. I decided I might as well try history again.

That decision changed my college career and my life. In this class I was not only succeeding but I was excelling. Professor Anthony gave me words of encouragement and challenged my idea of what history is. It wasn't just this stuffy history about our forefathers. It was the story of us. It was the story of wars, cultural change, and interconnecting world stories. Studying African history became my calling and for a while all of the history classes I took were with Professor Anthony. And I became comfortable and through this comfortability I was encouraged to branch out and test the historical waters from Ancient Japan with Professor Aso to the other side of the world in Latin American history classes with Professor Delgado. Each of the professors I have interacted with have made history come alive in a way I would not have realized otherwise but it wasn't only them. It was also Stephanie who put up with me being in her office pitching crazy ideas about new projects and new pathways that I needed someone to approve of because I had a barely fledgling idea of what my true strength was. So many of us have had these interactions with professors, faculty, TAs and staff and we have learned so much from them that we will carry with us into our future research and work.

This department has given me specifically what I needed to realize my true potential. I entered this university not believing I deserved to be here and now I aspire to go to law school to work in immigration and refugee asylum and I don't doubt that I will get there because of the encouragement and skills I have received from the history department. We have all learned to think critically, to understand the complex intricacies of the world we live in, and to argue our points articulately and creatively. History has come to mean so much more to us than just words on pages though. It has become our escape from our doubts about our own potential and it is the encouragement that if others can and have done things to change the world then so can we. This knowledge is what I hope each one of the graduates here today have gained from this department.

One of the lessons I learned in these years that took the longest is the value of parents and parental figures. I learned that all those times my parents attempted to punish me by taking away the tv and locking me in my room with books paid off in the end although they eventually learned to ground me with homework instead. Their decision to send me on a school bus two hours each way to attend a better high school allowed me to focus on my education rather than how safe I was at any given moment. My dad would wake up at five am to drive me to my bus stop in south central and would pick me up at six pm later that day after he had worked a full day. My mom would encourage me when I came home from long days wanting to just stop. When I went off 300 miles to college they bought me tickets home whenever I got homesick, which was often, and they told me to keep going.

Now I'm here, the first in my family to graduate from university like many of us, and all I can think about is how I could not have done this without all of the people in my life. So what I encourage all of the graduates here to do is to think of all of the challenges you went through and think of the person or people who helped you through and thank them because our degrees are a combined effort of our own hard work and talent but also the support of those around us. And remember that although so many of us are stuck in the past, we truly are the future. This journey has not been easy for all of us but as historians we know that we can do this because so many have been here before. What I want to close with is the definition Professor Anthony gave us each class of history as change over time. We have all changed over the time we have been here and through this ceremony we have become a part of history in some way or another.

So good luck class of 2016 and keep making history.