

Common Sense at NCCU

Contributed by Jonathan Alexander -- Black College Wire
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Hip-hop artist delivers strong message

DURHAM — When hip-hop icon, lyricist, author, activist and actor, Common spoke at N.C. Central University in the McLendon-McDougald Gymnasium on April 4, everyone listened. Everyone listened because he stressed a message a lot of students said they didn't expect. He started the night with a freestyle rap. His rhymes wooed the crowd, especially when he shouted out Baynes Hall and Eagle Landing Dormitories and Chicken Wednesday and Fish Friday. "Acappella, no instrumental. Respect to everybody here at North Carolina Central. I'm telling you yo, we got the lanes. They told me I could go out and hang at Baynes," he rapped. He added "I got the stuff y'all, I keep standing. They said take it up a level and go to Eagle Landing." "I'll be the sensei. I should have been here for yo Chicken Wednesday. This is like my day, maybe I'll be here for the Fish Friday." Common ended the freestyle with the lines "My people if you take this, I came to North Carolina Central to talk about greatness," and began his speech. Common encouraged students to use their gifts to perform at the highest level. He said by doing so you influence others to reach their highest level. When Common thinks of people who are great, he thinks Michael Jordan, Oprah, Martin Luther King Jr., Muhammed Ali and he said the greatest, "Jesus." His three points of emphasis on how to achieve greatness were: find your path, believe in your path and live it. Common said the story and pictures of Emmet Till influenced him the most. He said he was a ball boy for the Chicago Bulls when he was younger. Every night he had to walk down a dark tunnel under the stadium to carry the equipment. One day while he was walking under the tunnel he said he felt the spirit of Emmet Till say there was something great in him. From then on he felt the responsibility to be great. Common talked extensively about his path to greatness as an artist with minimal support from his mother initially. His favorite quote was "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God." Common warned students that challenges will come as you arise but you have to continue to work hard to overcome them. That is the message social work senior Sherri Feaster said influenced her the most. Feaster said she was initially apprehensive about going because she isn't a hip-hop fan. But something in her told her to go. "I really needed to hear him," she said. "I really needed to hear him because I was struggling a little bit." Mass Communication sophomore Christopher Moore said he was inspired by Common's speech as well. "I think this was confirmation of my passion, my dreams, my ambitions," Moore said. "I don't think it was a mistake that I was here." Common concluded his speech by answering questions from the audience. One student told him he admired the speech and asked how an aspiring artist like himself could get Common's label to listen to his music. The question made some laugh. It made others gasp. But the gasps increased when Common told the student to give his tape to SGA President Reggie McCrimmon and McCrimmon would deliver it to him.

When another student asked about rap lyrics and their degradation of women, Common said he didn't agree with it because he respects women. He replied "I think we have to change the way we think in the community and then hip-hop won't reflect that [degradation]."

Jonathan Alexander is assistant editor/sports editor at the Campus Echo, the North Carolina Central University student newspaper, where a version of this story was originally published.