

Baccalaureate Address given Sunday, May 12, 2013 by The Reverend Dr. Deborah Little Wyman, founder & missionary, Common Cathedral & Ecclesia Ministries

Following Your Feet

Photograph by Stuart Watson



Deborah Little Wyman

*Caminante, no hay camino,
Se hace camino al andar.* —Antonio Machado
Traveler, there is no way.
The way is made by walking.

Thank you *all*, for welcoming me. I am honored. And especially, as you know I come bearing two uncomfortable realities for most of us: homelessness, and “the church.” I am so grateful.

One day, in 1985—I was director of communications at Harvard Law School—I was driving up Mass Avenue to a press conference and I was on my phone with a *NY Times* reporter. I stopped at a red light, and I just happened to glance to my right. Sitting on the steps of an entrance to my own apartment complex was a woman surrounded by all her belongings in paper bags. I heard my own silent voice say, I want to have a life in which I could go

and sit with that woman until she has what she wants. I had been uneasily aware for some time that despite how much I loved my work, 35 years in publications and communications, something else was lying in wait for me. An unexplained itch was not going away.

A few months earlier, the rector of the church I’d gone to for a few years initially for the music, sat me down and told me he thought I was a priest. I had stormed out of his office and stomped down Newbury Street in Boston saying with every muscle, *no no no*. I grew up in the ‘60s and had no desire to be anywhere near something as hierarchical as I knew the church could be. Besides that, I wasn’t spiritual enough. I was a writer. I couldn’t stand up in front of people and talk. I needed a salary, a job description, benefits. I couldn’t afford seminary, and from what I’d heard, I wouldn’t pass ordination exams. These two “invitations” literally felt unbidden and unwelcome into my life.

How do people do things that are impossible? What followed for me were several years in an excruciating cavern between one life and another I couldn’t yet see. I had a grip on my dear-ly-won seat as a responsible tax paying adult, and I was sifting and sorting through the rich soil of wounds and dreams that life so generously provides each of us. How far could I roam and still be me. A sure sign of new direction is the prize combo of fear, doubt, and insecurity.

In the early ‘70s I worked with Edwin Land, founder of Polaroid, as he was inventing a major advance in instant film. After a very long day with skeptical shareholders, he turned from us to retreat into his lab. As he went, I heard him say, as if to himself, “There’s nothing so fragile as a new idea.”

What happened to me was a slow stripping of layers of myself I thought I couldn’t live without. One day I evidently hit bottom with my *no*, and I said “yes”—out loud, quietly, to myself. Immediately, the knot in my stomach loosened. I became curious. What might I do with both ministry and caring for that woman on the steps. I resigned from all my nonprofit boards and started volunteering in a new women’s shelter in Cambridge. The director wanted me to do communications and development work, of course, but I was there to move closer to the women, to basic needs, to just sit still, on those hard folding chairs, and listen.

I fell in love, with the simplicity, the women, the no nonsense, bare vulnerability, truthfulness, no justifications or explanations. Lives with no footnotes, just out there on the page. It was the beginning of a slow turning from a life I loved to another, very different one. I wanted to take what I had experienced as the gifts of church—community, celebration, acceptance, continuity, accompaniment, silence and music, the gifts I knew first hand—out to people who could not, for whatever reason, come in to receive them. Here was a way for my energy from civil rights, anti-war, free speech, women’s rights, AIDS and other actions, a way to bring together my best political and social impulses, with my best skills (writing, creating something new, networking, being outdoors, organizing, talking with people, and especially one person at a time), to create an environment in which people who have nothing could make a safe, kind community.

You know you are on to something when the interesting people start cheering and the institution digs in its heels. The diocese did not think a priest belonged on the street. I think it’s in the job description of authorities to make innovators miserable. Important to remember that’s the job they—and not we—have chosen. But still, we have practicality, including a living wage, responsibilities and fear to protect us from change. So a yes is the beginning of a long trip requiring all the faithfulness and doggedness we can muster.

Friends reminded me of old truths: “just keep doing what you are doing” and “you know Debbie, sometimes it’s not enough to be right.” I needed to keep doing the ministry, collecting stories that would make the necessary bridges to change old thinking. As I fell more and more in love with folks on the street, I

felt *their* support and became better at putting words on what we were doing. Over time, as the ministry became real and more public, many radio, TV and print pieces appeared, and I began to hear us referred to as a movement, and that our street ministry was changing the church, breaking it open, giving it meaning, and changing how people understood homelessness.

We all navigate in spheres starved for innovation. Individually and collectively our very integrity depends on new vision, requiring every last ordinary one of us to show up.

In fact, it’s true, in the beginning I didn’t know what I was doing. I made up street ministry as I went along. “What are you doing out here?” I was asked by a man I’d greeted for two weeks passing by his panhandling spot. This was the dreaded question not just Jack, but my bishop was asking. We’re standing there, eye to eye, Jack, his outstretched cup into which a passer by had just dropped a coin—and brand x, middle class me, in a clergy collar. He looked me in the eye, he, having nothing to hide or lose. He said, “Doing good is a hustle too, you know.” In no time, I was panhandling too.

Street church doesn’t cost anything, but I needed a salary. Two things I felt passionate about made fundraising very tough. I insisted that we are not an outreach project. We are a church that has no way to support itself. I would say, “We don’t need your money as much as you need to come and be with us.” Second, donors love successes and I had to resist the temptation to sell our ministry as a solution to homelessness. People we referred to as “the chronically homeless” are dearest to my heart and they are by definition likely never to go, as we say, “in” or make life changes that people who live as we do consider worth supporting.

After two years of hanging out on park benches, subway stations, heating grates and train tunnels in Boston, during the week before Easter 1996, I had the idea that we could actually have an outdoor worshipping church. I sensed people were waiting to be gathered. That Easter I set up a folding table on Boston Common and 10 brave souls came. I hadn’t asked permission or planned this to be regular, but the next day as I made my street rounds, several men who had not even been at the service told me they’d see me on Sunday. Celebration is deeply sought by people who by our standards have nothing to celebrate.

I learned that church can be made from the shards of real life and is big enough to welcome the bloody faces, raw truths, drunken gospel singing, cigarette smoking, seizures, nakedness, squabbling, ecstasy and despair. Dave overdoses on Listerine waiting for the Sunday morning bootlegger and the EMTs drive into the middle of our church to pick him up. We pray for him and I’ll head to the ER at Boston Medical after the service. John needs his new wheelchair blessed. “Here, I have a song for ya,” says Jimmy grinning and singing rounds of “God bless the Boston Red Sox” as we start our prayers. Micky has a shoebox full of baby rats she wants baptized.

We created a pastoral care team to visit in hospitals, plus common art and common cinema. Part of making it up as I went along included how to handle all the offers of help, and how to ensure the physical and emotional safety of people working with us, and I found myself chaplain to the new social services teams. I realized we needed disciplined self reflection to prevent burnout. I required volunteers and seminarians to attend Al-Anon, have spiritual directors, and attend team reflection meetings.

I was determined that the ministry survive the founder’s leaving and I knew that meant I shouldn’t stay too long. This is one of the hardest things, but it worked. Today Common Cathedral Boston is in its third generation of leadership. I left my ministry and my salary and miraculously received a Ford Foundation grant to support what I call the mission work of helping people start street ministries and churches. Today we are some 270 affiliates in the US, Brazil, Australia and the UK involved in about 130 ministries: Church of the Advocate in Asheville, Church of the Common Ground in Atlanta, Open Cathedral in San Francisco, Common Cathedral in Longmont, CO, Street Church in Cincinnati, Igreja na Rua in Rio de Janeiro, Church on the Green in New Haven, the Bridge Church in Guerneville, CA, Grace Street Ministry in Portland, ME, Welcome Church in Philadelphia, and so on.

Now that there are many with experience in this ministry, we have a large team of mentors for new ministries. I could be hit by a scooter tomorrow and the ministry would thrive. We receive new inquiries and are connected by a listserv, a website, a Facebook page and a director. Simple links maintained by volunteers.

Yes has a life of its own.

A small good thing. You get an idea, let the idea get you, help it to grow just by following your feet, as soon as you know how to do something really well, teach someone else how to do it and let it go, keep giving it away, give it away. Tell stories about it, invite people to be part of it.

We each hold a unique, fragile idea, a small good thing, the question that needs to be asked, the answer that needs to be tried. An angle on the problem no one else has. No one else can do that thing. It’s yours. You’ll know it when it comes. *Inshallah*. May it be so.

Penn Commencement Address given on Monday, May 13, 2013 by Penn President Amy Gutmann at Franklin Field.

A Rewarding Lifetime of Service

Photograph by Marguerite F. Miller



Amy Gutmann

Chairman Cohen, Trustees, Vice President Biden and honored guests, families, friends and alumni: welcome to the 257th commencement of the University of Pennsylvania!

To the members of the amazing Class of 2013: This morning when you awoke, I know you thought, as I did, “This is it! This is the day... I get to wear regalia!”

And may I say you look fabulous!

Perhaps we should consider making robes a regular part of our wardrobe... or maybe not.

Regardless of whether you ever wear robes again, they connect you this morning with generations of Penn graduates who came before.

At Penn’s seventh commencement, two hundred and fifty years ago, Benjamin Franklin, our founder, was seated among the dignitaries. It was the only Penn commencement that Franklin would ever attend. No doubt he felt the same thrill of hope for the future that—looking out at our graduates—you feel, Mr. Vice President.

Our surroundings serve to remind us of the deep connection of this University to public service, and of the essential connection of public service to hope for our future. In the depths of the Great Depression, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt came here, to Franklin Field at the University of Pennsylvania, to accept his party’s nomination to run for a second term.

Where others sensed decline and despair, FDR saw hope—but only if every citizen stood forth in service to others. “To some generations much is given...” he famously said. “Of other generations much is expected. This generation... has a rendezvous with destiny.”

Graduates, of your generation of Penn graduates much has been given... and much is also expected. Your rendezvous with destiny—and nothing less than the hope of our society and much of the world—depends, above all else, upon your using your Penn education to lead a rewarding life of service.

When Ben Franklin was asked by a friend how could he repay the kindnesses Franklin had bestowed upon him, Franklin advised: “Let good offices [meaning good deeds] go round, for Mankind are all of a family.” There is a word for this virtuous circle of service: citizenship. Good citizens do not just vote. Good citizens do not just campaign for their favorite candidates—important though voting and campaigning are, as our Vice President surely can attest!

Good citizenship encompasses every facet of life. It is an expansive engagement with others, and it reflects fundamentally on who we are as people.

You, Members of the Class of 2013, have already shown yourselves to be great citizens of Penn and of the Family of Humankind.

Working at our United Community Clinic, caring for members of our Philadelphia community who would otherwise go without, are hundreds of students from our Schools of Nursing, Dental Medicine, Arts & Sciences, Social Policy & Practice and the Perelman School of Medicine.

Every year, our Barbara and Edward Netter Center for Community Partnerships engages thousands of Penn students in service-based coursework—more than 60 courses annually—addressing everything from education and health care, to unemployment and economic well-being in West Philadelphia.

You have demonstrated that the best way to combine learning well and living well is by serving others.

Yet you can’t help but wonder—with some anxiety—what lies ahead? How do you combine a great career with good work?

In my own life, the greatest satisfactions have never been the quickest wins. As a newly-minted PhD, I earned an average starting academic salary, about \$200 a week.

This was more than double the peak earnings of what my hero—my father—ever earned before he died, when I was in high school. Unlike my father, I had many more lucrative options for a career. Had I taken any of those roads more traveled, I would never be here and never had such a rewarding career.

The contributions of a Penn education can never be rightly measured by your first paycheck or even your lifetime income. At the end of the day, it won’t be what you take but what you give that matters.

A previous Penn commencement speaker, Denzel Washington, said it best: of every funeral procession you have ever seen, how many times has the hearse been pulling a U-Haul?

There are so many ways everyone can serve and it’s never too soon to start.

Early in high school, my first job was washing dishes at a sleep-away summer camp for disadvantaged children. I later became a counselor at this camp, and still count spending time with those children as among the most satisfying summers of my life.

Like almost all of my campers, 10-year-old Dana’s family was on assistance. Her single mom worked three jobs housecleaning, but lived below the poverty line. Dana seemed unrelentingly sad, and often acted out, except when she had my attention. She told me she felt sad and guilty that her mom couldn’t come to camp with her because her mom was the one who worked so hard to support Dana’s entire family.

One of my goals that summer became to dispel Dana’s guilt. Now, dispelling guilt does not come naturally to anyone who—like me—has been raised well by a Jewish mother and father. But being happy and guilty—now that might be achievable. And I was also taught that to save one person is to save the world.

So I set out to prove to Dana that if she worked really hard to become the camp leader in her age group—as she did—that her mother would be so proud. After camp ended, Dana’s mother wrote me to say that Dana came home much happier, and better behaved.

In college, I was a work-study student and substitute teacher at an inner-city high school. I’ll never forget my first day as a substitute teacher. A veteran teacher entered my homeroom and, in front of all my students, sternly shouted at me: “take your seat with all the other students.” That unforgettable moment taught me an invaluable lesson in overcoming humiliation.

My story is far from unique. Everyone we are honoring today will tell you that their beginnings were humble, and that their greatest satisfactions have come from serving others.

To today’s Penn graduates, I say: Share this citizenship of service. You have been successful at Penn precisely because you’ve been such strong citizens of our University community.

Now destiny awaits your success as citizens of your society and the world. Your efforts will bring unrivalled and often unexpected rewards for the good deeds you do.

Today is your celebratory day. I know you will go forth proud not only in your lifelong advantages but also—and far more importantly—avid in your obligations to serve as citizens. Certainly, we will always be proud of how your Penn education taught you to relish the joys of great citizenship. And you can be sure that I will be avid in my admiration of you.

But—as I am about to prove to you—I am far from alone in my admiration. So, I ask that we all stand and join together now—proud moms and dads, spouses and partners, grandmas and grandpas, sisters and brothers, family and friends, honored guests, my fellow trustees and faculty—in unison with our graduates—in showing them and the world right now just how proud, boisterously proud, we are of their Penn citizenship!

Thank you!

Remarks given Monday, May 13, 2013 by Dwight Jaggard, Professor of Electrical and Systems Engineering; and Incoming Chair of the Faculty Senate.

Detecting Your Mission

Good morning everyone— Vice President Joe Biden and honored guests, President Amy Gutmann, Provost Vince Price, Deans, faculty and our most important attendees, graduating students and their families.

I am Dwight Jaggard, chair of the Penn Faculty Senate and I am delighted to join you in this festive occasion that is a marker of your transition from being students of Penn to becoming alums of Penn.

There is a story I have told once before and it seems appropriate to use it at this place in the program. Here I can identify with Al Gore, who when being one of a number of speakers said, “I feel a bit like the fifth husband of actress Zsa Zsa Gabor. I know just what is expected of me... but I am not sure I can keep it interesting.” Well, this morning I will try to do both what is expected of me and also will try to keep it interesting.

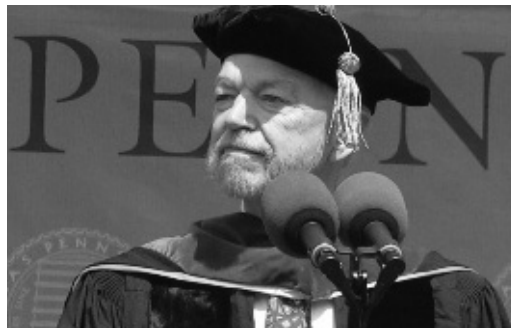
For the expected part, it is my great pleasure to congratulate you on behalf of more than 4,000 members of Penn’s faculty. Without students and graduates, there would be, of course, no university. The majority of us who are faculty have been here during your entire time at Penn—we have applauded your success, watched you mature as intellectuals and have been amazed at your talent and understanding. In some sense, we each took a chance on each other several years ago. Isn’t it great that it has paid off? You made the right choice and so did we! I wish you well in the years ahead. So, *felicitaciones, badhā ’i hō, mazel tov, gōng xǐ nǐ*, or simply congratulations from Penn’s faculty!

On the matter of being interesting, I would like to leave you with one thought for today. In a time where people are announcing their re-invention, their own transformation, their readiness to grab the next wave, there are some words of wisdom from a figure I often bring to the attention of my students in my leadership classes. That person is Victor Frankl. Frankl was a survivor of the holocaust, an inspiring author and an Austrian neurologist and psychotherapist. His book, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, is a classic in that it provides

insight into how the human spirit can survive suffering. In Frankl’s case it was suffering through the Holocaust. *Man’s Search for Meaning* also lays the groundwork for Frankl’s pioneering logotherapy, a new approach to analysis focused on meaning. As I have changed

and modulated my own career, one idea that has been very helpful has been Victor Frankl’s suggestion to “detect your mission.” This idea of detection is wonderful since it assumes that we all have a mission, a purpose, a deep reason for being on the planet. This is something that I deeply believe. [Of course I acknowledge that this mission, this purpose, can change over time.]

So, I encourage you who are graduates, to consider your own core values, strengths and passions... your opportunities, wide open vistas, and a multitude of available paths... and take some time to bring all of these together and to detect your mission, to find your purpose, to find your authentic self, and to discover how and where you will make your contribution. The search will be well worth it. And I wish you the very best of success in this next venture.

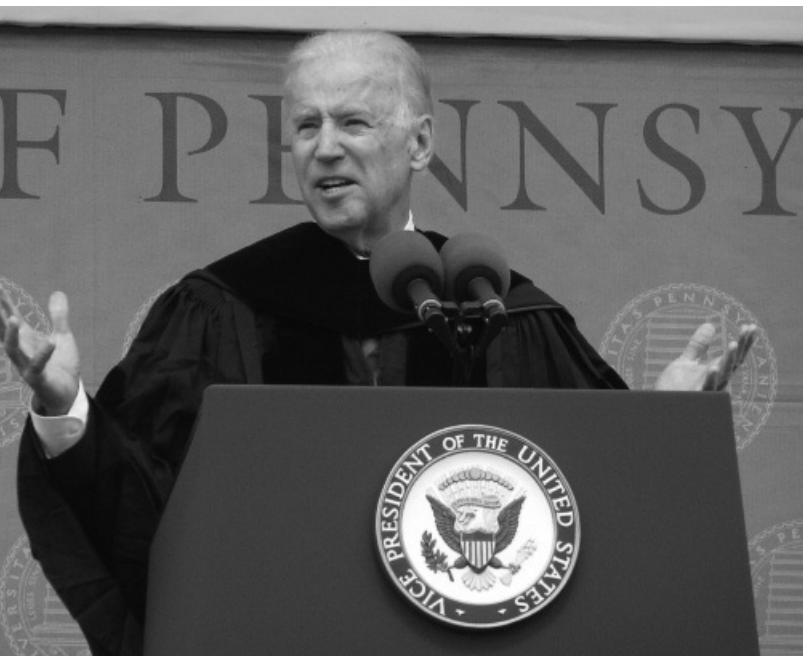


Photograph by Marguerite F. Miller

Dwight Jaggard

Penn Commencement Address given on Monday, May 13, 2013 by Joseph R. Biden, Jr., the 47th Vice President of the United States

A Chance to Write a New Chapter



Joseph R. Biden, Jr.

Thank you. Thank you Provost Price. Thank you very much. It’s an honor to be with you today. Thank you all. Please be seated.

Madame President, the last time I was in Franklin Field, I was watching my oldest son before a crowd of hundreds play lightweight football against Harvard, and I believe they won. And as I was saying to my co-honorees today, this is a much cheaper way to get a degree, isn’t it?

Madame President, thank you, thank you for the honor. I have the dubious distinction of not having—well let me put it this way—there’ll be no U-Haul truck behind my casket. When I did my financial disclosure as Vice President the first time, the *Washington Post* said, “it’s probable no man has assumed the office of Vice President with fewer assets than Joe Biden.” I hope they were talking financial assets! Then there was all this discussion about why I had no money. I’ll tell you why I had no money: four years of Penn, three years of Syracuse, four years at Georgetown, three years at Yale, two years at Tulane, two years at Penn, and now a granddaughter at Penn. I was asked why I wore a Penn tie. My answer is “I earned it.”

Faculty, distinguished guests, parents, grandparents, friends, all graduates: congratulations, and special congratulations and thanks to those of you who are going to be commissioned in the United States Military today. You are about to join the finest group of warriors the world has ever seen. Ever, ever seen. My hat is off to you.

To all the parents, I offer you special congratulations today. Not only have your sons and daughters completed an education at what my daughter and my granddaughter and my son say is the finest university in America. Not sure how my son who went to Yale feels about that, but I happen to agree with my other son. Ladies and gentlemen, parents, you’re also about to get a pay raise, unless your child is going on to graduate school. As I indicated, two of my children have graduated from this great university, and my granddaughter who is here with me today, just finished her first year and survived pledging at Penn. So your pride is justified. Not only because it took an awful lot of hard work for all of you to get to this day, I promise you all of you graduates, it’s worth it.

I read the headlines today on the way up... the Associated Press has said “Biden to Offer Advice to Penn Graduates.” I have gained too much wisdom to offer any advice. I’ve been around too long to know that’s not useful. But I would like to make a couple of observations. No graduating class gets to choose the world into which they graduate. Every graduating class faces unique challenges. Every class enters the history that up to this point has been written for you. But few enter at a point where they genuinely have a chance to write a new chapter, to bend history just a little bit. I would

(continued on next page)

PENN COMMENCEMENT 2013

Address by Joseph R. Biden, Jr., the 47th Vice President of the United States (continued from previous page)

suggest your class has that chance, and I acknowledge it creates anxiety, probably more—and I mean this seriously—among your parents than you. I understand, because my generation faced the same kind of questions and uncertainties. All you have to do is look at the headlines. When I graduated in 1968, and now. And today you see headlines in the *Washington Post*, January 2, 2013 saying “The world is baffled by the ‘fiscal cliff,’ sees it as a sign of American decline.” The July after I graduated in ‘68, the same publication declared, “Pollsters report decline in US standing abroad.” When you see the headlines in the *Wall Street Journal* of November this past year about “widespread fiscal and economic uncertainty,” I remember the headline in April of ‘68, the same publication that said, “US in worst fiscal crisis since 1931.” My generation heard the same voices of doom and despair that your generation hears today. “American decline,” “America’s lost its way,” “whither America?” What those voices do not and did not understand is that in both instances—yours and mine—we graduated into a world that had changed: the world of William Butler Yeats. Writing about his Ireland in a poem called “Easter 1916,” he said, “All changed, changed utterly: A terrible beauty is born.”

Old answers, the policies of the previous generation that has served my generation so well, have little applicability to the world into which I was graduating. On the eve of my graduation, Dr. King had been assassinated, the Vietnam War was raging, and in the shadow of my convocation, Robert Kennedy was assassinated. Our political system was in chaos. But as we strode across that stage to receive our diplomas, to a person we were absolutely confident that the naysayers were wrong, and that there were significant possibilities available to us. We ended the war in Vietnam, we ended the nuclear stalemate, the Soviet Union secured civil rights, fundamentally altered women’s rights for the better, began an environmental movement that’s far from finished, ushered in an information age that shrunk the world beyond recognition and in the process lay the foundation for a period of technological innovation that generated the world’s strongest economy in the 70s, 80s and the 90s. Today, you’re all graduating into another world that has changed equally and profoundly. Different dangers and different possibilities. Climate change left unattended by people with whom I work, and I marvel at whether they got an education. I’m serious. To deny climate change today, as my brother Jim would say, “go figure.” International terrorism, stateless actors, pandemic disease, a political movement that can be organized from your cell phone, Twitter can literally unleash a revolution, and ground-breaking journalism can be transmitted around the world from your kitchen table. Today’s technology has transformed the way we interact with the rest of the world and among one another. There are more voices today than ever influencing governments and the course of events, so it should be no surprise why those who understand this world less well than you do feel uneasy.

But I’m not at all surprised by the confidence you all feel today as you graduate from this great University. You are so much better prepared and you’ve already begun to change things significantly, even before you’ve stepped off this field. Just look at what’s happened since you’ve entered college. The fundamental shift that’s taken place in America with regard to the LGBT community, fundamental—now an absolute majority of the American people are fully supportive of extending all rights to the LGBT community, including the right to choose who they marry. Eleven states have already moved on marriage equality. That’s you! On immigration, there is now overwhelming support among the American people to bring 11 million undocumented men, women and children out of the shadows, on the path to earn citizenship. And that’s all changed within the last four years. We’ve ended the war in Iraq and we will end the war in Afghanistan. And economically, we regained our footing. Today, we’re better positioned than any nation in the world to lead the 21st century. I love to hear people tell me—now to use the vernacular—“China’s going to eat our lunch.” China’s a great nation, and we should hope for the continued expansion, but ladies and gentlemen, their problems are immense, and they lack much of what we have.

We have the best universities in the world, we have a legal system that is open and fair, we have the most agile venture capitalists in the world, we lead the world in innovation and technology, all for a simple basic reason. Steve Jobs, speaking at Stanford, was asked by a young man “how can I be more like you? How can I become like you?” Steve Jobs famously answered “think different.” You cannot think different in a nation where you cannot breathe free. You cannot think different in a nation where you aren’t able to challenge orthodoxy, because change only comes from challenging orthodoxy. And what you’ve learned at this great University and throughout this system is to challenge orthodoxy. That’s why today, our economy is still two and a half times bigger than any other in the world, our

workers are three times as productive as any worker in the world, high-tech manufacturing is coming back to the United States and your generation has already joined the ranks of those who are leading the world in innovation and job creation.

We’re about to enter an era of breathtaking change and progress. We’re on the cusp of innovations that will literally change the world, and some of the people who I had the honor of being honored with today with degrees can tell you more about this than I can because they’re already changing the world we live in. A world where there’d be superconductors capable of performing a million trillion calculations per second, which is one-hundred times faster than any computer on Earth today. It will revolutionize science, medicine, applied technology. 3-D printers able to restore tissue after traumatic injury and restore skin damaged by fire to unblemished skin. The ability to regenerate organs and limbs that have been damaged or lost, saving tens of thousands of lives and restoring our wounded warriors to their full capabilities. The ability in the near term of being able to engineer your white blood cells to attack cancer tumors and leave healthy cells untouched, allowing cancer patients to live out their lives without undergoing difficult and painful chemotherapy and radiation procedures. The ability to sequence the entire human genome in under an hour, delivering rapid, personalized medicine. Prosthetic legs that are able to climb mountains, prosthetic arms able to play the piano. I’ve watched just in the last four years, visiting well over 1,500 amputees, the radical change that is taking place, restoring them to full capacity, and it’s only now just beginning.

An era when utilities will make as much money saving a kilowatt hour as generating a kilowatt hour. Electric vehicles, travelling 300 miles and filling up on electrons cheaper than gasoline. Strong, lightweight materials now used by NASA cheap enough to use in cars, trucks and wind machines. Solar energy as cheap as coal and natural gas, generations before the end of this decade. Microbes and nanotechnology lowering the cost and time required to clean waste by 50%. Real-time speech translation allowing you to talk with anyone in any language at any time. High-fidelity holographic video conferencing, dramatically reducing the need for air travel. Automatically precise manufacturing allowing us to create materials that are stronger than steel and a fraction of the weight. Self-driving automobiles reducing traffic fatalities by 80% while freeing up our commute time. A world in which hunger is vanquished by crops that don’t need soil, water, fertilizer, or pesticides to thrive.

I’m not making this up. The Office of Science & Technology, the President’s group—every President has a group of brilliant scientists, part of which are headed by your President, who come and advise us on those things that are just on the cusp. By the time you stand before your children graduating from this great University, much of what I said will already have happened. All these things are on the horizon, and all of it will not only change the way we live but will create millions upon millions of new, good-paying jobs. And you’re a part of it. In fact, you’re gonna build it. You will take advantage of it. So today, for all the uncertainty you may feel, never forget the future is within your control. Don’t listen to the cynics—that’s the only piece of advice I will give you and of which I am absolutely certain. They were wrong about my generation and they’re wrong about yours.

Graduates, there’s the statement of history, it’s never ever been a good bet to bet against America, and it’s a very bad bet to bet against your generation. You’re the most competent, capable, caring generation this country has ever produced, and I’m confident you’ll write a new and better chapter of American history. So have faith. Do what you feel in your heart. The possibilities are unlimited. I spent ten days with President Xi, the new president of China, at the request of then-President Hu and President Obama, to establish a personal relationship. Tip O’Neill made famous the expression, “all politics is local.” Far be it from me to improve upon my friend Tip O’Neill, but I think all politics is personal, including international politics. Ladies and gentlemen, I looked and listened to the questions he had to ask, and the interest he had. And the President asked me, what did I think after ten days, five in China and five here? And I said, he’s a strong, bright man, but he has the look of a man who’s about to take on a job he’s not at all sure is going to end well. I mean that seriously. We are so well-positioned, we are so well-positioned to lead the world in the 21st century, that we have to take advantage of it. And you—this is not hyperbole—you, all those receiving your graduate and undergraduate degrees today, are the people that are gonna make it possible. So I say to you, congratulations and very good luck, Class of 2013. Show us what you can do, because you will be able to do more and live through a period of change more rapid and exhilarating and exciting than any generation in the history of the world. I’m just happy I’m gonna be along for part of the ride. God bless you all and may God protect our troops.