

Originally I planned to go to the library, put on Jhene Aiko's new album, and go-to-work on this speech. Finally! I've been planning exactly what I wanted to say to Class of 2020 since the day we stormed Gosman in teams white and blue. I've been collecting quotes from Jamele Adams speeches and been storing Brandeis memories since before we realized that Usadan is actually better than Sherman, so I thought this would be an easy task. I thought I was ready for it. Only today I sat down to write this speech from my New York City apartment. The train is hustling past my window, CNN blaring in my living room, COVID19 alerts pop up on my phone and I am lost. I forget everything I ever wanted to tell Class of 2020. It's hard to think about the future when the present is filled with so much uncertainty. A month ago we didn't even know if we would be here today. So we are no stranger to the feeling of uncertainty, nor will we ever be. So instead of pulling out the Dean Adams quotes and the corny Brandeisian jokes I have stored for this moment, I decide to instead, focus on the things we can be certain about

I am certain that there is no other college experience that could have ever come close to a Brandeis experience. Brandeis with all of its flaws has played a crucial role in our development. Here we have some of the most passionate students. Students who have put their all into standing in their truth. Students who won't hesitate to remind this university how and why it was built. Students who have managed to fit three degrees into four years and are walking out wanting more. This is no coincidence. Brandeis has offered us some of the most dedicated professors. I cannot thank you all enough for being there every step of the way. I remember freshman year Professor Williams assigned AAAS 5A a 12 to 15 page paper. I pulled my hair out getting it done, and I'm pretty sure I submitted it with dried tears on the pages, and still, I got it back with my very first B-. At that moment I swore I would never take another class with Professor Williams again. This year he mentored me, guided me, challenged me and stood at my defense as I successfully defended my senior thesis. I don't know how that happened, but I am eternally grateful.

There is no doubt that we would not be the people we are today had we not matriculated through this particular university at this particular time. When we chanted THIS IS OUR HOUSE on the first night on campus we had no idea that in a couple months, for some of us, America would no longer feel like home. But we had to sit with that. Felt homesick for a few but had to get back, and we did. Last semester when we sorted through hundreds of course descriptions to pick our very last classes at Brandeis we had no idea that those classes would be totally transformed in the middle of the semester. With second semester senioritis sitting on our shoulders screaming “ LETS GO REWATCH ALL NINE SEASONS OF THE OFFICE” and Mom in the kitchening hollering about the dishes every... five... seconds adjusting to this new format was the very last thing we wanted to do. But still we fought these urges, ignored mom and found a way to adjust. We were devastated that we had to leave Brandeis two months too early, we were anxious about everything going on around us, but we pushed through so we can be here today. If there is

anything that I can be certain about, it is that Class of 2020 has some of the most resilient students this university has ever seen. Not everything we endured in these last few years was easy. It didn't start that way and it did not end that way. Not everything in life will be easy either. It did not start that way, it will not end that way. That I am certain. But these last 4 or 5 years have taught us the beginning of everything we need to know about weathering storms. Here we learned to hold lighting like a flashlight. We learned to sit in those moments of discomfort, hopefully. Though we all leave Brandeis with very different degrees, having walked very different paths, we have learned the most important lessons together. While only some of us can name the formula for elasticity, all of us can show you what resilience looks like. That I am certain.

I can not end this speech without giving a special shout out to first generation students, to Black and Brown students , (who entered one year post Ford Hall 2015 and ironically celebrate 50 years post Ford Hall 1969 two years later), to Queer students, to female identity students, and to Black women especially. We have found a way for love to exist in institutions that never intended to love us. We did all we had to do academically despite the challenges we faced socially, economically, and politically. And we did it all unapologetically. So to the most resilient class Brandeis University has ever seen. I know the journey hasn't been easy, so please be proud of yourself. Keep being passionate. Keep standing in your truth. Hold with you the lessons this experience has taught you. As we go on I wish you the sunniest days. Always remember when the storm hits, let the lighting be your flashlight. Don't let it strike you down, use it to lead the way.