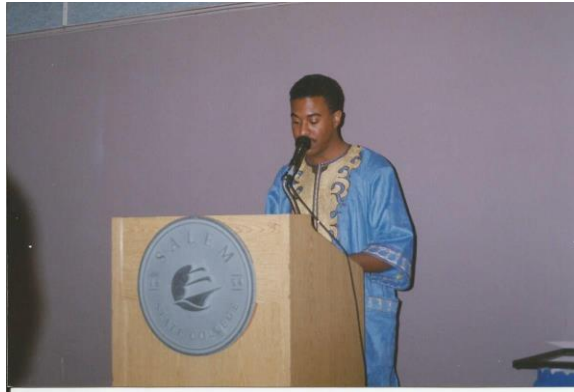


Duty and Opportunity

by Ken Granderson

As delivered to the audience of the Commencement Luncheon of
Salem State Colleges 189th Commencement Exercises
on May 22nd, 1999



I am honored and somewhat surprised to stand before you here today.

I am honored because people whom I do not know; people whom I have never met before today have chosen to confer their highest possible honor upon me. While I do not work to seek the validation or approval of others, I must say that to be recognized in such a way is very exciting and reassures me that I am on the right path towards achieving my future goals. So, to those who selected me from the thousands of others who could have received this award, I thank you for this much needed moment of appreciation of my efforts to bring communities of color into the Information Age.

I will keep my comments brief, but will take this opportunity to do some thank-yous and share a few thoughts.

For those of us who believe in a Higher Power, in the name of your Higher Power, I say “thank you” for the benefit of being born in this time and place, where I have the opportunity to create my own destiny and improve the lives of others.

I would like to thank my ancestors, both biological and philosophical, for their struggles and accomplishments which have made it possible for me to do things on a daily basis which they were not even able to imagine.

I would like to thank my mother and father for a loving home, for encouraging me to explore my interests, and for providing me with a solid moral foundation of honesty, integrity, humility, a strong work ethic and an entrepreneurial spirit. My mother is present here today. My father left this earth a year and a half ago, but he is present in many ways through my brother and myself.

I would like to thank my brother, who is also here today, for introducing me to philosophies of personal achievement that have formed the foundation of all of my professional and community accomplishments for which I am being honored here today.

I would like to thank my friends and business associates, who assist me in manifesting my various accomplishments and provide me with support and sounding boards that help keep me focused and grounded.

And I would like to thank my electronic circle of friends, who help me maintain a global perspective on the issues, attitudes and opportunities that impact us all.

I said earlier that I do not work to seek the validation or approval of others. The two forces that drive me each day to work to achieve more and more and do better than my best are named Duty and Opportunity.

In case you had not noticed, I am a Black man. I realize that some of us live in a color-blind world, but unfortunately, neither I nor the vast majority of Black people on this planet have that luxury. Some of us think we do, but it is only a matter of time until some comment or situation slaps us back into the reality that if you are a Black person, you are going to have many different experiences than others, and these experiences will often be discouraging or unpleasant.

We face extra challenges for reasons both internal and external to the Black community. Internally, we do not have enough powerful role models of success for our young people to emulate. Externally, there are many who consciously or unconsciously see us as second-class citizens and treat us accordingly.

So as a Black man who is in the most dynamic industry on the planet, an industry created by other misfits of society, an industry that is redefining the rules of business, society and opportunity, but an industry that has no significant Black presence in its leadership, my Opportunity and Duty to stand up and be counted is clear.

My experiences in this industry have proven to me that the Opportunity to make a global impact is real and absolutely attainable. Without the benefits of external financing, family or business contacts, I have been able to do business on an international basis since the early 90's. I have the same opportunity to get my creations seen by millions as the kings of the industry. And I have an unlimited Opportunity to connect with like-minded people across the world to strategize and implement solutions to the problems that plague our society.

As far as Duty, I know that the freedoms and opportunities I take for granted were paid for by the blood of millions who have preceded me, and that I am just one link in a chain that stretches into forever in both directions. I have benefited greatly from this chain, and I have no

right to break it. Thus, each day I must do my best and better than my best, not just as a person, but as a Black person, not only because we do not live in a color-blind world, but because one of the only ways I believe we will create a color-blind world is for Black people to see ourselves reflected in positions of great power and influence in every field of human endeavor. As future Black generations see themselves represented in all industries and vocations, they will emulate that which they see and those outside the Black community will recognize that we all are, in the words of this country's founders "created equal." It is just our experiences and societal problems that make us unequal.

This is my Opportunity, this is my Duty, and I accept this task willingly and with great humility.

Thank you again for this honor, and for listening, and I wish you all the best. May all of your greatest and grandest dreams come true.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kenneth A. Granderson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.