Stellenbosch University's convocation speech was expected to be reconciliatory. Instead, history was made.

"We can no longer be seen as a group of noisy and lazy black students; it is not acceptable. This is all about unity."

The first black woman to address the Stellenbosch University convocation was, by and large, expected to pen a reconciliatory address. She spoke to a predominantly white audience, who were encouraged to come in droves by AfriForum and other alumni to ensure the conservative message prevailed. Perhaps they would have preferred it if she had spoken about hot summer days in the Boland sipping chilled white wine. Perhaps they expected jokes about learning to soakle and a reflection on the strides made at the institution in the quest for transformation.

But as Laurel Thatcher Ulrich once said, well-behaved women seldom make history. In less than 25 minutes, Nigerian born and Eastern Cape-raised Lovelyn Chidimma Ntirne Nwadeyi barged her way into the university's history books. She used her flawless Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa to tear through all of the institution's holy cows, calling it out on its tributes to the architects of apartheid and the use of Afrikaans as a means to exclude and oppress.

"I know that a lot of people who know me were expecting me to do the whole kumbaya thing. I am known as a person of reconciliation and unity building, and that is a part of me. But this was a different moment," said Nwadeyi of the speech, which, by yesterday, had attracted more than 32,000 views online and countless shares on social media.

The convocation was supposed to sit on November 5, but was postponed until last week because of student protests, which saw Nwadeyi on the front lines. During the FeesMustFall protests, she was there in the early hours of the morning, negotiating politely with police officers and furious motorists, urging them not to assault or run over students barricading roads with their bodies. Ever pragmatic, the international studies master's graduate was regarded by university authorities and her fellow students alike as a voice of reason. When she spoke, the students called her mbokodo, a sign of respect to their resolute female leader.

On the fourth day of the protests, she delivered an impassioned speech at midnight to thousands of students who had come from the residences to hear what the protesters had to say. It was her birthday, and the crowd started off by singing to her. She told them: "I am going to say something and I need you to accept it in the correct spirit. My dear white friends, we can't have you showing up at night and not show up during the day. This is the truth about what I am saying.

"Tomorrow is the last day of the week and it may be the last chance for us to force management to accept the terms we have given them, so we need this turnout to convince them."

My dear white friends, we can't have you showing up at night and not show up during the day. This is the truth about what I am saying.

LOVELYN NWADEYI
newsmaker
by S'thembile Cele

PROVOCATIVE
Lovelyn Nwadeyi
PHOTO: NASIRI MANE

READ THE GREAT UNIVERSITY DEBATE IN VOICES

This material has been copied under a DAVID License and is not for resale or retransmission