

Good Morning, Father Schell, Faculty, Students and Invited Guests.

It is a distinct pleasure to be here today. First, it is always a treat to be back home in the Valley for any reason or for no reason at all but to be here to address you on such an honorable occasion as Dr. Martin Luther King's Day is an amazing privilege and a humbling feeling. There is no doubt, this will go down as one of my most remarkable and memorable MLK's Day. Thank you Kent, and thank you Ms. Devonna Hall for asking me back.

It seems like just yesterday, that I too was sitting in one of those very seats listening to a Chapel Talk or more likely dreaming of running touchdowns on Saturday night. But seriously, so much has transpired

since I was here and so, so much has happened to me
BECAUSE I was here.

When I came to Kent as young high school junior, I had a single mission; to become a Division One football player. Yes, I knew then that Kent was more than just a place to hone my athletic prowess. I knew Kent had a sterling reputation for being one of the most storied boarding schools in New England, if not the country. We had done our homework and my parents were overjoyed that I wanted to attend this wonderful place. Deep down though, running touchdowns on Saturdays was top of mind for me. Kent was going to be my springboard to Division One stardom and it did; not to stardom but something even better; more long-lasting. Kent showed me that I was more than just a football player who could get good grades. Kent showed me how to tap into my full potential; Kent

showed me that I can use whatever space I have, however small my platform; to effect change; that each of us can make a lasting difference. This lesson has served me well through my 4 years at the University of New Hampshire and will be even more important now as I get ready to graduate and begin a new chapter of my life.

Effecting change is why Ms. Devonna Hall asked me here today. As a sixth former, a small group of us - mostly students of color - decided that Kent, as a community could and should mark Dr. King's day in a more visible and cohesive manner. In true Kent fashion, Father Schell hosted us in his home one night to discuss. That night Father Schell gave us the space, the confidence and the support we needed to have a frank, sometimes emotional discussion about our experience as students of color. How could we safely

introduce more multiculturalism into our community? How could we better share our different experiences and backgrounds and learn from each other without offending others? (Pause) What better way to do so than for us to honor Dr King. As he so famously **said "if one cannot do great things, do small things in a great way."** After all, his legacy belongs to all of us. I'm ecstatic to see that what began with just a small group of us that night in Father Schell's home has fittingly become the norm here at Kent. I remember how moved I was that night; how fortunate, I felt to be in a place such as Kent where we were encouraged to be ourselves; where we were not being forced to fit in but to be the best versions of who we are.

That winter morning, on my first visit to Kent, and immediately after interviewing with Mrs. Traub, I knew that this was a place that I could and would

have success. I felt deeply that Kent, would be a school to help me reach my goals; you know, running those touchdowns on Saturday nights. What I did not realize then, was that in trying to achieve these long-sought after goals that I would make and cultivate friendships that would become even more important; friends that would buoy me when things turned sour and friends that would celebrate with me when things were great. There is an old Jamaican saying that goes, "Good Friends are better than pocket money." and the friends I've made here at Kent have proven that over and over again, that they will remain my friends for life.

During my time at Kent, I was in a friend group we named KURL. <say what it means> we started a group chat that we still use five years after graduation. We used to

battle rap each other for hours late at night. The friends I made in KURL traveled from Boston to New Hampshire in freezing November weather to see me play my very last football game; even though they knew I would not be running any touchdowns. Those same friends let me bunk on their couch when I was stranded in Boston overnight and needed a place to stay. So you are probably asking yourself; what made these friendships so special? It is because when we first came together we were so different; and yet over time we came to realize that we were not that different at all and that the differences we did have did not matter; that regardless of that, we could create a bond rooted in our shared experiences here at Kent and that in fact we had much more in common than was readily visible. We were of different ethnicities, born in different places. Some had money others did not. Some came from two-parent households others

had parents who were divorced. Some had been in boarding school their entire school lives, others were desperately trying to live away from home for the first time. There were so many differences in the room. But we also had the commonality of being here at Kent together. We were all Kent Lions! KURL gave us the opportunity to really see each other, to learn from each other and we embraced one another.

There can be power in our differences especially today, where outside these hallowed walls is a world that is deeply divided. Let Kent be a center where you harness the power in those differences. Power, in the opportunity to start the conversation in a safe space. To learn from one another. To understand why we think the way we do. To break down negative notions or ideologies that we may have built up knowingly or unknowingly. Without the dialogue, sometimes

uncomfortable dialogue, there is no progress. Anything else and we are simply grumbling to ourselves in our respective boxing corners; reinforcing our own thoughts. In the spirit of Dr. King we should all practice patience. Patience for what we don't understand; patience to learn the things we have not experienced and so do not know. Patience to give our fellow brothers and sisters the space to change and grow. There can be power in our differences but we must choose to harness that power. We must choose to begin the conversation. We must seek to understand each other's reality. In so doing, we find that the bonds of friendship that we build, sometimes at our most vulnerable, are the friendships that last a lifetime. The type of friendships I was able to nurture in KURL.

After a solid Junior season, coming just one game short of reaching the NEPSAC championship; I entered

my senior year riding high. I was voted by my peers to be one of the next football captains to lead them in 2015 along with my roommate Deshawn Stevens, who himself is now a captain at The University of Maine and my fellow teammate and friend Tim Guiggio. Entering the season, I could not be more excited. NEPSAC first teamer, Matt LaPorta had graduated and I was going to get my shot to be a big feature in the offense. Man, finally I was going to get to run them touchdowns! However, it was not to be; fate had a different plan for me. In the second game of the season I supplexed and fractured my knee cap virtually making me ineffective for the season. To make matters worse, trying to fight through that injury I ended up suffering a concussion which literally brought my high school playing days to an end. Remember that dream of running touchdowns on Saturdays,? it was gone in an instant. In that fleeting

moment, my dream since the 4th grade evaporated. I remember calling home, throat closed, eyes filled with tears asking my parents. “ What now?” What do I do now?

“Who am I now?”

Recovering from postseason knee surgery; I locked myself in my room a lot, trying desperately to focus on college and yes, recruiting. Without the ability to compete in postseason hoops, I was at a loss for things to do! I was bored and I was sad. However, as we all know, here at Kent one simply doesn't just do nothing. In my search to broaden my interest away from sports, I ended surprising myself. Mr. Stewart and Coach Wells persuaded me to take part in the One Act Plays so I did. Lo and behold, I loved it. I never thought the faculty would witness me kissing a fellow student without the shield of night, but there you have it. Thank you Mr. Stewart and thank you for

coming to see me play UAlbany and thank you to my friends in KURL, who helped me through some pretty rough times.

In my gloom and doom, I had written a poem appropriately titled “What Does It Cost To Live Your Dream.” After reciting it to one of my friends, Emilia Worth, I entered it as a spoken word piece in the talent contest. And what do you know? Backed up by her creative genius, we took first place, Joined by fellow Kent Students Jamil Gambari on drums, and Lachlan Cormie on the tenor sax.

I was so encouraged by the success of the One Acts that I decided to be bold and perform what some may have considered a controversial poem called “I am proud I was a slave” during our first campus recognition of Dr. King's Day. I was nervous at first but as they had done since the day I came here, Kent gave me the courage and the space to be who I was,

who I am and who I will be. Kent recognized that my reality was something worth sharing. In that moment, Kent demonstrated its commitment to diversity, to hearing the other point of view and in so doing to encourage empathy and understanding.

Dr. Martin Luther King told us that, **“Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?’”** That is my very question for all of us today, what are we doing for others? How are we helping the communities in which we go to school, live work or play. How are we leaving the places we enter, better, because we were a part of it? **How will we leave the world better, because we were a part of it?** Now is not the time to aim low, it is the time to roll the dice. We are the generation who is not scared to challenge the traditional pathways that have been laid before us. Pathways that are yes, tried and true. But

we are the generation that is willing to take risks, and challenge those very pathways that are yes, tried and true. Because change does not come from comfort. Change and progress comes from those who are daring enough to bet on themselves.

At the University of New Hampshire, every time we walked out onto the practice field or into the stadium there was as a sign that read:

“ONLY THOSE WHO RISK GOING TOO FAR, KNOW HOW FAR THEY CAN GO.” (Repeat).

I challenge us all today, I challenge us to risk going too far. I challenge us to risk taking on too much. To push ourselves past the point we thought was possible. I challenge us to go for every dream, to chase every

mountaintop, and to strive to make everything to be good and true in our world. Because in the end,

ONLY THOSE WHO RISKED GOING TOO FAR, KNEW HOW FAR THEY COULD GO.

- Thank you