THE NEW SCHOOL

2008 University Commencement Remarks from Janine Nabers

President Kerrey, Provost Lee, Trustees, Deans and Officers, Honored Guests, Family and Friends. I am pleased to be standing here today...

On November 5th, 1951 Time Magazine printed an article in reference to the younger generation living in America. They were children born during the depression, the children of bricklayers and WWI heroes, the great grandchildren of slaves and slave owners. During the political reign of Coolidge, Hoover, Roosevelt and Truman they sat by their plastic radios and black and white TVs as they watched the stock market crash, the rising of Adolph Hitler, the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and the Cold War.

50 million youth. All born between 1925 and 1945, (Sandwiched between wars) deemed by their elders as the "silent generation."

 $50\ \mbox{million}$ faces. One label: A generation without a cause.

Despite this stigma, these 50 million persevered. They saw an America in desperate need of change and they demanded it: Becoming a movement of fearless individuals who shouted in the face of adversity. Out of their fight to be heard came voices like Gloria Steinem, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King; artists like Andy Warhol and Bob Dylan.

This is the generation we've read about in countless history books, during a time in America, when change went beyond political boundries. It was a people's revolution. A movement.

This is the generation of our parents and grandparents.

In a recent article, Time Magazine has singled out the younger generation of America yet again:

Born between the years of 1961 and 1986, we have been labeled as the "slacker generation." Or The new silent generation of X and Y. We are the children of Kennedy, Nixon, Reagan, Clinton, Bush and hopefully not McCain. We are the products of divorce and single parent households: We've been called "a rootless generation of cynics and drifters."

Yet despite these labels, this year alone, the younger generation of America has applied to Colleges in record numbers and our generational turnout in this years election was extraordinary.

We've been deemed the new silent generation but that doesn't mean we have to be.

When I first came to the New School I questioned my decision to come here. I was one of seven playwrights from all over the world sitting in a single room and I had no idea what my worldview was. I struggled with finding my voice as an artist— not because I was scared of speaking out, but because I questioned whether or not what I had to say was worth hearing.

And then the levee broke in Louisiana.

I sat on the phone with my parents as they told me their stories about my family living in Lafayette, Lake Charles, and Baton Rouge. It was my mother's voice one evening as she told me about volunteering to help the Katrina victims near our home in Houston. It was the picture she painted with her words as she walked by the screaming babies and uncovered corpses: A portrait of negligence, sadness, and desperation. A portrait of shame and confusion.

That was my catalyst moment. The single moment when I realized that my worldview was staring me straight in the face and it was so massive that I couldn't get it all out in one play; even now, at the end of my thesis year, I still can't get it all out in the plays I continue to write.

As we gather here in our caps and gowns—every one of us has made many sacrifices to be here. Every single one of us has struggled with self-doubt as we ask ourselves "What do I as a professional have to say that's worth hearing?"

I'd be lying if I said I'm not scared that my voice as a writer will be lost in masses. That my education at the New School and writing theater for a social cause will go unnoticed and that I'll wake up one day and realize that I've spent my entire life writing plays in the dark—disconnected from the world around me.

And then I think of the 4,000 soldiers that have lost their lives in Iraq.

I think of the 50 bullets that went through the body of Sean Bell.

I think of the 45 million uninsured Americans that walk the streets everyday.

And my voice is loud. And angry. And brave.

We have been deemed the silent generation but that doesn't mean we have to be.

I stand in front of 2,200 people that are receiving their bachelors, masters and PhD's. 2,200. Eight Schools. One University.

We are the media theorists, architects, writers, designers, philosophers, and creative artists of a new millennium. We are the generation of Iraq, Darfur, Katrina, 9/11 and HIV/AIDS.

Because of these things we cannot continue to be silent. We face critical times that demand critical action and even though we may not have all found our voices yet— we must be a generation of people finding their individual voices and then joining together as a community in pursuit of change.

For the class of 2008...our people's revolution goes much further than the simple act of voting. Or getting a great education—

With the tools that have been instilled in us, OUR VOICES can be the change that this America aspires to, by picking up the pieces of a country that has fallen into yet another recession.

Our people's revolution with be the act of rebuilding...

By wiping the death marks off the dilapidated homes in lower ninth—

By saying NO to one more year of an unpopular war—

By fighting the corporate forces that are threatening our environment—

By writing letters to our congressmen and women about the genocide in Chad—

Like our parents and grandparents before us—these actions and many *many* others will be *our* marching through the streets of Montgomery. They'll be *our* songs of peace on the steps of Washington.

It's been an honor spending the last three years of my life in this city that never sleeps with the people of The New School. There is no doubt in my mind that with our words and our actions, we too will be the next great generation of leaders.

In the words of the late John F Kennedy...

"A revolution is coming—a revolution which will be peaceful if we are wise enough; compassionate if we care enough; successful if we are fortunate enough—a revolution is coming whether we will it or not.. All this will not be finished in the first hundred days. Nor will it be finished in the first thousand days, nor even perhaps in our lifetime. But let us begin."

Thank you.