

**GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY COMMENCEMENT TRANSCRIPT
MAY 15, 2016
COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER: SEN. CORY BOOKER (D-N.J)**

>> Ladies and gentlemen, good morning and welcome! I am Forrest Maltzman, Interim Provost of the George Washington University. Please rise and join me in welcoming the graduating class of the George Washington University!

[Music]

The faculty of the George Washington university! .

[Music]

>> It is now my pleasure to introduce the U.S. Army Old Guard Fife and Drum Corps. The Corps is the only unit of its kind in the military. As official escort of the president of the United States, these active duty musicians represent our nation at all state arrival ceremonies at the White House. They wear uniforms patterned after those worn by fifers and drummers of General George Washington's Continental Army. We are delighted to have them join us today.

Thank you, Old Guard Fife and Drum Corps. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the George Washington University Board of Trustees Chair Nelson A. Carbonell, Jr., President Steven Knapp, members of the administration, and our very special awardees and honorees escorted by the GW Police Department Honor Guard.

>> On behalf of my colleagues on stage and my colleagues throughout the

university, I am delighted to welcome all of you to the Spring Commencement in the 195th year of the George Washington University!

[Applause]

Would those who are able, please stand? We will continue our ceremony with the Presentation of the Colors by the George Washington University Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps' Ceremonial Color Guard, and the National Anthem sung by Millicent Scarlett, a professor in our Department of Music. We will remain standing for the Retiring of the Colors, followed by the invocation from Father Adam Park, chaplain of the Newman Catholic Student Center. Would those individuals not in uniforms please remove your hats.

[Music]

Oh, say, can you see by the dawn's early light
What so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's last gleaming?
Whose broad stripes and bright stars thro' the perilous
fight O'er the ramparts we watch'd were so gallantly streaming?
And the rockets' red glare the bombs bursting in air
Gave proof thro' the night that our flag was still there.
O say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free
And the home of the brave?

>> Let us pray. Almighty and ever-living God, giver of all good gifts, we come to you today with gratitude in our hearts. Gratitude for the gift of life, and the blessings You have bestowed upon us. Gratitude for the constant support and love of our families. Gratitude for the lifelong friendships we have formed, and

that have formed us. We are grateful for the faculty, staff, and administrators here at this University who have challenged and inspired us to learn, to love, and to serve. Heavenly Father, as we congratulate and pray for the Class of 2016, may You instill within them a spirit of excitement and joy for this momentous occasion in their lives. Dispel from their hearts any fear. fear of failure. fear of what is to come. fear of living in their parent's basement. May they instead look forward to the future with confident hope that they may see, in every new opportunity, a chance to live out Your greatest commandment. To love You above all else, and to love one another as themselves. May they take what they have learned to love more perfectly. That in all of their pursuits and endeavors they will serve more perfectly. As You now send them forth into the world, empower them to live lives worthy of the calling You offer by loving and serving their brothers and sisters and to help shape our world according to Your perfect design. Bless this class of 2016 as they graduate from George Washington University. Help them to stay true to themselves, to use their gifts wisely, and to walk into the future with great faith, hope, and love. We ask all this in Your most holy name. Amen.

>> Please be seated.

Class of 2016, I am delighted to open this ceremony in this one-of-a-kind setting, the National Mall. To gather here in the shadow of the monument dedicated to the nation's first president and our university's namesake is a fitting tribute to your achievement in completing your studies at the George Washington University. I am now pleased to invite the president of the university to join me at the podium. Dr. Steven Knapp is concluding his ninth year as president of the

George Washington University. Dr. Knapp leads a community of faculty, students, and staff that number over 30,000 people. Please join me in welcoming the George Washington University's 16th president, Dr. Steven Knapp.

[Applause]

[KNAPP] Thank you, Forrest Maltzman, Chair Carbonell, University Trustees, Honorary Degree recipients, University Leaders, Distinguished Faculty, Ladies and Gentlemen, good morning!

Graduates, let me begin by congratulating you on your outstanding achievements and telling you that the George Washington University is very, very proud of you! I would like to thank our host, the National Park Service, who celebrates its 100th anniversary this August, for its gracious and generous help preparing this majestic setting for today's ceremony. Now I would like to continue an important Commencement tradition. Will the parents, the families, and the friends of the Class of 2016 please rise to accept our congratulations and our thanks.

[CHEERS AND APPLAUSE]

>> It is now my pleasure to recognize the special guests who today will receive the university's highest honor. Please join me in welcoming technology industry veteran and parliamentarian currently serving as the Under-Secretary of State and Minister for Internet Safety and Security of the United Kingdom, baroness Joanna Shields.

[Applause]

a Navy veteran, president of Southern Engineering Corporation, and steward of American history, Albert Harrison Small.

[Applause]

and the Honorable Cory A. Booker, United States Senator from New Jersey.

[APPLAUSE]

>> Next, I have the honor of introducing Nelson A. Carbonell, Jr., chair of the university's Board of Trustees and an alumnus of this university. Chair Carbonell.

>> Thank you, President Knapp. As board chair, it is my role to arrange the weather. I prayed fervently that it wouldn't rain. I didn't think about wind. I hope all of you wore sensible shoes. These are mine. I am honored as Chair of the Board of Trustees to join President Knapp and my

Fellow trustees in welcoming all of you on this very significant occasion as we celebrate the class of 2016.

First, may I ask trustees who joined us this morning to please rise and be recognized by the audience.

[Applause]

>> Trustees, thank you for your leadership and service on the Board of Trustees. We are all grateful for your commitment to GW. It is also my pleasure on behalf of the board to welcome our honorary degree recipients, Joanna Shields, Albert Small, and Cory Booker. We appreciate all of you being here on this momentous occasion to not only celebrate our graduates, but also to recognize the hard work and commitment of the faculty and the staff and families that helped them on their journey at GW. 31 years ago, I graduated from the George Washington University with a Bachelor's degree in engineering.

[CHEERS AND APPLAUSE]

>> That's right, engineering. Come on. Okay, good. GW prepared me well for the opportunities and challenges that I faced throughout my life.

I will forever be grateful and loyal to this university.

Remember, graduates, who you are has been shaped by your experiences here at George Washington university.

Our university is currently in a transformational \$1 billion philanthropic campaign, making history.

This campaign to date has raised over \$855 million.

To exceed our goal, we need you to be engaged and connected with the university, and, yes, we need you to give us gifts, and that would mean money.

Please encourage -- okay, you can wait until you get a job.

Please encourage your fellow graduates to follow in your footsteps and others to come here, as you have, to the George Washington University.

Graduates, we are proud of you, and I know you will always be proud to say that I am a graduate of the George Washington university. Congratulations to you all. It is now my pleasure to turn the program back to provost Maltzman. Thank you.

>> I would now like to recognize this year's recipients of the George Washington awards. This award is conferred for the extraordinary contributions to the GW community. The students, staff, and faculty who receive the GW award have each, in his or her own way, shaped our university. Making it the outstanding institution it is today. It gives me great pleasure to announce this year's honorees. As I call your name, please rise and remain standing.

Christopher Evans.

[Applause]

Timothy Rabolt.

Dr. Rahul Simha.

[Applause]

Elizabeth Amundson.

[Applause]

Please join me in congratulating the winners of the GW awards.

[Applause]

[MALTZMAN] As you may know, each year, the university receives entries from undergraduate and graduate students, who audition for an opportunity to speak at commencement. This year over 50 students applied, and a panel of judges selected your student speaker, Julia Haigney.

Julia is a candidate today for a Juris Doctor degree in the Law School. This is her second degree from GW, having previously graduated summa cum laude with a bachelor's in International Affairs from the Elliott School. She is also a former staff member of the university, having worked for five different departments, many in the Division of Student Affairs. At the Law School she served as a writing fellow, a deans fellow and the Senior Notes Editor of the George Washington Law Review. After graduation, she will serve as a law clerk to the

Honorable Kenneth F. Ripple, at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit. Ladies and gentlemen, Julia Haigney.

>> I feel a little short. Thank you so much. President Knapp, distinguished members of our stage party, faculty, staff, families and friends, on behalf of the George Washington University Class of 2016, good morning and thank you for your support and for your presence at this morning's celebration. For many years, I passed a sign on Gelman Library that proudly proclaimed: "in the White House or at GW, four years can change the course of history." Well, after nine years at GW, I can say that is certainly true. Over the last nine years, Foggy Bottom has become my home. I arrived in 2007, graduated with a Bachelor's degree from the Elliott School in 2011, worked in the Division of Student Affairs for 2 1/2 years after graduation, and now stand before you as a graduating member of the Law School's Class of 2016.

[CHEERS AND APPLAUSE]

For me, perhaps like many of you, this has been a time of tremendous growth. I came to GW nervous, not even knowing how to do my own laundry, but I promised myself one thing -- to try some green eggs and ham while I was here. Like Dr. Seuss's main character in Green Eggs and Ham, I often have strong opinions about what I like and what I don't. But also like Dr. Seuss's main character, my first impressions often deceive me, and trying New things has allowed me to maximize my GW experience. In the last nine years, trying "green eggs and ham"

has meant moving to a new city, studying abroad twice, living in Thurston Hall three times, landing my dream summer internship, and even getting to argue a moot court case in front of a Supreme Court justice this year. GW not only provided these opportunities, but also provided a Community that inspired me and supported me in trying them. Thanks to GW, I have Learned some pretty important lessons. where to find the best cupcakes in DC, how to admit that you're scared, but still do something anyway, and, perhaps most importantly, how to thank those who pushed you along the way. Based on that, I would like to invite the Class of 2016 to join me in thanking those who have helped us get where we are today.

[CHEERS AND APPLAUSE]

our families and friends, the people who cheered us on from the moment we were accepted through all of the bumpy moments in between. our professors, especially those who told us we were smart Enough when we were too nervous to apply to graduate school, and those who were patient enough to explain the concept of mens REA at least four times once we got there. and finally, our Mentors, especially that federal work study supervisor who took you under his wing to make sure you succeeded. There's one other group that needs congratulating -- the Class of 2016. As you move forward in the world, I ask that you find your own green eggs and ham -- and continue to try them. Pioneer in a field, take a risk, or start a new adventure. Your green eggs and ham just may change the course of history. Thank you.

[Applause]

>> Thank you very much, Julia. Your remarks as well as your achievements inspire us. President Knapp will now confer the honorary degrees. >> The recipient of our first honorary degree this morning will be introduced by Eric Jordan Darnell who graduates today With a bachelor of arts degree in American studies. He has interned with The United States chamber of commerce, VH1, and the communications and marketing firm EDELMAN. Following commencement, he begins a career in the sports and entertainment field with the creative artists agency in Los Angeles.

>> President Knapp, I am honored to present to you Baroness Joanna Shields for the degree of Doctor of Public Service, honoris causa.

>> You are a renowned leader in the fields of digital technology and internet safety, and your career has taken you on an extraordinary journey from America's Silicon Valley to the United Kingdom's House of Lords. You were born in St. Marys, Pennsylvania. After graduating from the Pennsylvania State University with a bachelor's degree, you earned an M.B.A. from the George Washington University in 1987. You were an early pioneer in digital technology and began your career at National Digital Corporation in 1986 while you were a student at the GW School of Business. Later, you spent more than 25 years building some of the world's best-known tech companies, including Google, AOL and Facebook, where, among other roles, you led the company's international expansion and operations in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. In 2012 you were asked by Prime Minister David Cameron to help build the

United Kingdom into a technological powerhouse. You joined the government as his digital advisor and as chair and chief executive officer of TechCityUK, working to accelerate the growth of London and the United Kingdom's digital economy. What began in 2010 as an initiative to support the East London technology cluster ahead of the 2012 Olympics has expanded to greater London and other major cities. Your efforts helped build London into the technology capital of Europe and one of the largest technology start-up centers in the world. You led a joint United States and United Kingdom task force established by President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Cameron to combat child online exploitation. You founded WeProtect, a global alliance of more than 60 countries, law enforcement agencies, NGOs and technology companies committed to eradicating child abuse and exploitation from the internet. Today you serve as under-secretary of state and minister for internet safety and security for Her Majesty's Government of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland. Your responsibilities include combating online extremism recruitment and radicalization, eradicating harmful online crimes, including child abuse and exploitation, and ensuring safe and open access to the internet for everyone. You were ennobled as a baroness in 2014 and serve as a life peer and member of the House of Lords and an Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. You have served as a non-executive director of the London Stock Exchange Group and trustee of Save the Children and the American School in London. Joanna Shields, in recognition of all the foregoing, the George Washington University proudly confers upon you the degree of Doctor of Public Service, honoris causa, with all the rights, duties and privileges pertaining thereto.

Congratulations.

[Applause]

>> Our second honorary degree recipient will be introduced by Conor Coyne, graduating today with a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering with a concentration in Robotics.

[Dr. Knapp's hat is taken by the wind] Oops!

That's okay. You've got to learn to let things go.

[Laughter]

As an engineering student, he worked on a project for the George Washington physical therapy program that designed a wheelchair made of PVC pipes to withstand the humid climate of BELIZE.

>> President Knapp, I am honored to present to you Albert Harrison Small for the degree of Doctor of Public Service, honoris causa.

>> A third-generation Washingtonian, you were born in Washington, D.C. in 1925 and have spent your life forming a powerful connection between the past and future of your native city. You served in the Navy during World War II and graduated from the University of Virginia in 1946.

You later studied business at American University and law at the George Washington University. On a long-ago visit to New York City, you discovered a manuscript documenting

the 40 milestones placed around the perimeter of Washington, D.C. Your purchase of this manuscript inspired what became your life-long passion for historical collecting. Since then, you have spent more than 60 years amassing more than 1,000 manuscripts, maps, photographs, letters, prints and newspapers detailing the creation and evolution of our nation's capital.

In 2011, you donated that collection to GW to help establish the George Washington University Museum and The Textile Museum. Today, they are part of the Albert H. Small Center for National Capital Area Studies. Your collections help preserve our history. Your Declaration of Independence Collection, housed in the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library at the University of Virginia, is considered the most comprehensive in the world. You created the Albert H. Small Documents Gallery at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History; the gallery displays rare and historically significant material, including Thomas Jefferson's Bible and a signed copy of the Emancipation Proclamation. Your Normandy: Sacrifice for Freedom Institute teaches high school students and educators about the turning point in our nation's struggle to save democracy in World War II. It does so in part through the life-changing exercise of assigning each student the task of learning about a soldier or sailor from his or her home state. Alongside these many achievements, you have helped shape this region for more than 60 years through your efforts in construction. As president of Southern Engineering Corporation, you have developed communities in Washington, D.C., Virginia and Maryland. You also developed several million square feet of office space, contributing greatly to Washington's vibrant local economy. You serve on numerous civic and

cultural boards, including the Aspen Institute, the National Gallery of Art, the National Trust for the Humanities, the Foundation for the National Archives, the National Symphony Orchestra, the Folger Shakespeare Library and the Tudor Place Foundation. You are a member of the James Madison Council of the Library of Congress and of the Life Guard of Mount Vernon. In appreciation of your efforts to deepen the nation's understanding of its history and culture, you were honored by President Barack Obama in 2009 with the National Humanities Medal. In 2011, you were awarded the George Washington University President's Medal. Albert Harrison Small, in recognition of all the foregoing, the George Washington University proudly confers upon you the degree of Doctor of Public Service, honoris causa, with all the rights, duties and privileges pertaining thereto. Congratulations.

[Applause]

>> Our final honorary degree recipient will be introduced by Marguerite Wedeman, Who graduates today with a bachelor of arts degree in international affairs and Chinese language and literature. This is not the first time she's heard senator Booker speak. Her previously encounter was as a delegate to the 2012 democratic national convention.

This will be her family's sixth GW degree. Her parents are alumni who met in Gellman library and together earned five degrees from our university.

>> President Knapp, I am honored to present to you the Honorable Cory A. Booker, United States Senator from New Jersey, for the degree of Doctor of

Public Service, honoris causa.

>> You were born here in our nation's capital and grew up in New Jersey. Your parents were among the first African- American executives at IBM. They placed great importance on education. They pushed you to take advantage of your blessings and contribute to society. You graduated from Northern Valley Regional High School and then Stanford University, where you were a member of the varsity football team. You were awarded a Rhodes Scholarship and studied at the University of Oxford before earning your Juris Doctor degree at Yale Law School. After Yale, you began a career in public service by launching a nonprofit organization that provided legal services for low-income families and helped tenants take on slumlords, improve their living conditions and remain in their homes. As a member of the Newark City Council and later as mayor of Newark, you further raised awareness of this issue by living in at-risk neighborhoods and housing projects. You went on a 10-day hunger strike to draw attention to a forgotten, crime-filled section of the city. Later, you lived on food stamps for a week to highlight the plight of Americans who live in poverty. Under your leadership as mayor from 2006 to 2013, Newark entered its greatest period of economic growth since the 1960s.

You were elected to the United States Senate in 2013 and soon emerged as one of the Senate's most innovative problem-solvers and one of its foremost leaders in the drive for commonsense criminal justice reform.

You have advocated for sentencing reforms and the banning of juvenile solitary confinement in federal facilities, and you have spearheaded legislation to make it easier for returning citizens to find meaningful jobs. You have worked

tirelessly to tackle some of New Jersey's most difficult problems. You have advocated for more federal resources to modernize the state's transportation system, secured funds to continue the recovery from Superstorm Sandy, and worked to ensure that communities are safe from the effects of pollution and climate change. All along, you have formed a close and transparent relationship with your constituents, especially those from Newark. You went door-to-door before Hurricane Irene to warn residents and help neighbors evacuate. You consistently engage with your fellow citizens, including our students, on Twitter and other social media platforms. You even accepted the invitation to be our Commencement speaker by posting a video to Snapchat! You are the ranking member of the Senate Subcommittee on Surface Transportation, and you serve on Senate committees that oversee commerce, science and transportation, small business and entrepreneurship, and homeland security and government affairs. You have partnered with colleagues of both parties to create a number of economic initiatives, from increased small business investment to apprenticeship programs, with the hope of fostering greater economic mobility and opportunity for all Americans. And you have advocated a bipartisan approach to tackling the nation's most pressing problems, searching for common ground and advancing the common good. Cory A. Booker, in recognition of all the foregoing, the George Washington University proudly confers upon you the degree of Doctor of Public Service, honoris causa, with all the rights, duties and privileges pertaining thereto.

[CHEERS AND APPLAUSE]

>> Ladies and gentlemen, our commencement speaker, Senator and Dr. Cory Booker.

[Applause]

>> Good morning, everybody! It is such an honor to be here. I know the wind is blowing, so I'm going to try to be quick. But I have to just thank this community of incredible folks for inviting me here, especially each and every graduate. Thank you for letting me be a part of this. I also want to thank the entire community, not just the faculty and the staff and the trustees, not just the people who are at the exalted point of this community who are recognized on a daily basis, but I would be remiss if I didn't thank the entire community, and that includes the people who clean floors and toilets.

The people who manicured lawns. And kept the university beautiful. This is a day that all of GW should celebrate and all of those who made it possible should be thanked.

[Applause]

>> Now, this is not a speech about taking risks and being courageous, but I'm going to do something that is definitely a risk and ill advised.

I am going to be a politician that is going to lead with a joke. But this is a dad humor joke that I hope makes -- that I hope makes a good point.

There's a story about a church. Let's say it is from my community in New Jersey, where a pastor was having some trouble with two little boys who were cutting up in church all the time. He asked the deacon, the head of the deacons to take care of it, and the head of the deacons tried, but the boys kept cutting up. So then he went to a very strict, tough person in the church, the head of the choir, head of the choir tried to get them to behave, but the kids kept cutting up.

And so finally, the pastor said to himself, I've got to take this into my own hands and do something about this. So he brought the two boys to his office and sat the youngest one outside of the office, sat the eldest right in front of him inside his office, closed the door, and that young boy was just so disrespectful.

He just stared there at the pastor with his arms crossed, staring down the pastor. The pastor looked at him, and after thinking for a while, he thought to himself, I've got to try something different.

The deacon failed. The head of the choir failed.

And so he saw his bible sitting there on the corner of his desk, and he put his hand on the bible, and he looked at the little boy and said, my son, where is God?

And the boy suddenly snapped to attention. His eyes opened wide.

And I don't know what kind of church or religious institution you might go to, but in my church, if the pastor has something working, he doubles down on it.

So the pastor picked up the bible and waved it in front of the little boy and said, I don't know if you heard me, son, where is God?

And now the boy started shaking from head to toe, grabbing the arms of the chair, looking at the pastor. And the pastor now thinks, I've got this now. I've got this. So he stands up real tall behind his desk, takes the bible and waves it in the air and says in his Sunday sermon voice, my son, tell me right now, where is God?

And at this point, the little boy jumps up out of his seat, runs out of the pastor's office, sees his little brother sitting there and grabs him by the hand and says, man, we've got to get out of here.

God is missing, and the pastor thinks we took him.

[Laughter]

I'm sorry.

When I left Newark to run around my state, and campaign for what has been one of the great privileges of my life, to serve as a United States senator, I found a lot of folks that were beginning to question the world we live in, question our nation, and ask often that question, all this madness, all these challenges, all the gridlock, all the problems, all the continued injustices -- where is God?

But I was taught all my life, not to ask that question, that that was not the important question.

That in life, the more important question is where are you? I tell you this, standing on this mall today, I wish my father was here to see it. He died six days before I was elected to the United States senate.

Now, I'll tell you, death can end a life, but it can't end a love, and my father had a mighty love.

Matched by his sense of humor. My dad would have loved the joke. He has a delicious sense of dad humor. My mom joins him. They would be loving seeing me in this moment. My mom has a saying, it says, behind every successful child is an astonished parent.

But my dad would have loved me standing here because it was along this mall, right by the Jefferson memorial, that my mom and dad had their first date.

Yes, yes, my dad got lucky to meet my mom, and my mom had the charity to allow him to marry her.

And what would have remarked to my father about this moment, he would have thought it was incredible that here his son, who he never would have imagined until I started running, that I would be the fourth elected African-American in the history of the United States senate. My dad would have joked about that.

My dad would have done the math and said, son, let's see.

Between the senate, between the supreme court, and the White House, there's only four black folks.

It looks almost as bad as an Oscar nomination list.

[Laughter]

But what I really want to do is tell you about my father's admonitions, and frankly, I want to tell you a story about how I failed to live up to my father's instructions.

But first, three things about my dad. You see, he would tell me, son, it's about you. It's not about this world. He says, you have a decision to make. There's two ways to go through life. You can go through life as a thermometer or a thermostat. A thermometer just reflects the world that's out there.

If it's hot, you get hot. If it's cold, you get cold. You're just a reflection of what is.

But a thermostat, it changes the temperature. It focuses on itself.

It sets the level. That's what I want you to be. You got to be you.

You've got to be one that, wherever you are, like a flower, you've got to blossom where you're planted. Tell your truth in this moment.

And if I had to summarize my father's guidance about it's about you, it would be he would worry about three things. The first, he would worry about me becoming cynical about the world.

You can't control the world, he would say, son, but you can control your reactions, and don't give in to cynicism. Cynicism is a toxic spiritual state. Cynicism -- it's erosive and corrosive to who you are, not about the world.

It actually clouds your vision. It makes it hard to see faint possibilities amidST glaring problems. Cynicism is a choice that you make that actually is disempowering. There's not one statue built on this mall to anyone who was a cynic. It was people in our history that, despite overwhelming challenges, despite frustrations, despite the bad actors here in Washington or where they live, they never chose cynicism.

They kept believing in freedom, even if it's slavery, they kept on believing in the right to vote even when women were denied it, they kept believing in the end to sweat shops and child labor.

Even though they were frustrated about that, they kept believing. They never became cynical. They kept working and trying.

The second thing my father said that's related to that.

It goes to this idea by Alice walker, who said so clearly that the most common way people give up their power is not realizing they have it in the first place.

My father would say, it's not about the world.

It's about you. Don't surrender your power to someone else. Just because they're mean doesn't mean you have to be.

Now, I see this amongst myself the temptation online when you're communicating with people and you see somebody saying something bad, that doesn't mean that you have to be mean.

In this world, it's so urgently needs kindness, love, generosity. We cannot let ourselves in any way reflect that negativity with our own. Right now more than ever in this political climate, I'm tired of people complaining about what others do and not looking about how they're living in their lives. We have a choice to make in every moment. Why not blossom in this moment?

By making sure you're kind to people who are right in front of you.

I love that advice that was given by a man who once said, someone who is nice to you but not nice to the waiter is not a nice person.

[Applause]

Don't complain about meanness in the world if you're not manifesting kindness in your own. Don't call out for the world to be more MERCIful if you can't manifest mercy. Don't say we need more hope in this world if you are not an instrument of hope in someone's life. You have power in your choices. Right now, planted where you are, don't miss those opportunities.

But it's more than that.

My father was someone who said not to be cynical, was someone who said not just don't reflect the world around you, but all of this to him was about staying faithful to your ideals and not in any way allowing yourself to give in to that darkness.

Now, in that I mean a couple things.

Look, I graduated with a S.T.E.M. degree in the best kind of science there is, political science.

Now, I may not know all there is to know about physics, but I do know this. You can look at the history of this country, and you cannot eliminate darkness. You cannot banish it by cursing darkness.

The only way to get rid of darkness is light and to be the light yourself. So many people want to talk about the problems and not be about the solutions themselves.

I tell you this right now. I'm tired of this call in our country, for this idea of tolerance. That's not the aspiration.

We have a nation right now that seems to think the greatest and highest achievement is for us to be a tolerant nation, but I say no. We're not called to be a tolerant nation. We're called to be a nation of love.

You see, we know that tolerance to me is a floor, but love is the ceiling.

Tolerance says that I'm just stomaching your right to be a different American.

If you disappear off the face of the earth, I'm no better off or worse off because I was just tolerating you in the first place.

Really what we need to do is understand that we have to love each other, that we have to see each other have worth and dignity and value, and that if you disappear off the face of the earth, then I am worse off for that.

If you don't cultivate your genius, then I'm worse off for that.

If your children don't thrive, then I am beREFT of their genius, of their artistry, of their teaching, of their glory because ultimately tolerance does not recognize the truth of who we are, that we're all in this together, that we need each other to be successful.

You see, tolerance is becoming accustomed to injustice. Love is being disturbed and activated by another's adverse condition. Tolerance just crosses the street, keeps its head down. Love confronts and engages. Tolerance builds fences. Love opens doors. Tolerance breeds indifference. Love demands engagement.

Tolerance couldn't care less, but love couldn't care more. And we are a nation of love. If you walk to where my parents first had their date, right there at the Jefferson memorial, you will see one of our founding documents.

Now, I'm a person that's not afraid to tell the truth. There were flaws in those documents.

Native Americans were referred to as savages. In our founding documents, blacks were just referred to as fractions of human beings.

Stokley Carmichael used to always say CONSTITU, CONSTITU, I can only say three-fifths of those words.

Women were not referred to much as all in those documents, but if you look at those documents, there's such profound genius.

We're the first nation on the planet earth, hey, we don't have to look alike. We don't have to pray alike. We don't even have to be from the same origins, but we are a nation that's putting forth profound ideals of truth, Liberty, and the call to justice. We are a nation that understands that we need each other.

Right there at that Jefferson memorial, if you go there and stand in solemn respect and read the words of the declaration of independence, it ends with this call to interdependence. It says for this nation to make it, stop and recognize that we need each other. We need everybody.

It says that we can't make this country go far if we're not together like that old African saying, if you want to go fast, go alone. But if you want to go far, go together. At the end of that declaration of independence, that declaration of interdependence, that small words at the end, it says, we pledge to each other. To make this work, we mutually pledge to each other our lives and our fortunes and our sacred honor. Those aren't just words to be inscribed on a wall.

We have to make a choice to live them in our hearts. What does it mean to give forth your sacred honor?

Well, don't think it means some big speech or a big election or congressional debates.

It's a choice about what you do right now as you engage the world. Will you show that love for your fellow American no matter what? No matter if they're not manifesting it towards you. I'm a big believer that we've got to lead with love. Even when they criticize you, I say love them, for they're teaching you humility. When they heap scorn upon you, you have a choice to make, and I say love them for showing you and helping you discover how you are resilient.

When they doubt you, love them for giving strength and courage to your dreams. And when they cast you in the darkness, love them for letting them show you that you have within you an inextinguishable light. We have a choice to make in America.

Will we be people that react to the world, or will we be individual lights that say, no matter how tough it gets, no matter how dark it gets, I am going to ignite myself and show my truth, blossoming where I am. But this is difficult. It's difficult to live your values. It's difficult to put them into action every single day, and I get weary of people who preach their patriotism and don't live it.

I get weary of people who want to tell me about their faith. I have a saying that I say all the time that, before you speak to me about your religion, first show it to me in how you treat other people.

Before you tell me how much you love your God, show it to me in how much you love all his children.

Before you preach to me about your passion for your faith, teach me about it through your compassion for your neighbors. To me, I grow frustrated with folks who don't understand that patriotism is not just love of country, because you can't just love your country without loving your countrymen and women.

You don't always have to like folks. You don't always have to agree with them. But how you engage them with just love or grudging tolerance, with love or by spewing out darkness, that's what defines you.

Now, I told you I would confess to you my mistake, and this is the hardest part for me because what I've just told you now was the commands and the calls and the admonitions of my parents.

There's a woman named Alice Walker, who wrote a great book called "in search for my mother's garden." And I'm one of those people who was profoundly ambitious in my career, but she admonished me that often those who seek revolutions and scream for them, they're not often looking at themselves.

Alice walker said, the real revolutionary is always concerned with the least glamorous stuff, with raising a reading level from second grade to third, with simplifying history and writing it down, or reciting it for the old folks.

With helping Illiterates fill out food stamps, for they must eat, revolution or not.

The dull, frustrating work of the revolutionary artist means, most of all, being there for people when you need them.

We walk this earth. We walk our nation. And there are people that need us every day.

Sometimes we get so ambitious that we're running to change the world, that we forget that we need to change our world, first and foremost, our world of friends, our world of neighbors, our world that includes strangers and those who are different than us, our world that has people struggling with fights that we're often not even aware of because of our indifference and our apathy and our most dangerous type of privilege, which says, hey, a problem is not really a problem in this world unless it affects me directly.

This, to me, has been the struggle of my life, is to live up to my parents' understanding that, as you run towards your great goals of world change, slow down and look around you and change that world.

Well, I was a 20-something ambitious young man, and I was going to go change the world, fight the injustices. I followed the call of a great American prophet -- some of you might have studied him here at George Washington in your rarified, high level classes. That prophet's name is Chris Rock.

Now, Chris Rock had a saying, why is often the most dangerous street in many cities named after the man that stood for nonviolence?

And I moved on to Martin Luther King Boulevard in a great city named Newark.

Now, King boulevard in Newark has so many, even there in the mid-'90s, so many great testimonies to the greatness of my city, from universities like Rutgers and NJIT to great county college, to some great high schools, arts high school and St. Benedict's, but I moved to the south end of this street to begin my career, which was a dangerous place with open air drug dealing, lots of violence, and I decided in 1998 even, to move into some high rise projects.

I was captured and inspired by these incredible local leaders.

I always say I got my B.A. from Stanford but my Ph.D. on the streets of Newark because I met people like Miss Virginia Jones, who was the tenant president of those buildings, and I went to work as a young lawyer trying to change the community, change the neighborhood, change the city.

And before I knew it, leaders there were encouraging me in the tenant community to run for city council, and I became a city council person, and then in 2002, with an ambition to change the city, I ran for mayor.

I'm going to tell you right now, I lost that election, but this is good advice for you because, if you're going to have a spectacular failure in your life, have a documentary team there to capture it because it was a good movie.

[Laughter]

My shame exposed. But I lost that election, and I went back to work, living in brick towers, living in those projects, fighting and beginning to prepare for my run for office in 2006.

But along the way, the kids in my community, I watched some of them grow up, and a group of them used to hang out in the lobby of my building.

I'd come home at night, and I would see them, and they were incredible kids.

I knew them well. I knew their families, their light, it was amazing.

One of them, Hasan Washington, he reminded me so much of my dad. They both had the same quick wit, the same humor. In fact, both of them had almost the same background. Both were born poor. My dad was a little poorer because he said, son, I couldn't afford to be poor. I was just PO, P-o, I couldn't afford the other two letters. Both of them were born to single mothers. Both of their mamas couldn't take care of them and were being raised by their grand mamas.

In fact, my dad said he's here today because so many people in that community rushed to his aid, rushed to his assistance, were there for him. And Hasan lived four floors below me where I lived in brick towers. Those kids, I tell you, they got older. They got to high school, and when I would come home, I began to smell things in that lobby I had not smelled since college.

And understanding that that smell of marijuana in that lobby, I knew that there was a problem.

You see, there's a difference in this country, and it's a difference that is tragic, that belies what it says on the supreme court, this idea of equal justice under law. We live in a nation right now that treats you better if you're rich and guilty than if you're poor and innocent, as my friend Brian Stevenson says.

And I knew while at college at Stanford, my friends flaunted drug laws and a recklessness without any fear at all of being caught, that for kids in the inner city, flaunting drug laws, doing things that the last two presidents admitted doing, that they would experience a very different type of justice.

That we live in a nation where there's no difference between rich or poor or black or white for using drugs or dealing drugs.

In fact, young white males deal drugs a little more than young black male, but if you're black in America, especially if you're poor, you have about a four times more likely chance of being arrested for drugs than if you're white.

So when I saw these kids in my lobby, I knew there was a problem and they were in danger because one drug charge, one nonviolent drug charge would mean a world of transformation in the most negative sense.

People who come out for nonviolent drug charges in America, they can't get jobs, they can't get loans from their bank, they can't get a pell grant, they can't get food stamps, public housing, tens of thousands of consequence that's would crush their young lives.

So I started intervening with them.

Hey, guys, fellas, Hasan, let's get the guys together.

I always talk to you when I come home in the lobby, but let's go out and do something.

Let's go to a movie, any movie you want. I thought they were going to take me to a home improvement movie when they said, hey, let's go see this movie called "Saw." I took the kids after the movies to the diner.

I brought friends of mine who had been involved with drugs or thankfully got out and had horrible stories to tell. I told them I was going to start up mentoring programs so we could really start intervening. I'll tell you what, I started to follow through, but then I got busy chasing after my big dream to change the world.

You see, it was coming to 2006, and I was running for mayor, and I got so busy I couldn't follow through on what I said I was going to do. I never connected these kids with their mentors. I never followed through and began the informal programs of pulling them out of a lobby with marijuana onto their dreams, like had been done for my father.

But yet these kids, they never gave up on me. I came home into the lobby every night, tired from campaigning, and they would see me, and they would cheer me up. Sometimes they'd applaud when I'd come in. Sometimes they'd tell me, hey, man, we got your back. We're going to get everybody to vote for you.

One night I came in, and as I walked through the lobby, they pulled out lawn signs with my name on it, and they started chanting what I wanted to hear so badly, the title I longed for, they were chanting, mayor booker, mayor booker, and I walked through them with my swagger and waving to them like I was in a parade.

Those project elevator doors opened up, and I stepped in. I don't know if the elevator was working or not that day, but they lifted me so much, I was rising. Until I suddenly thought to myself, wait a minute.

Where did they get those lawn signs from? They're expensive. I won the election. I was mayor. I had death threats right away. So they surrounded me with police officers. The police officers were even stationed in the projects when I wasn't there. It's the safest they were for a long time.

But suddenly, those kids that were hanging in my lobby didn't want to hang out anymore where there were police officers now all the time, but I barely noticed. As mayor-elect, I was racing. I was going to change the world. In the back of my mind, I thought, you know what, I'm going to make things better for these kids and all the kids in the city. I was racing around. I got sworn in.

It was a time of rising violence in the city. I would run to street corners and talk to people at the sight of shootings with blood often on the sidewalks. I would tell them, this is not who we are. We're going to rise above the violence in Newark. I would give street level sermons.

One day I got called to come to a shooting about a month into my time as mayor. There was a body covered up on the ground. Another one being loaded in an ambulance. I barely even affirmed the humanity that was there. I was too busy rushing to the groups of people, telling them my plans for prisoner re-entry programs, my plans for more police on the streets.

And before you knew it, I was off doing the next thing during the day.

And by the time I got home at night to try to steal a few hours of sleep because I was so busy and so important, I sat down on my bed and was scrolling through my e-mail, and I saw the police report from the shooting.

And I glanced at it, but then I got stung at what I saw, and I stopped and kept looking and looking and looking at my phone.

It said the name of the person that was murdered, it said homicide, teenage victim, and the name was Hasan Washington. From my building. From my lobby, four floors below me, it was Hasan. I'll never forget his funeral.

I hated going to this room in Perry's funeral home. It was in the basement, and every time I walked down those stairs, I felt like I was descending into the bowel of a ship, narrow and Rickety. There we all were chained to each other, piled on top of one another, chained together in grief and mourning, moaning and groaning, at a reality that is all too common in America. Another boy in a box.

I did not feel like the mayor. I didn't feel powerful or important. I felt shame pressing on my chest. I couldn't comfort others. I couldn't do my duties.

I stood in the back of that funeral home, and all I could do was just try to hold it together as people came over to me.

I didn't comfort them. I leaned on their light. I leaned on their love. But finally, it was too much, and I'm embarrassed and ashamed to admit I didn't wait around for the service.

I turned to my newly assigned security guard, and I said, we got to get out of here. And I ran out of that funeral home, jumped into my newly issued SUV, sped to city hall, ran up the steps.

I didn't want to ride the elevator and have to look anybody in the eye. I got into the mayor's office, this new palatial office. I slammed the door. I sat on my couch, and suddenly for the first time as a mayor of New Jersey's largest city, all I could do, like a child, was sit there and cry and sob. God had put this kid right in front of me every day.

He was my father! And while his community and his town, they didn't let him down, I failed Hasan. I failed to honor my dad, that commandment, thou shall honor thy mother and father.

It's not about being nice to your parents or owe obedient, it's about honoring the legacy of our ancestors, not with the mountains you climb or the battles you win, but of the people around you right now. I did not honor my parents.

And all of us crowded right into that funeral home, we were all there for his death, but where were we for his life?

[Applause]

We are Americans, one to another. Yet we lose thousands of our children because of indifference, because of apathy, because we're just tolerating each other. We're not linked by love. We're not recognizing worth. We're letting too much injustice go on. But how can I curse the darkness if I myself can't be light?

Graduates of 2016, I hate to tell you this, but you're going to make mistakes too. You're going to fail to live up to your own standards. Your moral compass will go off kilter. In this world, it's tough. It's going to break you at times.

I wear scars and wounds of my own making, but I tell you this, if you're conscious, if you're truly conscious, your wounds can become wisdom, your scars can become strength.

Even when you get beat down, that beatdown can be a blessing.

If you remember failure, it's not final if you don't give up.

I want to end with the words of one of the Elders from Newark, New Jersey, and what she said to me when I was crumbling inside, when I felt like I was a thousand feet under water with my own shame and frustration and anger. She's a testimony that love does not always leap canyons of injustice.

Sometimes it's small steps, doing small acts of kindness, decency, and love. Sometimes that's what's most needed in this world. Helping a child. Being nice to your neighbor.

Waking up to the hidden pain that too many of us carry.

This woman who saw me suffering across a courtyard after a child's death, she looked up and saw me, and I saw Miss Jones, like she could read my heart.

All she did was open her arms, and it's exactly what I needed.

That small gesture that sometimes we all just need, and I ran over to her across the courtyard like a child.

I'm 6'3", and she's an Elderly 5 foot woman, but when she hugged me, I disappeared into her arms, and she just said two words. She said them over and over as she rubbed my back, and I wept like a child in her arms.

And these are the two words I want to leave you with.

And they're words that -- don't be mistaken. They're not about religion. They're about how you're living your ideals and your values.

These two words are not about divinity.

They're about right here on earth and how you choose to go about life. These words are not about God, but about you.

She rubbed my back over and over again as I cried. She nurtured me with these words. She said them over and over, these two words. She said, stay faithful. Stay faithful. Stay faithful.

Graduates of 2016, stay faithful because you have come this far by faith. Faith in each other, faith in yourselves, faith in our country.

Stay faithful because you are the living evidence and substance of things hoped for by your parents and ancestors past.

Stay faithful, not just in the big things, but in the small things, understanding that faith, the size of a mustard seed can move mountains.

And I want you to know that the world, it's calling you.

Where is the class of 2016? Hear that. Your nation is calling you.

Where is the class of 2016? Heed that.

But there are also small voices calling you too right in front of you, right next to you, right around you.

Heed that call.

And understand that you may not be called to change the whole world, but to one person, this day you could make a world of difference.

God bless you.

Way to go, class of 2016!

[Applause]

[Maltzman] Senator and Dr. Booker, your words, your stories, and your commitment to others is an inspiration to all.

Because of the weather, we will expedite the remainder of the ceremony.

Would President Knapp please join me at the podium. Would the deans please stand at their chairs. And would the graduates please rise.

President Knapp, before you stand the candidates for Bachelors, Masters, doctoral, and professional degrees at the George Washington University.

[Knapp] By virtue of the authority granted by the Congress of the United States of America, vested in the Board of Trustees of the George Washington University, and by the trustees of the university delegated to me, I hereby confer your degrees and declare you fully entitled to all their rights, honors, privileges, and responsibilities.

As a symbol of your new status as university graduates, you may now move the tassels on your caps against the wind, from right to left.

Congratulations to you all.

And now as our ceremony concludes, go out, be the light, remain faithful, and change our world.

Congratulations to you all.

#END#