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Van Halen once said, “Change, nothing stays the same/Unchained, yeah you hit the ground running.”

The funny thing about change is that sometimes it’s completely obvious, like graduation, and other times, we don’t even realize a change has taken place until we look back. I think many of us graduates here today could say that some of the biggest changes that happened between high school orientation and graduation have occurred within ourselves.

I’ve tried to picture how freshman me would view senior me. I think I’d be pretty impressed, but also incredibly surprised. The friends that have come and gone, getting my driver’s license, actually passing some of my most challenging classes... To senior me, these are just insignificant rungs in the ladder of high school. But to freshman me, these things were a big deal, and appear to be major accomplishments.

So now I realize that not only has my hair grown from my hideous freshman year haircut, but I have grown so much in maturity and confidence in myself as well. Freshman me could never have predicted what I am like today, and that’s a good thing. It means I’ve changed, and that’s what’s important in life. Who wants to remain stagnant?

At a time like graduation, it’s important that we all recognize these changes that have occurred within ourselves. Maybe, like me, some of you have gained confidence in yourself and your abilities. Perhaps some of you find yourselves with completely different interests. Maybe some of you aren’t happy with how you’ve changed. Regardless of the nature of each of our personal changes, we should look back on them

and try to learn from them. I think we've all heard a history teacher say, at some point in our high school careers, when the class is complaining and wondering why history is important at all, that famous history teacher line: "If we don't learn about our past, we are doomed to repeat it." Now, I'm not saying that repeating the mistakes of our personal histories can literally doom us, but knowledge of how we have changed can help us to grow and evolve.

High school graduation, the present for some of us, is a good time to look backward to the past but also forward to the future. We must realize, as young adults, that we are the results of rapid change, and our lives will continue to be defined with changes and how we handle and adapt to them.

We must also work toward creating change in our world. At this point in our lives, many of us don't know what we want to do with our futures. I know that I myself have felt a lot of stress about majors and which career path I will ultimately choose. And college is definitely the time to explore the many choices. So right now, although I can't yet choose my future career, I know I can choose the kind of person I want to be to be able to create change in the world.

And we can all make that choice, right here, right now, today. Who do you want to be? What kind of mark- what kind of change- do you want to leave on the world? What do you want to be remembered for? What and who are you leaving those permanent fingerprints on? When I think about the changes I would like to see in our world, so many ideas come to mind: a United States with an environment of wellness, rather than waste; a political and social environment of cooperation, rather than contention; a world where the underprivileged find successes, rather than struggles; and a

world community of awareness rather than unfairness. All, at this moment, appear to be impossible, utopian goals. However, if we work together, we have the ability to create immense change. Let's finally be the generation to bring positive changes to our world instead of negative. If we don't step up, who will?

As the Greek philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus said, "Change is the only constant." Change will come whether we like it or not- here it is today, finally for some, much too soon for others. Sometimes change hurts. Sometimes we don't want to have to say goodbye to the past. And it's so incredibly hard to even verbalize how change can scare us into fleeing back into our old selves. But if we learn to embrace change and use it as a tool, we are essentially living our lives to the fullest.

Class of 2009, don't be afraid to befriend change and let it take you places you could never see yourself before. We all have it in us- we made it here today! We've been unchained; let's hit the ground running. Don't forget how far we've all come in the last four years- and good luck finding out how far we can go!