

PENN BACCALAUREATE 2017

Penn President Amy Gutmann's Baccalaureate Remarks given in Irvine Auditorium on Sunday, May 14, 2017.

Baccalaureate Welcome

Parents, families and friends, welcome to Penn's Baccalaureate Ceremony. A special welcome and thanks today to the awesome Class of 2017!

We gather here not only to celebrate but also to honor you. We do so in a reflective manner. If Commencement is a big bang of a celebration shared with the world, then this event is an opportunity shared only with family and friends to hear from a leading public intellectual. Our honored speaker is the Christopher H. Browne

It is a fitting capstone to your experiences at Penn. You—the remarkable Class of 2017—have learned and grown and advanced in so many ways in the past four years.

Your time on campus has been bookended by presidential elections. It has been punctuated by Spring Flings. Philly's third snowiest winter in history was your freshman year.

Some of you no doubt told your parents you loved the snow days because it gave you a chance to catch up on studying. Parents, they said “*a chance*.”

Yours is a class filled with Ivy League Champion athletes, with singers and dancers, and with artists and inventors. In countless classes and student groups, you've engaged for good in our community and around the world. And, of course, there was Hey Day.

You boast among you seven winners of the President's Engagement Prize and a President's Innovation Prize Winner.

Over the next year, they will work to develop after-school opportunities for South Philly Latino high school students and immigrant families; innovate healthcare case management within Philadelphia-based homeless services programs; build numeracy, literacy, and technical training programs for marginalized youth in Senegal; and increase access to software coding for everyone, no matter their training or income level.

By any measure, your Class has been and will continue to be a potent force for good in the world. This gathering is an opportunity to give thoughtful attention to all you are capable of achieving. It's also our opportunity to share our thanks for everything you mean to us.

Members of the Class of 2017 and family members: Know that wherever you go, whatever good you do, you'll always have a home and an extended family here at Penn.

So, on behalf of everybody at the University of Pennsylvania, I applaud you both for who you are and what you have achieved.

I salute you for the good that you will do, and wish you every joy along the way.

Congratulations and enjoy.



Amy Gutmann

Distinguished Professor of Psychology and MacArthur “Genius” Fellow Angela Duckworth.

This time together underscores the value of the friendships you have formed, the importance of family, and the caring Penn community that will be a cherished part of your lives forever.

The baccalaureate is an ancient custom that links us with centuries of university graduates, stretching all the way back to Medieval Oxford. As the years change, so too do our traditions. Back then, it was a test of endurance because you, the graduates, were required to listen to—and deliver!—lectures in Latin.

Today, that particular endurance test is officially waived.

As luck would have it, though, our speaker is *the* expert on endurance and matters of perseverance and passion. We are very fortunate and grateful to enjoy the originality of her ideas and the importance of her insights today.

Baccalaureate Address given in Irvine Auditorium on Sunday, May 14, 2017 by Angela Duckworth, Christopher H. Browne Distinguished Professor of Psychology, a MacArthur “Genius” Fellow and author of the New York Times best-selling book, Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance.

Develop a True Calling

Members of the faculty, proud parents, and above all, graduates of the Class of 2017:

All of you are well-aware of President Gutmann's formidable powers. Given how far your family and friends traveled for this very august occasion, you assumed she'd secure someone worth tweeting about.

Your expectations were high, and why not? Just a few weeks ago, this auditorium saw Wharton Professor Adam Grant interview Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg. Months earlier, the actress Anna Kendrick took the stage. And within the last year, Penn hosted Hillary Clinton, Elizabeth Warren, and Alec Baldwin.

But instead of a celebrity, you got a professor. Four years of sitting in lectures, and it turns out you have to sit through one more!

What can I tell you? These are desperate times.

It may provide some comfort to know that I never set out to become a professor. Once, when I was in my mid-twenties, working my way through a master's program in neuroscience, someone asked me whether I'd continue and get my doctorate, then try to join the faculty of a university somewhere. “No way,” I said. “How boring! Why would I ever want to do that?”

So how'd I get here? Not only as your speaker today but as a professor of psychology. Not only a professor of psychology, but a professor who absolutely loves what she does.

The surprising fact about people who love what they do is that there was a time when they didn't.

When I was sitting where you are, about to be launched into what my father liked to call “the real world,” I *ached* to know where my life was

heading. By your age, I'd learned how to work through a to-do list with ferocious efficiency; how to plow through the assigned reading and required problem sets. In short, how to play by the rules. But all that doesn't prepare you for the most important thing. At 22, I still didn't know what I wanted to be when I grew up.

Maybe you've been asked in recent days: “So, what are you going to do with the rest of your life?” It's a really annoying question, isn't it? I mean, a few of you *love* that question because you have an answer. But many of you—probably the majority—don't. You may even *hate* that question. You don't want to be reminded that ultimately, you do have to choose what you're going to do with your finite time on this planet.

How do you find a *calling*? That's what I want to talk about today.

My research specialty is the psychology of achievement. I've studied the Green Berets and the winners of the National Spelling Bee. I've had the privilege of interviewing Olympic gold medalists, Nobel laureate scientists, and Oscar-nominated actors. Basically, I study the sort of people you hope show up behind the podium at graduation.

Ask these remarkable individuals if they love what they do and without taking a breath, they'll look you in the eye and tell you, “Oh yes, I love what I do.”

Passion is half of a character strength I call grit. Perseverance is the other half—the more obvious half. In my research, I've found that the common denominator of high achievers is not *just* their perseverance but *also* their passion.

Earning a degree from the University of Pennsylvania means you already know a lot about perseverance: You've worked hard. You've finished what you've begun. And I applaud you for that.

But what about passion? Grit isn't just perseverance—it's perseverance *in the service of something you love*.

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Baccalaureate Address by Angela Duckworth (continued from previous page)

The paradox of passion is that it can lead to accolades and praise but is never directed toward those outward rewards.

I have a little quiz that will help explain what I mean. To take it, you first have to think of a goal. Think of a goal you'll be working toward over the next few months. I'll give you a moment.

Now that you have a picture of that goal in mind, I'm going to ask you four questions. You have a chance to earn four points—one for each question. Start keeping track...

#1: Is this goal genuinely interesting to you? If the answer is yes, you've earned a point.

#2: Does this goal tie into your core ethical, religious, or moral values? If so, then give yourself another point.

#3: Do you care about this goal at least as much as anyone else does? If so, give yourself another point.

Finally, #4: Does thinking about this goal make you giddy with the possibility of achieving it, rather than cringe imagining the consequences of falling short? If thinking about this ambition makes you smile, instead of grimace, give yourself another point.

Now, add up your points. The higher your score, the more internally motivated you are to accomplish your goal.

Recently, I gave a version of this quiz to 300 adults. In addition, to assess their long-term passion and perseverance, I had them rate themselves on what I call the Grit Scale. I found that gritty women and men tend to pursue internally motivated goals.

Likewise, when I interview world-class achievers, I find that without exception, they're driven from within, not from without.

One year, at her own graduation, one of my students gave me a thank you gift. It was a journal, and on the front was calligraphy that read: "Follow your bliss." I bet you've heard that one before.

The quote comes from Joseph Campbell, a professor of literature who taught at Sarah Lawrence College for 38 years.

"My general formula for my students," Campbell said, "is follow your bliss. Find where it is, and don't be afraid to follow it."

Campbell also said that when you follow your bliss, "doors will open where you didn't know they were going to be."

That's great advice for those of you who know exactly what you want to do from here on out.

But for most of you, this advice is not enough. Most graduates today cannot yet say what their life's passion will be. For you especially, I have good news: interests and values can develop well below conscious awareness. Strange as it may seem, many of us struggle to recognize what we enjoy and who we really are.

If you'd like to get better acquainted with your intrinsic interests, I have an assignment. You can do it right now.

Graduates, I want you to ask yourself what you like to think about.

When you have free time—time to do whatever you want—how do you spend it? What do you like to read about? When your mind wanders, where does it go? What dilates your pupils, what makes your heart beat a little faster? The answers to these questions are clues to what kindles your curiosity.

Values, too, can be deeply part of who you are and yet not top of mind. To bring them into focus, try an exercise called "values affirmation." It's astonishingly simple. You sit down and for about 10 minutes, you write about one or two values you really believe in.

That's it!

I recommend you do this assignment for homework. Why? Because research shows that writing about your values is especially helpful in times of uncertainty. Because writing is reflecting. Because affirming your core beliefs puts things into their proper perspective, helping you see the bigger picture, and your place in it.

These exercises—identifying your interests and affirming your values—are a good start. But they're just the beginning.

It can take years to develop a true calling.

Let's take Joseph Campbell as an example.

Many years before he advised his students to follow their bliss, young Campbell wrote in his journal, "The thought of growing into a professor gives me the creeps. A lifetime to be spent trying to kid myself and my pupils into believing that the thing that we are looking for is in books!"

But Campbell did become a professor. He wrote dozens of books and articles about ancient mythology, his literary specialty. He delivered hundreds of lectures. He influenced thousands of students.

What's more, Campbell's scholarly research on the hero's journey

directly inspired George Lucas to create the *Star Wars* saga. Lucas read Campbell's books when still in film school. Much later, they would meet in person and become friends, and ultimately, George Lucas would come to call Professor Campbell "my Yoda."

Graduates and families, you showed up for a graduation speech, and what did you get? A professor lecturing you on what she studies! You got a pop quiz. You got homework!

Sorry, a professor's habits can get pretty ingrained.

I began my remarks by telling you that for a very long time, I had no idea I'd end up here someday.

I want to conclude by telling you that my work has become my calling.

My research on character and achievement and grit is, to me, infinitely interesting and ultimately fulfilling. Most Saturday mornings, I get up early, make myself a mug of coffee, and settle into the living room couch, a stack of scientific articles at my side. For the next three or four hours, all I do is sit and read and think and fill up my notebook. Is it relaxing? Not at all. It's hard, but it's glorious. It's work, but it's also play. I'm never bored, and in my heart of hearts, I believe psychological science can make a positive difference in the lives of children.

How'd I get here?

When I was still a teenager, a catalogue arrived in the mail. It was from a summer program offering college courses for high school seniors, and it had a watercolor painting of a Gothic building on the front. After school, I found myself paging through it, again and again, until one day, I decided to apply. Because I paid the tuition myself, blowing what amounted to my life savings at that point, I had the freedom to enroll in any two courses of my choosing.

What did I pick? Introduction to Psychology and Non-Fiction Writing. Thirty years later, as a professor of psychology who writes all day, I can recognize those sparks of interest for what they were. But at the time, I had no idea.

When I declared my undergraduate major, I was still pretty clueless.

In fact, after graduation, I cycled through a half-dozen jobs before, at age 32, I had the clarity to enroll in the doctoral program in psychology at the University of Pennsylvania. When I finished at age 36, I was older than many of my professors.

In the movies, passion is like a bolt of lightning—illuminating the sky of your consciousness with a hundred megavolts of self-awareness.

The reality, confirmed by research, is that for most people, passion begins as a little spark that must be fanned and fed, over months and years, so that one day—one day, it may become a raging fire that burns perpetually.

Graduates, wherever you are on your journey, today is a step forward. Tomorrow you may stumble. When you lose your way, groping in darkness, aching for certainty, do not look skyward for a flash of insight. Instead, look within.

And have faith that with time and with experience, those tiny embers of curiosity and purpose that are at their beginnings so faint you're not even sure they're real, will burn more and more brightly, so that years from now, when I meet you in the street, and you tell me you were here on this beautiful Sunday, and I ask, "Do you love what you do?" you will look me in the eye and without taking a breath, tell me, "Oh yes, I love what I do."

Thank you very much.



Photograph by Marguerite F. Miller

PENN COMMENCEMENT 2017

Penn Commencement Address given on Monday, May 15, 2017 by President Amy Gutmann at Franklin Field.

Save a life. Serve a cause. Seek the sublime.

Chairman Cohen, Trustees and Honored Guests: what a memorable day to applaud our amazing graduates – the Class of 2017!

Graduates: your success, which we celebrate today, is all about the choices you have made to get here.

You are so very good at choosing – as I will now demonstrate.

Penn Vet: Do we have our graduates here today from the Penn School of Veterinary Medicine?

Alright, Penn Vet: I want you to choose by cheering.

Large animals? Or small animals?

Very good, these are graduates who know their minds!

Now let's try just Penn undergraduates.

For our undergraduates, this is truly an important choice.

So let's hear it:

Magic Carpet? Or Lyn's?

I think we'll call that one a tie! Now a choice for all our graduates: Last night, your friend who doesn't dance...did! And you got the video.

All right, to all the graduates here, do you choose to share it on:

Instagram? Or Snapchat?

Hmmm, very revealing!

Now, let's finish with the toughest question, and this one is for all the parents and grandparents.

You have made many hard choices before this one. But now the pressure is on!

Let's hear it for either: The Beatles? (*below*) [*song clip plays*]

Or the Rolling Stones? (*below right*) [*song clip plays*]

Interesting! We may not always get what we want... but clearly we get by with a little help from our friends!

Everybody, let's hear it for our greatest friends, our parents and grandparents!

Choice can be fun, as you've just demonstrated.

But there is a larger meaning in our exercising choice. Our choices define us: The broadest contours of our lives—and of our character—are drawn by the choices we make.

Choice is freedom and freedom is choice.

By that measure, Penn graduates today have enormous freedom, more so than almost anyone who's gone before. Yet the challenge of living the most meaningful life possible remains: what do we choose?

The answer lies not in what you have with your freedom, but in what you do with it.

How will you use the amazing freedom of choice that is yours?

I am the child of a refugee. We lost my father 50 years ago this year. Perhaps that is why I've been thinking even more than usual of him, and of my mother, and what their lives taught me about making the most of our choices. Their freedom of choice was radically constrained compared to yours and mine.

Nonetheless, they chose to live inspiring and satisfying lives by making incredibly meaningful use of the freedom they had.



Photograph by Marguerite F. Miller

Amy Gutmann

Those whose lives are most inspiring, and satisfying, find the means to answering the essential question, "What will you use your freedom of choice to do?"

They find the path.

They save a life. They serve a cause. They seek the sublime.

Save a life.

Our Commencement speaker came home one night to find his neighbor's house lit against the night sky in flames, his neighbor screaming for her daughter still inside. At once, he ducked into the flames.

He was through the kitchen and to the top of the stairs when he felt something. A sharp tug on his belt. It was a police detective behind him, shouting, "Get out!"

The moment of choice had come. Cory Booker made a snap decision—a fateful choice—and he saved a life. By saving a life, Cory Booker made another person's world possible.

When my father made the fateful choice to flee his home, he faced a decision shared by refugees everywhere: Save just oneself or try to save others?

In places such as Syria or in the path of Boko Haram, we see it. In the inferno of war and genocide, the choice is so often excruciating.

His siblings, his parents, and others – my father helped not just himself, but all of them escape. His choice made the worlds of many possible. His choice made my world possible.

Nothing so dramatic as a war or a burning house is required to save a life and, through it, a world. We can all do it. The path to save a life starts in the day-to-day.

We choose to save a vulnerable life when we support a loved one or

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Photographs by Marguerite F. Miller

PENN COMMENCEMENT 2017

Penn Commencement Address given by President Amy Gutmann (continued from previous page)

mentor a child; when we intervene to help someone in harm's way; when we share our resources; when we devote our energies to finding common cause to help others.

Above saving a life, there can be no greater good on earth.

Serve a cause.

We would not be here today but for the selfless commitment of those who serve the high cause of safeguarding our lives and liberty. For serving that cause, which protects countless lives, we are profoundly grateful to the men and women who have chosen to serve in our nation's military. Let's hear it for them.

Essential to our freedom is opportunity. Too many in our world are without it. We know high-quality education is one of the most powerful ways to attain it. Your Class bears special witness to this fact.

Many of you join me in being the very first in your families to graduate, with all the opportunities that a Penn education today makes possible. Let's hear it for our first-generation students!

My own mother never had the opportunity to go to college. Yet, all her life, she felt the calling to educate. In college, I found out how to make her passion my own.

I was a work-study student and a substitute teacher. I worked at a local public high school serving first-generation, low-income students, not unlike myself. In my head and by my college major, I was to be a mathematician.

But in that classroom and in my heart, I reimagined my mother's cause. Commitment to providing exceptional educational opportunity for everyone has guided my choices ever since.

Worthy causes are all around. We make the most of our lives when we passionately serve a calling, taking it to heart: to heal, to invent, to teach, to protect, to defend.

There's service to one's family and friends, to one's country, to humankind and to all beings large and small. There's great urgency in advancing knowledge for all.

When we serve a great cause, when we have a calling, we grow great ourselves.

And then there's also another path:

Seek the sublime.

For many years, my father lived as an exile in India, in Bombay, now Mumbai.

He found himself a stranger in a strange, but beautiful land. He had to learn a new language. He had to find a way to earn a living.

Even so, he made time to seek something higher. It was more than a full day's journey north from his adopted city to the foothills of the Himalayas.

With a camera slung around his neck, he traversed that long road just to climb and behold the mountains. I grew up with his photo albums, pages of deep dramatic valleys and towering peaks.

He collected Indian art. He cultivated his love of Mozart and Beethoven. He loved as well Indian music – maybe that's why my spirits soar hearing the music of Penn Masala!

So bright did these things shine, that my memories of my father are suffused with his search for the sublime.

Those moments of mountain peaks, of musical and literary magic, of working together as a team, of creating art, of humor reducing an audience to tears of laughter: they defy measurement. They baffle description. But when you experience the sublime, you know it. Your spirit soars.

Save a life, serve a cause, seek the sublime.

Memories of my parents remind me every day of the power each of us has in choosing the lives we make for ourselves. To the utmost of what they did have, they championed freedom well-used.

Freedom well-used: That's the end to which your Penn education is the means. You are incomparably well-equipped to put your boundless opportunity – your limitless freedom – to the best possible use.

From watching you grow and succeed here, we know that you're already off to a grand start. All of today is not nearly enough time to list the inspiring things you have chosen to do at Penn.

But in just two minutes, I can show you! [Shows video] Watch this: <http://tinyurl.com/lpgoyv9>

The composer of the soundtrack and drummer is Wharton senior Tai Bendit-Shtull. Tai, are you here? Let's give him a hand!

Graduates, use your freedom well, for you will be defined by the choices you make.

And know that your joy today is amplified a thousand-fold by the pride that all of us feel in your achievements. Rather than just tell you, we will show you.

Families and friends, faculty and colleagues, Trustees and honorees: please stand with me now and show these graduates just how proud we are!



The Penn Band led the way for the student procession along Locust Walk.



Logan Kesel, C'17, (above) sang the National Anthem.



Remarks by Santosh S. Venkatesh, professor of electrical and systems engineering and incoming Chair of the Faculty Senate.

The Continuing Quest for Knowledge

There is a quaint custom at Penn in which the Chair of the Faculty Senate is invited to address the festive throng at Commencement. In a time of turbulence and change, some of these traditions add a sense of timelessness, of stability. And these selfsame traditions compel me to do two things: first, to somehow allude to Benjamin Franklin (even if I have to drag him in, kicking and screaming, into a *non sequitur*) and, second, to leave you with a *bon mot*, a word of wisdom.

As far as old Ben is concerned, I've done my job—I've already mentioned him. But it would be churlish not to give him his due—we owe our presence here to him, after all—and so here is one of his quips, written in 1758, and singularly appropriate for our times: "An investment in knowledge pays the best interest." I should mention, by the way, that another long held tradition at Penn holds that anything quotable was first said by Benjamin Franklin. This is very convenient: it saves us having to tediously memorize who said what. So: "An investment in knowledge pays the best interest," said the great man.

And this brings me to my *bon mot*. Tradition, you see: and, oh, did I mention that tradition is valued at Penn?

In the Academy we are invested in knowledge: from wide-eyed discovery, to critical interpretation, and to wide dissemination. And this is what we have inculcated in you to appreciate and love. It is ironic that, in these remarkable days when the egalitarian creation and flow of knowledge has perhaps never been more vibrant, the Academy itself is under siege. "This is the best of times, this is the worst of times," another of Ben's (though uncharitable people credit it to Charles Dickens). It is in these times that you should hold fast to the principle of the lifelong pursuit of knowledge, the seeds of which great endeavor have been nourished here at Penn. And aside from more mercenary considerations, knowledge has its own inef-



Photograph by Marguerite F. Miller

Santosh Venkatesh

fable beauty. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." (Misguided folks who attribute this to John Keats are mistaken, of course. We know better: Ben said it.) "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." If one can spend a lifetime in the pursuit, well, that is a lodestar to live by.

Remember these remarkable years at Penn and the professors who have cajoled, pushed, taught, and wondered wide-eyed with you as a new planet swam into our ken. Nothing brings a tear to a curmudgeonly old professor's eye faster than to see a student come back to say hello after many years. And, in my case, the large bowl of chocolates that I keep in my office serves as an added inducement.

On behalf of the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania, I salute you. Remember us; we, assuredly, will remember you.

A Penn Tradition

Penn President Amy Gutmann (at right) sat with Ben on the Bench before the 2017 Commencement as this year's Honorary Degree recipients gathered around. Standing behind them (from left to right, front row): Clara Franzini-Armstrong, Ada Sue Hinshaw, Terry Gross and Isabel Allende. Standing behind them (back row): Robert Parris Moses, Penn Trustees Chair David Cohen, Commencement Speaker US Senator Cory Booker, Paul Muldoon and Emerita Trustee Andrea Mitchell, a member of the Class of 1967, celebrating their 50th reunion.



Photograph by Eddy Marenco

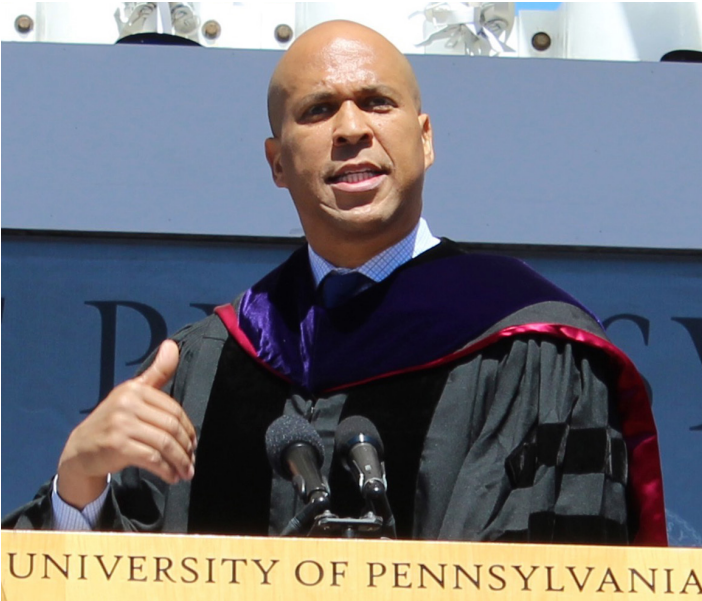


Photograph by Marguerite F. Miller

Penn Commencement Address given on Monday, May 15, 2017 at Franklin Field by Cory Booker, US Senator from New Jersey.

Making a World of Change for Everyone

Photograph by Marguerite F. Miller



Cory Booker

Thank you very much. It is incredible to be here and I want to thank you all for inviting me to be a part of this day of history in your lives. I want to thank you for allowing me to be a small part of this extraordinary community. I want to congratulate the graduates, and I want to thank everyone who helped to make this possible and when I say *everyone*, it took so many people to make this day possible. I want to thank the parents and the grandparents and the family members. I want to thank everyone from the incredible president and astounding provost, all the way up to those people who cleaned floors and manicured lawns and served food to contribute to this community.

And so I confess to you, when I was graduating from college, I felt like I knew a lot and now that I'm about twice your age, I'm not as confident in what I know. In fact, I am a person who believes I am in struggle, as we all are. The beautiful thing that I've realized is that we're all in this struggle together. We perceive that there are differences between us, gaps and gulfs, but we are far more united, far more indivisible, far more involved in a larger common struggle than we know. And so what I'd like to do very briefly today, is confess to you two things I struggle with and it's really two stories, one from someone from history who I've come to admire and the other one is perhaps one of my greatest mentors ever.

The person from history, it's a short story—I don't even know if it's apocryphal or not, but it's made a point that I struggle with and it's a story about Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi was said to be rushing on busy days, running from point to point but now he was said to be running for a train to leap into the third-class section that he travelled in. People were there to grab him and help him to get on to the train but one of his sandals fell off. Everybody watched with disappointment that Mahatma Gandhi had lost his sandal, but before people could settle into their thoughts of disappointment or consolation, or problem solving about how they were going to deal with this one sandaled man, Gandhi reached down, really quickly, grabbed his other sandal and threw it onto the tracks. People were curious, "Mahatma, why would you throw your other sandal out there?" He looked like it was a confusing and bemusing question. He said, "I threw the other sandal because whoever finds that first sandal, wouldn't it be nice if they found the other one as well?"

I heard that story when I was about your age and I was astounded by the moral imagination of Gandhi in that story. To literally see people who are not there but yet still expand his love, to touch those folks we would never even see—it was the most creative compassion and I wanted to try to live my life in that way. I knew, and I experience now, the same rush of chasing after dreams, of racing around a day, of moving from there to there,

but I realized a simple lesson the older I get, that how we live our days, is how we live our lives. And as we're chasing after our destinations, our goals and our dreams, it actually is those small things we do every single day that define us. In fact, in truth, more than a big speech than you've prepared for, more than a big goal or a big dream, more than the big fight, more than our race, more than our religion, it is our actions every day that define who we are, they define us. I've begun to learn in my life that perhaps the biggest thing you could do in a given day is really just a small act of kindness, of decency, of love, an exhibition of moral imagination, or creative compassion.

I wonder about this when we miss our opportunities every single day with just the people around us, while we talk big about changing the world or about what's wrong with other people, but we forget that we have so much power to make a difference. Now look, I say I struggle with this because I don't always get it right. Let me give you an example. I had been elected as a United States' Senator; I still live in the central ward of Newark. We're not the wealthiest community there in my neighborhood, the median income is about \$14,000 per household but my community is rich with spirit, rich with energy, rich with compassion.

But one day as I was driving home, I felt a little bit like Odysseus, because as I passed this fast food restaurant, I began to hear the Siren call. Now look, I'm a vegan, and listen to these people because how do you know if someone is a vegan? Don't worry, they'll tell you. And so I'm a vegan and I knew that in my neighborhood, folks know me but I couldn't resist the call to this fast food restaurant. It was a call in a language that I don't even speak any of them, it was French and it was French fries that were calling to me and I don't speak any French but I could swear I heard that song, "Voulez-vous coucher avec French fry" now. And as I told my driver, an incredible officer named Kevin Batch—retired from the Newark Police Department, joined my staff because of our friendship and our bond—I said to him "Kev, we're almost home but do you mind? We have to swing through the drive-thru." Now, Kevin, he didn't say a word but he smirked, he was mocking me and my weakness. We drove around to the drive-thru, I sunk down in the seat, I didn't want anyone to see me, the person said to me, "May I take your order?" and I used a falsetto voice, I ordered two of the most super-sized French fries I could, we pulled around to pick up the fries, I was still leaning down low, and then they handed these fries into my window and I'm telling you, I'm a Senator now so maybe I could change this, because these French fries could be a schedule 1 or schedule 2 narcotic, I mean they must sprinkle a narcotic on these fries because as soon as they got in I felt this joy and this anticipation, I cuddled my fries like I was from *Lord of the Rings*, "my precious," and we began to move but then I see a guy at the end of the drive way there, a young white man in a garbage, rooting around and I slowed down and I told Kevin to roll down the window and he rolled down the window and I said, "Hey man, anything I can do to help you? Are you OK?" And he turns around and he looks at me and he says, "No I'm OK I don't need anything" and I go, "Are you sure?" and he goes, "Well, I'm hungry." Now I don't know what religion you all pray to, if you do at all, but I swear Jesus said something like, "If I have two McDonald's French fries and my neighbor has none..." And so I reached in my bag as the aroma hit me, I shook as I grabbed that large fries and I reached to him and I swear he put his hand on it to take it from me and I resisted for just a moment. And then he pulled the fries to him, he was happy and I felt some sense of, OK I did the right thing. And then he was about to leave and he turned around and now his face went from appreciation to anguish, almost as if he was in pain and he says to me, "Hey man, do you have any socks? I need some socks." And it was a strange question, but I knew it must speak to something he was dealing with, some pain, some hurt and I look at him, I wish that I could help him but I don't carry any spare socks in my car and I said, "I'm sorry I can't help you," and he began to leave but then this retired police detective, born in Newark, raised in the projects, threw the car in park, reached down between his legs, kicked off his shoes, pulled off his socks and handed them through the window. I sat back and I realized—wait a minute—I'm a few blocks away from my house, I have so many socks I don't even wear that my mother gave me on some birthday or special occasion but yet I was not living with that moral imagination, that creative compassion.

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I've come to learn in my life that we have such power that we do not use as we go about our big challenges, our big goals, our desire to make big differences, we forget the power we have right now, we have a choice in every moment if we just look around us, and the choice that we often surrender and fail to make is to accept things as they are or to take responsibility for changing them. And no, you may not be able to end homelessness, maybe you're not going to be able to end hunger but we can never allow our inability to do everything to undermine our determination to do something. We, as great as every one of us are, as much as I spent my life trying to change the world—we cannot forget that our real power is not necessarily to change the world, but to make a world of change to the people we encounter every day, a smile, a creative and a kind word. Finding a way to throw a sandal onto the track—that is the power we have today and every day.

It was Desmond Tutu who said, “Do a little bit of good where you are. It’s those little bits of good, put together, that overwhelm the world.” We’re not here because of the people we read about in history books. Yes, that’s part of the story, but we’re here because of little bits of good, of sacrifice, of decency, of mercy and of love. Let me tell you about two Ralphs. And when I was in college, “to ralph” meant something completely different so let me be more specific. It was Emerson who said very simply, to paraphrase him, “...that only what we have within, can we see without. If we see no angels, it’s because we harbor none.” Now I worry because I still see now the words of Ralph Ellison to be so true. He said, “I am an invisible man, because people refuse to see me.” I believe that there are so many people we encounter every day that we just don’t see. But what is even worse, than that—and I am compelled by that, it is what drives me every day to try to make this nation once more of justice and mercy and decency—but I’m telling you now that I’m in a professional world, I’ve come to worry about a different type of invisibility that actually can’t be best described as invisibility, but maybe it is how we, every single day, reduce people, strip them from their layers of their humanity down to a label or a presumption.

I love the flowing words of Martin Luther King when he talked about repentance; he said, “We will have to repent in this day and age, not just for the victory of the violent words and actions of the bad people, but also the appalling silence and inaction of the good people.” Well, I’ll tell you, I am compelled to try to motivate and inspire through my actions, good people to get off the sidelines to realize that this democracy is not a spectator sport, but I also worry about those folks who we assign labels like vitriolic words and we assign conclusions about their souls that they are bad people. We do this in ways we don’t even realize. I remember as a young guy, living in the projects in Newark, I was in New York trying to chase down money for a non-profit. I was scuttling through, on an awful day, sleet and snow and every street seemed to have curbs of slush and as I walked to this one curbs, I saw what amounted to one of the great lakes of slush. I worried about my shoes, how was I going to get around it, and then I saw an elderly African-American woman, amongst all the hustle and bustle of this fancy New York street, she was carrying a cart, one of those metal carts with wheels, trying to make it across a busy street, with the light about to change, heading towards the ocean of slush. My mama raised me right, I began to dart over to her, but before I could, some guy cut me off. I was angry about it. He was dressed like a Wall Street guy in a coat that was probably worth more than my car. He had fancy shoes on and I looked at this white man, cutting in front of me, just holding back for a second, it’s like he didn’t see me, but suddenly, he does what I don’t expect—he goes through the great lake of slush in his fancy shoes, grabs the woman’s cart, lifts it up, pulls it to the sidewalk, goes back through the slush to grab the woman and take her all the way around, putting his hand up to traffic to get the woman on the curb. Before my implicit biases about this man, because of the color of his skin or because of what he was wearing could fully settle in, he shocked me to the consciousness. I didn’t render him invisible, but I stripped away his humanity because I did not see him.

The question we have to ask ourselves about the importance of being good and decent and loving, morally creative, is do we extend those feelings and those emotions just to people we like, or just to people we deem worthy or just to people who agree with us or just to people who think like us? I don't understand, and it hurts me that we're becoming a society that, just because someone has different views, we tend to strip them from their humanity.

I want to talk about us and our daily lives, but let me use the public stage for one moment. One of my lowest points during the Presidential elections, was when I was sitting at home watching the Republican debate. And it was one of those strange moments where I knew a lot of folks, I mean heck, half the America was running for the nomination for the Republican Party at that point, and there was my Governor. Now, I could write a dissertation on my disagreements—we literally fought over policy issues, yet he and I had forged a friendship; we knew that he was the Governor of the state, I was the Mayor of the largest city, and we had to put aside the 60, 70, 80% of things we disagreed on because I represented a struggling city in a recession and when the country has a recession, inner cities face depressions. I had to seek the common ground with him to try to find a way to make some difference for my community and as I sat there during a Presidential election, I could not believe my eyes when these other nominees were castigating Chris Christie for hugging Barack Obama. Now let me tell you about this hug. It was after Hurricane Sandy. The President flew into the state of New Jersey. So many people died; thousands of people lost their homes. And here is the President of the United States, coming down the steps to meet the Governor and the two of them at the bottom of the steps, they hugged. And I want to tell you something, I'm a hugger, and it wasn't really a good hug either—it was one of those awkward guy hugs. But what have we become in a society where we are vilifying people so much so that to hug someone of a different party, who thinks different, is a sin! Where have we come as a nation?

But that's the national stage, I want to take it you. I was, just a few weeks ago, at a Humane Society banquet dinner. And it's the Humane Society, treatment of animals. Did I tell you I'm a vegan? And here we are talking about compassion and kindness and treatment of animals and someone comes up to me and says, "Senator Booker, I so appreciate what you're doing, thank you for being in the fight. Hey, let me show you what I tweeted just now," and they showed me a tweet to Paul Ryan and it was probably one of the most troll-y, vile, angry tweets I'd ever seen! And the incongruity of the moment really struck me.

So this is the challenge. Can we be a nation that can disagree but still find common ground? But that's the country. Can you be a person whose love is so great that you love those people you disagree with, you love those people who curse you, you love those people who you see even as an obstacle to justice. Now, I'm not asking folks to do what my heroes did, like Mandela did in prison, who found a way to love his captors and eventually forgive them, or Gandhi with the oppressive, imperialistic regime, but still found a way to love his enemy, or Martin Luther King, who literally got on his knees and prayed for white supremacists, no. I'm just asking you, hey, can you sit down with somebody that's wearing a red "Make American Great Again" hat and have a conversation. And, by the way, one of the best pieces of advice I've ever been given, was simply this, "Talk to the person, but you don't have to attend every argument you're invited to." You could look for other common ground.

But that brings me to the last person and who I want to end on. Because this was my mentor who lived these lessons that I am struggling to embody. This man's name was Frank Hutchins and he was a legend. By the time I was a law student, coming to Newark, the stories of him as a tenant activist and a tenant organizer were legendary. He literally was responsible for the longest rent strike in Newark's history against the worst of slum lords, the Federal Government and the Newark Housing Authority. And he won. By the time I met him, we were organizing these neighborhoods that had high-rise buildings that had some of the most difficult slum lords imaginable, people that were caricatures of slumlords. But I'll never forget this guy. When we would sit in negotiations and I would be angry and be fit to fight and yet he still found a way to look at them with grace and even mercy. He seemed to understand that you don't have to be mean to be tough, you don't have to be cruel to be strong, that you don't have to curse the person who curses you. I saw Frank now in tenant meetings where we would sit up and have to take people's complaints, to try to write it down, to fight these battles. It was amazing to me how Frank would sit in the tenant meeting that would go on for hours and hours. I would get restless as another person would get up and tell their whole life story, but he never seemed to falter at looking

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PENN COMMENCEMENT 2017

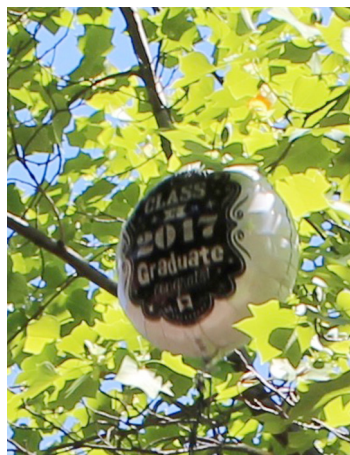
Commencement Address (continued from previous page)

at those people, teaching me that perhaps the most valuable thing you can give someone in your life is your attention. As he sat there, I talked to him after the meeting and I said, "God that was too long, people went on..." and he goes, "Cory, it's important that we heal those buildings from the crisis that they're in but people too need healing. We're all fighting hard battles; pay attention to people, see them."

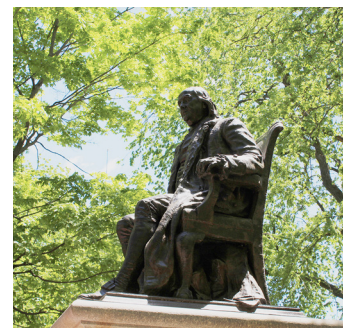
Well, I would become a councilman and a mayor and Frank and I would still work together. And yet, he got older and older and then he started getting sick. His disease took his eyesight from him and I would still take him out to restaurants and I would still take him shopping and he would demand that I still take him to the movies and I was like, "Frank you can't see man!" And he would say, "No, no, take me there; I want to listen, I want to listen." By the time Frank's health began failing, they put him in hospice but I would still go visit and I confess to you, I was frustrated at times that the hospice room wasn't full of people. Here's a guy that thousands and thousands of people relied on; I was frustrated that he was alone. And I'll still always remember the last day I saw him alive. This is my hero. And I walked into the hospital room after the nurse told me that he wouldn't last long and I could see his breath was faltering. Now, when Frank's eyesight started going we started a little joke, I would see him before I would take him out to dinner and I'd say, "Hey Frank, it's Cory," and he'd push me off and he'd say, "I see you Cory, I see you." Well, it became our thing, "Hey Frank, it's Cory," and "I see you." But now in this hospital room, his voice is not there, his breath is rapid and I said, "Frank, it's Cory." I saw

him with such effort, he labored and he said to me, "I see you." I walked to the side of his bed and I held his hand and I talked to him and as I sat there I felt this peace and I still saw his light and I realized that he was trying to teach me that, Cory I am here and I've lived a good life. I felt like he was trying to teach me that ultimately, life is not about celebrity, it's about significance; life is not about popularity, it's about purpose; life is not how many people show up when you're dead but about how many people you show up for while you are alive. I sat with him for as long as I could, I felt such love for this man and I knew this would be our last time. He said no words except for that when I entered, "I see you." Then I had to go, I told him I was leaving, I stood up and I leaned over and I kissed him on the forehead, I put my hand on the side of his face and I said with all of my heart, I said, "Frank, I love you." And then as I was beginning to pull away, he wanted to say something again. I leaned close to his bed and he repeated my words, he looked at me and with short breaths, he forced out, "I love you." I walked out of his room, I closed the door, I started crying, I knew it would soon be over and it was; he would die there soon after.

So Class of 2017, I got to leave you with those six words that Frank said, "I see you. I love you." I see you. I love you. I see you! I love you! Class of 2017, you're going to go out for the big challenges, the big fights. I see you, I love you. You're going to have tough days, you're going to fail, you're going to fail but I see you and I love you. May your vision and your love not just change the world but make a world of change for everyone that you can. God bless you.



A few of the many 2017 Penn graduates who paused to share the LOVE and be seen as they savored the moment on Monday, May 15, 2017 after Penn's 261st Commencement.



Photographs by Marguerite F. Miller