The George Washington University Commencement  
Sunday, May 19, 2013  
Full Transcript

PROVOST LERMAN: Ladies and gentlemen, good morning. I'm Steve Lerman, it's my honor and privilege to be the Provost of the George Washington University. Will all of you please rise and join me in welcoming the graduating class of the George Washington University.

[Playing pomp and circumstance]

PROVOST LERMAN: Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming the faculty of the George Washington University!

PROVOST LERMAN: Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the George Washington University Board of Trustees, Chairman Russ Ramsey, President Steven Knapp, members of the administration, and our very special awardees and honorees escorted today by the GW Police Department Honor Guard.

PROVOST LERMAN: On behalf of all my colleagues on the stage and my colleagues throughout the university, I am delighted to welcome all of you to the spring commencement in this 192nd year of the George Washington University. Please join me and stand. We will begin our ceremony with the presentation of the colors and the national anthem sung by the university singers. We will remain standing for the invocation by Reverend Beverly Dempsey and the retiring of the colors.

Oh say can you see
By the dawn's early light
What so proudly we hailed
At the twilight's last gleaming
Whose broad stripes and bright stars
Through the perilous fight
O'er the ramparts we watched
Were so gallantly streaming
And the rockets red glare
The bombs bursting in air
Gave proof through the night
That our flag was still there
Oh, say does that star spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free
And the home of the brave!

REVEREND DEMPSEY: Grace and peace to you all. As we move through the 2013 George Washington commencement exercises, I invite you to join me in prayer. Author of all life and source of all goodness, we praise you for the glories of this day. For our privilege to be in scholarly community to our right to gather on this lawn before our nation's Capitol, we praise you. For the ones who have nurtured and supported, informed and encouraged us, we praise you. For our diverse gifts and abilities that have awakened our appreciation for creative expressions of learning, we give you thanks. For each student, family member, educator, and university employee among us and for those who have been lost along the way but would rejoice with us were they present today, we give you thanks and praise. As these graduates consider their journey and the demands of higher education, may they say with gratitude that the time was well spent. May they embrace the transformations they have undergone and the developments they have witnessed in others. May they have grown from the opportunities they have missed and the mistakes they have made, and then may they reflect with gladness upon the years they have shared and be content. As these graduates move through their years, may they be inspired to live into a fullness that only you could know.

In a world of disparate truths, may they find a way to make unity visible.
In a world of conflict, may they find a way to make peace visible.
In a world of self-indulgence, may they find a way to make generosity visible.
In a world of despair, may they find a way to make hope visible.
In a world of anger, may they find a way to make love visible.
In a world of disrespect, may they find a way to make honor visible.
In a world of hubris, may they find a way to make humility visible.
In a world of disapproval, may they find a way to make grace visible.
In a world of sadness, may they find a way to make joy visible.
In a world of outrageous want, may these students go out from this space as a holy embodiment of your will, intent upon expanding the visibility of goodness for all eternity.
Thanks be to you, O author of life, and all praise to you for the glories of our days to come.
Be a persistent guide among us today and within us always as our constant companion and guide.
Amen.

PROVOST LERMAN: Class of 2013, would you and your guests please be seated.
I am delighted to open this ceremony in this truly one of a kind setting here at the national Mall.
To gather here so close to the U.S. Capitol and to the monument dedicated to the nation's first president is a fitting tribute to your achievements in completing your degrees. It's now my pleasure and honor to invite the president of the university to join me at the podium. Dr. Steven Knapp is concluding his sixth year as president of the George Washington University. Dr. Knapp leads a community of faculty, students, and staff that numbers almost 30,000 people. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming the George Washington University's 16th president, Dr. Steven Knapp.

PRESIDENT KNAPP: Chairman Ramsey, honorable trustees, honorary degree recipients, university leaders, distinguished members of the faculty, ladies and gentlemen,

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, and Park Service staff for their gracious and generous help preparing this majestic setting for today's ceremony. Please join me in thanking our hosts.

[Applause]

Now I would like to continue an important commencement tradition. Will the parents, the families, and the friends of the class of 2013 please rise to accept our congratulations and our thanks.

[Applause]

Thank you. It is now my pleasure to recognize the special guests who today will receive the university's highest honor. Please join me in welcoming 23rd Commandant of the United States Coast Guard, admiral Thad Allen, international education leader Harriet Mayor Fulbright, and distinguished actor and activist Kerry Washington.

Next I have the honor of introducing W. Russell Ramsey, chairman of the university's Board of Trustees. Mr. Ramsey.

CHAIRMAN RAMSEY: Thank you, Mr. President. Good morning. I am honored, for the last time, as chairman of the Board of Trustees, to join President Knapp and my fellow trustees -- many of whom are also alumni and parents, relatives, and friends of GW students -- in welcoming all of you on this very significant occasion, as we celebrate the class of 2013. The class of 2013! And your many accomplishments and achievements. A couple things. First, may I ask the trustees who have joined us this morning to please rise and be recognized by this audience.

[Applause]

These are amazing friends whose leadership is beyond words for me, and I thank you for your commitment to GW and its past and future glory. It is also my distinct pleasure to offer a special welcome to our honorary degree recipients -- Thad Allen, Harriet Fulbright, along with our commencement speaker, Kerry Washington. We appreciate all of you for 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 support of the staff and the love and caring of their families and friends that helped them through their journey at GW. Hats off to family and friends! So a bit of nostalgia. More than 30 years ago I was one of you, and I had completed my studies here at George Washington. From my own experience, I can tell you that the time I spent here, the lessons I learned, the friends I made, they stayed with me and continue to enrich my personal and professional life, all aspects of myself, my whole being. I often tell people that GW changed the trajectory of my life in so many ways that I will be forever grateful and loyal to this university. That's really one of the unifying points that connect to us a broader, lifelong and worldwide community. While you may not fully appreciate it right now, I doubt you do, I can tell you this connection is one that has shaped who you are and who you will be for the rest of your lives. Over my last 15 years as a board member and later as chair, I've had a really wonderful opportunity to play a role in the growth and development of this great university into what I believe is the most respected and admired universities in the world. All of you, as the newest GW graduates, also have a role to play. Take the knowledge that you have learned through your academic and co-curricular pursuits and the pride and respect you have gained for your alma mater into the world as citizen leaders. Remember who you are has been shaped in large measure by your experiences at the George Washington University. Don't wait to be asked. Stay connected with this university by coming back and visiting, letting us know of your
accomplishments, sharing your expertise, going a little beyond Facebook, really stay connected with us, hire a fellow GW alumni, make gifts to support the causes you believe in, and encourage others to follow in your footsteps here at George Washington University. We are very, very proud of you. And I know you will always be proud to say, I am a graduate of the George Washington University. Congratulations to all of you! It is now my pleasure to turn the program back over to Provost Lerman.

PROVOST LERMAN:  It is now my honor to recognize this year's recipients of the George Washington awards. This award is our university's highest honor and is conferred for extraordinary contributions to the GW community. The students, faculty, and staff who receive the GW award have each, in his or her own way, shaped the university, making it the outstanding institution it is today. So it gives me great pleasure to announce this year's honorees. As I call your name, please rise. Joshua D'Angelo, a candidate for a Doctor of Physical Therapy degree in the School of Medicine and Health Sciences.

[Applause]

Charles Barber, the deputy general counsel of the university

[Applause]

And Edward Cherian, Professor of Information Systems.

[Applause]

Thank you and once again join me in congratulating the winners of the GW awards.

[Applause]

Now let me introduce Jim Core, the president of the GW Alumni Association, who will offer a few remarks and introduce our student speaker. Jim?

MR. CORE:  Thank you, Provost Lerman. Good morning, everyone. And a special good morning to the class of 2013! My name is Jim Core. I am a proud graduate of the Elliott School of International Affairs, and it's been my honor to serve as president of the George Washington Alumni Association. My first task this morning is to recognize your Alumni Association executive board that is gathered here to celebrate this day with you. It is also a great privilege for me to welcome and honor our alumni emeriti that are in the audience to celebrate this great day with you. They are seated in front of the podium in ceremonial caps and wonderful gold gowns. It is a pleasure to welcome you at this wonderful occasion. Please stand to be recognized. And let's give them a round of applause.

[Applause]

To the class of 2013, I congratulate you on behalf of the worldwide GW alumni community and welcome you to our family. Welcome to the club, we're glad you're on board. This means that you are now part of a global network of over a quarter of a million people in 150 countries around the world. The next chapter of your GW experience begins today. I invite you to engage with our young alumni network as a way of connecting with your fellow alums. Participate in regional club activities, follow us on Facebook and twitter, continue to challenge yourself academically by attending one of our alumni speaker series or even auditing a class. All these and more are ways to stay connected to GW and, more importantly, reap the rewards of a powerful affiliation. Your Alumni Association is a community of volunteers serving our students, our alumni, and our beloved alma mater. We are driven to help people succeed. That's what we're about, and that is what we do. The association provides funding to student groups, athletic organizations, and cultural groups who want to host reunions. We offer career consulting for alums who are looking for some mentoring to advance the careers that they have begun or perhaps are looking to make a change. We offer many benefits, including trips to foreign destinations with faculty. Stay in touch with us, attend your class reunions, be an active alum, and please, please come back and mentor that next generation of GW students, and of course be sure to stop by alumni house when you're on campus. Remember this, GW is your university long after the diplomas go up on the wall. And it does not matter where that wall sits -- from Boston to Bamako to Bangkok -- for every stage of your life and wherever you may be, your George Washington Alumni Association is here to serve you. It is now my privilege to introduce our student speaker, Alex Zafran. Mr. Zafran graduates today Summa cum Laude with a Bachelor of Arts in Classical Studies. During his four years at GW, this entrepreneurial son of Parkland Florida excelled in class and in the community. He says that GW inspired him to start a world class political satire publication, the Washington Fancy. Alex served as vice president of Chabad GW, excelled in the university
honors program, and helped recruit the next generation of Colonials with his work in the admissions office. He interned on Capitol Hill and with leading companies in Washington, D.C. and Fort Lauderdale. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Alex Zafran to the stage.

MR. ZAFRAN: Thank you so much, Mr. Core, and good morning GW! Now, I must add before I begin that there is no experience like singing the national anthem while looking at beautiful lady liberty on top of our United States Capitol. In ancient Rome, education wasn’t seen as an end unto itself but, rather, as a bridge leading out to self-discovery, global consciousness, and the working world, much as it is today. And, in fact, our English word education derives from the Latin educere, which literally means to lead out. Today, as the graduating class of 2013 stands here on the Mall, we are leading ourselves out from GW into our future endeavors. In true ancient Roman fashion, GW is an open forum of opportunity. Our unofficial university motto is that something happens here, but truth be told, everything happens here. This is a place where, on Martin Luther King Day, thousands of students unite to connect with the D.C. community and devote themselves to service. This is a place where students don’t simply speak about their goals, yet hundreds of student organizations debate, rally, organize, fund raise, engineer, sing (a cappella of course) and dance to achieve them. And, yes, this is a place where college Republicans and Democrats hold meetings that get louder than the bar down the street. But no student past or present could ever have arrived at this junction alone. Our first debt of gratitude goes to our first educators, parents, family, and friends.

[Applause]

But at GW, our professors, academic advisors, and mentors have mapped out the journey beside us. They have led us through investment portfolios and musical performances, debates on philosophical ethics, and research on quantum mechanics, preparing us for that day, today, when we would have to face those challenges by ourselves. GW students do not grow in a linear fashion. We expand in every direction and dimension. We are political consultants who speak multiple languages, entrepreneurs who can teach people to Gangnam Style, technology gurus with passions for Shakespearean drama and biology lovers who still long for the study abroad days in China. I say this not to typify GW students, but because these are my actual friends, my peers with whom I graduate today. Educere -- to lead oneself out. This is the mission of our graduating class. A final word on this Latin. I once asked a professor of mine whether my general pronunciation was acceptable, and he said to me, Alex, if you want to speak a dead language with a made-up accent, you go right ahead. To my fellow graduates in the class of 2013, may you thrive with the buff and blue blood now coursing through your veins, and may you lead yourselves out, moving from strength to strength. And to all of the witnesses present, just wait and see what we can do. Thank you. L’chaim!

PROVOST LERMAN: Thank you, Alex, very much. Your remarks and your achievements inspire us all. Now we move to the point when President Knapp will now confer the honorary degrees.

PRESIDENT KNAPP: The recipient of our first honorary degree this morning will be introduced by Elena Kim. Elena is an army veteran who graduates today with a bachelor's degree in international affairs, a concentration in Middle East studies, and a minor in religion. During her time at GW, she has served as a leader in the student veteran community, worked on initiatives such as the rendering project, which transforms the experiences of veterans into powerful works of art. She is also a sister of Delta Phi Epsilon, a professional foreign service sorority that seeks to promote the participation of young women in the foreign service. After graduation, she looks to forward furthering her education in preparation for a career in national security.

MS. KIM: President Knapp, I am honored to present you to Thad Allen for the degree of Doctor of Public Service honoris causa.

PRESIDENT KNAPP: You were born in Tucson, Arizona, where you also graduated from Palo Verde High School, following in the footsteps of your father, a World War II veteran and lifetime Coast Guardsman, you entered the United States Coast Guard Academy. There you demonstrated your skills both in the classroom and on the football field where you were a standout linebacker. For the next four decades you served our nation ashore and at sea. You commanded cutters and took on assignments ranging from search and rescue operations to intelligence gathering to fleet mods earn says. You were promoted to operational commander with responsibility for the safety, security, and environmental stewardship of some 14 million square miles. At the same time, you continued your education, earning a master's degree in public administration from the George Washington University and another master's degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Sloan School of Management. Your leadership in response to both national and international cite ease embodied the Coast Guard motto, semper paratus, always ready. In the hours following the attacks of September 11, 2001, you acted to
secure the nation's waterways. While chief of staff to the Commandant of the Coast Guard, you oversaw the government-wide response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. In 2006 you were appointed by president George W. Bush to a four year term as the 23rd Commandant of the Coast Guard. As Commandant you focused on modernization, interagency collaboration, and a reorientation of the Coast Guard to better address issues such as terrorism and piracy. You directed the rapid response of the Coast Guard to the earthquake that devastated Haiti in January 2010, giving indispensable aid to that nation in its hour of need. In May 2010, as your term as Commandant was ending, President Barack Obama named you incident commander for the deep water horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. In that role you presided with calm authority over the nation's response to its worst environmental disaster. You are currently an executive vice president at Booz Allen Hamilton, where you lead the firm's activity in the fields of justice and homeland security. You serve on the advisory board of George Washington's Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration, the board of directors of the Coast Guard Foundation, and the Board of Trustees of the partnership for public service. This is not the first time this university has had the privilege of honoring you. In 2006 you received its distinguished alumni achievement award, four years later you received the Colin Powell Public Service Award. Thad Allen, for 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!

COMMANDANT ALLEN: Thank you. Isn't this wonderful Coast Guard weather? Understanding that I'm standing between you and the rest of your life, all greetings and salutations remain in effect. And to quote an irreverent leader a long time ago, my job here today is like a corpse at an Irish wake. I'm required for the ceremony, but nobody expects me to say much. I am grateful, President Knapp, for the academic preparation that George Washington gave me in the field of public administration, but I must caution you, you need to be careful about where you parachute a public administrator into because they immediately start field work. For the sake of brevity, I would like to talk about two things this morning very quickly. One is the need for transparency in your life and in our government and in our lives. And Alex upstaged me on another one, and that is the need for you to lead. Mark Twain, and I'm going to paraphrase this one, said always tell the truth. It will gratify most and astound the rest. What people expect of leaders is open, honest communication and accountability. If you do that, you will be amazed. Transparency of information breeds self-correcting behavior. Your people will do what's asked of them before you have to ask. Regarding leadership, my favorite definition of leadership is the ability to reconcile opportunity and competency. Very much like Alex said. You can be the most competent person in the world, but if you're never given an opportunity, that is a loss for you, that is a loss for society, it is a loss for the world. On the other hand, you must be competent when the opportunity arises. That means you must keep learning. Great leaders are great learners. You need to engage this through your entire life. But I will tell you not all opportunities for leadership are good. We will all face adversity at times, you will face adversity. But the opportunity that exists when adversity arrives is the opportunity to find yourself by who you are, how you act, and your behaviors. From the hallways of sandy hook elementary school to the streets of Boston, we have seen our fellow citizens confront adversity of the worst kind, with humanity and heroism and know bill it I. It is in those times that we define ourselves as citizens, acting towards a higher purpose. In closing, I will suggest that it may now be time for us to lead our leaders.

Thank you.

[Applause]

PRESIDENT KNAPP: Our second honorary degree recipient will be introduced by Jordan Chaffin. Jordan who received her Bachelor of Arts degree at GW in 2011 is a presidential administrative fellow and graduates today with a master's degree in global communication. This summer she will be leaving for Geneva, Switzerland to work as an intern with UNICEF's office of emergency programs where she will apply best practices in serving some of the world's most vulnerable populations.

MS. CHAFFIN: President Knapp, I am honored to present to you Harriet Fulbright for the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters, honoris causa.

PRESIDENT KNAPP: You were born in New York City and grew up in New York, Washington, D.C., and Toronto. You graduated from Radcliffe College with a Bachelor of Arts in political theory. As a young woman, you taught students the English language in Korea, the Soviet union, and Germany. You earned a Master of Fine Arts from the George Washington University in 1975. You taught art at several institutions, including American university and the Maret School where you were elected teacher of the year in 1980. In 1987 you became executive director of the Fulbright Association, which had been founded in 1977 to foster collaboration among American and international alumni of the Fulbright Program, the prestigious international educational exchange program created by Senator J. William Fulbright. There you met Senator
Fulbright, himself a distinguished alumnus of the George Washington University Law School. You and Senator Fulbright were married in 1990, and you have preserved his legacy through your own leadership in the field of international education. You founded and served for five years as president of the J. William and Harriet Fulbright Center, a nonprofit organization dedicated to globalizing education and promoting nonviolent means of resolving conflicts through international collaboration and educational programs. Your commitment to international education is also reflected in your position as the founder, namesake, and honorary president of Harriet Fulbright College, which provides English language instruction to international students. You currently lend your expertise to your alma mater as a member of the advisory board of George Washington's Graduate School of Education and human development.

[Applause]

Your leadership has extended beyond education and diplomacy to embrace culture and the arts as well. President Bill Clinton named you executive director of the president's committee on the arts and humanities, a role in which you served from 1997 to 2000. You were the first assistant director of the congressional arts caucus and also served as executive secretary of the international Congress of art historians at the National Gallery of Art's center for advanced study in the visual arts. You have been a trustee or director of numerous organizations, including the international child art foundation, the International Institute of Leadership and public affairs, the American Council for International Education, and the national foreign language center. Harriet Mayor Fulbright, for all the foregoing, the George Washington University proudly confers upon you the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters honoris causa, with all the rights, duties, and privileges pertaining thereto.

[Applause]

DR. FULBRIGHT: I can't thank you enough for this extraordinary honor. It was many decades ago that I came to George Washington University, the mother of three very small girls, and a mind that was crying for stimulation, and I was amply rewarded. George Washington gave me a wonderful education to be able to do the things that you have just heard about. And I am deeply grateful to them for this extraordinary honor. My children are now full grown ladies, very successful in the fields of the law, computer science, and the arts, and I attribute that success also to my education here at the George Washington University. Thank you very much.

[Applause]

PRESIDENT KNAPP: Our final honorary degree recipient will be introduced by Arielle Katcher. Arielle is a Presidential Scholar in the Arts and has participated in numerous theatrical and musical productions on campus. At GW she has exhibited grace and wisdom in balancing her studies, her love of theater, and her ultimate goal of becoming a physician. She graduates today with a Bachelor of Science degree in biology, and we are proud to say that she was recently accepted as a member of the early selection program at the George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences and will pursue a doctor of medicine degree beginning this fall.

MS. KATCHER: President Knapp, I am honored to present you to Kerry Washington for the degree of doctor of fine arts, honoris causa.

[Applause]

PRESIDENT KNAPP: You were born in the Bronx in New York City. You graduated in 1994 from the renowned Spense School, where you were honored with the National Society of Collegiate Scholars Award. In recognition of your talent and potential, you were admitted to the George Washington University as a Presidential Scholar in the Arts, a distinction you held for all four of your undergraduate years. You created your own interdisciplinary major, combining theater, dance, music, sociology, anthropology, and psychology in a way that deeply informed your acting and laid the foundation of your later success on stage and screen. In 1998 you were elected to Phi Beta Kappa and graduated magna cum laude from the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences. You made your film debut in 2000 in the highly acclaimed Our Song, and you later appeared in Save the Last Dance, for which you received a teen choice award for best breakout performance. You also appeared in The Last King of Scotland, Lakeview Terrace, and the Academy Award-nominated Ray, for which you earned the NAACP Image Award for outstanding actress in a motion picture. Your recent credits include Django Unchained, which was nominated for both academy and Golden Globe Awards for best picture and for which you won a second NAACP Image Award, this time for outstanding supporting actress. In 2009 you took time away from your rapidly advancing film career to provide a riveting Broadway portrayal of a young attorney in David Mamet's play Race, and then in 2012 you became the first African-American...
woman since 1974 to headline a network television show. Your role as Olivia Pope in the ABC series Scandal has earned you still another NAACP Image Award for outstanding actress in a drama series. You have worked tirelessly not only in the arts but for the arts. In 2007 you testified before the United States Congress on behalf of the Creative Coalition, seeking an increase in funding for the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities. In 2009 you were appointed by President Barack Obama to the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities. As a member of the V-Counsel, you have worked to end violence against women and girls around the world. By adopting Savoy Elementary School in Washington's Anacostia neighborhood, you have invested your time and energy in using the arts to improve the attendance, engagement, and academic success of inner city students. This year, your public service and commitment to civil rights earned you the prestigious NAACP president's award. You have also given back to your alma mater by serving on our Board of Trustees and have earned the university's alumni achievement award. Kerry Washington, for all the foregoing, the George Washington University proudly confers upon you the degree of doctor of fine arts, honoris causa, with all the rights, duties, and privileges pertaining thereto.

[Applause]

PRESIDENT KNAPP: Ladies and gentlemen, our commencement speaker, Dr. Kerry Washington.

[Applause]

DR. WASHINGTON: I love you, too! President Knapp, trustees, friends, families, fellow honorees, and most of all, class of 2013, congratulations!

[Applause]

It is great to be with you back on the ellipse in D.C. It seems like just yesterday I was here for my own commencement ceremony. Like many of you, my parents are here today, and I think we should all take one more moment to thank our loved ones for being here and for being a source of love and support throughout the journey that led us to this moment.

[Applause]

The doctoral regalia that I am wearing belongs to my mother, Dr. VALERIE Washington. In my profession it is important to dress for the part, so when my mother offered me her robe for the day, I gratefully accepted. It is my hope that even a tiny bit of her insight and grace be embodied in my words to you.

[Applause]

I am proud to be here. I am shaking, and tremendously grateful for the honorary degree you have bestowed on me, and I will spend the next few minutes trying to earn it. But I have to admit that I am even more proud of the GW degree that took me four years, a lot of sleepless nights, student loans, study groups, and more than a few drinks at Lindy's to earn. Although we called it the Red Lion back then. So I stand here today in solidarity with you, as a proud alum of this institution. I celebrate you and I welcome you into the great lineage and legacy of GW. Today you join the ranks of award-winning journalists like Bob Woodward and Dana Bash, Colin Powell, elected leaders like Harry Reid and Eric Cantor, civil rights champions like Ron, philanthropists like Dr. William McGee who founded Operation Smile, taste makers like Jackie Kennedy to Ina Garten, Michael Coates and physicists like Dr. Ralph Alpher who came up with the big bang. I'm, of course, talking about the theory, not the television show. You join an impressive tradition and our commencement is part of that tradition. Year after year GW sends its graduates into the world on the wings of advice from esteemed leaders and thinkers, and this year you got me. Well, look, I know -- no, no, no, no

[Applause]

I know what some of you are thinking. You're thinking we're celebrating our academic and intellectual achievement with that lady who is having an affair with the president on that TV show. I know. I get it. On television I play a character who is smart and powerful and successful, Olivia Pope could give you all some advice on making it to the top. But in real life I am just an actor. I play pretend. I tell stories. So bear with me because that is what I'm going to do. When I first arrived at GW, I didn't think I would be an actor. I dreamt of being a psychologist or an educator like my mother. From an early age, I was fascinated with people and how we become who we are, but acting? That was a hobby. A hobby, however, that helped me pay for my education here. As you heard, in my senior year of high school, GW offered me financial aid as a member of the
presidential scholars in the arts program, and while I did not have to major in acting, there were several requirements. Among these was the stipulation that I had to audition for every single performance produced by the theater and dance department. More on that in a minute. So instead of studying how to pretend to be people, I studied people. I designed an interdisciplinary major in various social sciences -- psychology, sociology, history, and anthropology -- and one of the things that fascinated me most was the importance of story telling. In every culture and in every moment of human existence, the ritual of story telling has been a central tenet of our experience because it is through stories that we understand ourselves and each other. When we engage in a story, whether it's a great novel or a film or documentary, we learn more about who we are, who we want to be, who we don't want to be, and in that way stories transform us as we journey along with the hero of any story we realize that we, too, are the lead characters of our own lives. I am here today to remind each of you that you are the heroes of your story, and I'm not just referring to your heroic victory over Georgetown in the 2010 snowmageddon snowball fight. Your life is your story, and the adventure ahead of you is the journey to fulfill your own purpose and potential. So I want to share a little something with you about stories and about heroes and about how this all works. It was here at GW that I first read the work of Joseph Campbell, and what attracted me to his writing was the concept of the hero's journey. He wrote, the hero's journey always begins with the call. You've experienced it, an exciting opportunity presents itself, but our fear makes us believe that we're not capable of meeting the challenge. There are 17 stages of the hero's journey as Campbell describes it, but don't worry, I'm not going to go through all of them. What I will tell you is that I crossed the threshold into unknown territory, meaning I showed up for my audition because I believed in the message of the production, a message of love and family and environmental conservation. I wanted to support Leslie Jacobson, my brilliant professor and my mentor, and I had to fulfill my scholarship requirements because, as many of you probably relate to, I wanted to complete my degree and graduate. So I answered the call. I pushed past my comfort zone, and when I did, I won the role. So now I was in the belly of the whale. Now I had to be willing to be the lead frog. Again, I was terrified. This was a serious musical with important dramatic themes. How could I commit to the role and bring life to the character in a way that made people think and feel rather than giggle and mock us? So I approached the role as a social scientist, the way GW taught me to. I thought, I'm going to study frogs. I went to the zoo up in Woodley Park, and I spent hours watching frogs. I read about frogs, I held frogs, I watched frog documentaries, I figured out ways to physicalize my performance as a frog without seeming to be a cartoon. I faced my fears, and I stepped out on to that Marvin Center stage, and it became a role that transformed my thinking about how I use my body to do what I do every single day, and more importantly, to this day it is my father's most favorite thing I've ever done. I'm serious. You can ask him. But the lesson here isn't how you, too, can be a frog. The lesson is that you are sitting here today because you, too, learned how to answer the call. Your degree is proof that you have what it takes to take the leap into the adventure of your unique experience. You don't earn a degree by doing and being and existing in the comfort zone of what you already know. So whether it's taken two years or seven to get today's degree, I want you to look back on the journey that brought you here. What moments challenged you most? When were you asked to step outside of your familiar territory in order to rise to the occasion of your potential? How have you pushed past your fear? I want you to remember those moments because they will embolden you and affirm you and remind you that you did this, you completed this journey. You answered the call, and now you can continue to do so. But the choice is yours. When you leave here today and commence the next stage of your life, you can follow someone else's script, try to make choices that will make other people happy, avoid discomfort, do what is expected and copy the status quo or you can look at all that you have accomplished today and use it as fuel to venture forth and write your own story. If you do, amazing things will take shape. Look at the stories you've already begun writing, stories of warrior poets like Elena Kim who served for five years in Iraq and has been working with local high school students to turn veterans personal essays into art projects. She along with 152 other student veterans wears a cap and gown instead of a uniform.

[Applause]
Stories of idealistic pragmatists like Daniel Bassali and Winslow Marshall who started a PAC that sharing drinks will lead to sharing dialogue. When they hosted a summit, they proved a beer can go a long way towards bipartisan action, stories about agents of change like MBA grad Shashwat Gautam who will be returning home to Bihar, India. When he steps off the plane he will step immediately on to the campaign trail for state assembly and continue to fight to eradicate poverty and disease. Stories of --

[Applause]

Stories of innovators like the team that participated in the solar decathlon, champions for women's rights, champions for labor rights, scientific leaders in the field against climate change. Your stories astound me. Your list of accomplishments is as long as the list of graduates today because, as you sit here, you are not only graduates, you are adventurerers. In my eyes, you are heroes who have faced fears and taken risks and forged ahead to conquer one of the most important chapters of your life. Now that you've achieved the goal of this great quest, now you must ready yourself for when the call to adventure comes again, and when it does, don't follow the path prescribed by someone else. Don't give in to fear. Continue to define your unique path in faith and with the experience of the accomplished adventurer that you are. You and you alone are the only person who can live the life that writes the story that you were meant to tell. And the world needs your story because the world needs your voice. Every single one of you. And because as your story unfolds you will inspire others to find their stories, and so on, and so on, and so on, and those stories George Washington graduates of the class of 2013, those are the stories that I can't wait to watch. In fact, don't be surprised if you get a call from me wanting to option the really good ones and turn them into movies because I'm so Hollywood now. Graduates, may God bless you in all that you do. It is an honor to share this day with you. I promise you that you will be hearing from the alum. I promise that sooner than you know it, you will be hearing from the Alumni Association. Very soon. So, again, congratulations and welcome to the club!

[Applause]

PROVOST LERMAN: Graduates, commencement is a time to reflect upon your accomplishments, but it is also, of course, a time for many of you to begin to reflect on what comes next. For some of you that's not so much in specific terms but rather in the broader sense of what it will mean for you to be a citizen of the world and how you might draw on all that you have learned here to become an even more engaged member of civil society. At the George Washington University, we help you along with this traditional graduation ritual -- the charge to the graduates. President Knapp, I invite you to join me at the podium to offer your charge to the graduating class. President Knapp, the graduating class of 2013.

[Applause]

PRESIDENT KNAPP: Did you all notice how the drizzle actually stopped when Kerry Washington began to speak? As our class student speaker, will appreciate, that is the story of Orpheus. Ladies and gentlemen, I now have the honor of welcoming our new graduates to the lifelong and worldwide community of George Washington University alumni. Class of 2013, you are exceptional men and women, and I am proud to call you graduates of this great university. This is a very significant day for you and for the family and friends who have supported you throughout your educational journey. We gather at this majestic setting on the National Mall to celebrate your accomplishments, to applaud your hard work and perseverance, and to honor your commitment to serve as active and engaged citizens of your communities, your nations, and the world. Graduates, I charge you to keep alive the spirit, the energy, the imagination, and the commitment to service that have won our admiration during your years in our midst. I charge you also to keep alive the curiosity that has guided you through your studies here so that whatever work you undertake will constantly be refreshed by new knowledge. And I charge you to nourish the respect you have learned for all persons, especially those whose cultures, traditions, and opinions differ from your own. You are our future. We depend on you to repair what earlier generations have broken, to build what we have left unbuilt, to learn what we have not yet learned, to heal what we have so far left unhealed. And as you go forth to do these things, always know that, at the George Washington University, you have a home in the heart of this nation's capital. Congratulations and best wishes to you all!

PROVOST LERMAN: Ladies and gentlemen, the president of the university will now confer the bachelor's, master's, Doctoral, and professional degrees. I ask the Deans to rise and come forward in the order of the founding of their schools. Graduates, as your Dean announces degrees from your college or school, please rise and remain standing until all the degrees of the university are called. For degrees in Columbian College of Arts and Sciences, Dean Peg Barratt.
DEAN BARRATT: President Knapp, it is with great pride that I present the candidates for the degrees Associate in Arts, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Fine Arts, Bachelor of Science, Master of Arts, Master of Fine Arts, Master of Science, Master of Forensic Sciences, Master of Philosophy, Master of Psychology, Master of Public Administration, Master of Public Policy, Doctor of psychology, Doctor of Philosophy. These candidates have completed all the requirements for the Colombian college degrees indicated, and the faculty asks that the degrees be conferred.

[Applause]

PROVOST LERMAN: The degrees from the School of Medicine and health sciences, Dean Jeffrey Akman.

DEAN AKMAN: President Knapp, I am honored to present the candidates for the following degrees: Associate in Science, Bachelor of Science in Health Sciences, Master of Science in Health Sciences, Doctor of Medicine, and Doctor of Physical Therapy. These candidates have completed all requirements for the degrees indicated, and the faculty asks that these degrees be conferred.

[Applause]

PROVOST LERMAN: For the degrees in the law school, interim Dean Gregory Maggs.

DEAN MAGGS: President Knapp, it is my pleasure to present the candidates for the following degrees: Juris Doctor, Master of Laws, Doctor of Juridical Science. These candidates have completed all requirements for the degrees indicated, and the faculty asks that the degrees be conferred.

[Applause]

PROVOST LERMAN: For degrees in the School of Engineering and Applied Science, Dean David Dolling.

DEAN DOLLING: President Knapp, I am pleased to present to you the candidates for the degrees: Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, Master of Science, Applied Scientist, Engineer, Doctor of Philosophy, Doctor of Science. These candidates have completed all requirements for the degrees indicated, and the faculty asks that the degrees be conferred.

[Applause]

PROVOST LERMAN: For degrees in the Graduate School of Education and Human Development, Dean Michael FEUER.

DEAN FEUER: President Knapp, I am proud and joyous to present the candidates for these degrees: Master of Arts in Education and Human Development, Master of Arts in Teaching, Master of Education, Education Specialist, and Doctor of Education. These candidates have completed all requirements for the degrees indicated, and the great faculty of the great School of Education and Human Development asks that the degrees be conferred.

[Applause]

PROVOST LERMAN: For degrees in the School of Business, Dean Doug Guthrie.

DEAN GUTHRIE: President Knapp, it is with great honor and pleasure that I present to you the candidates for the degrees: Bachelor of Accountancy, Bachelor of Business Administration, Master of Accountancy, Master of Business Administration, Master of Science in Finance, Master of Science in Information Systems Technology, Master of Science in Project Management, Master of Tourism Administration, and Doctor of Philosophy. These candidates have completed all of the requirements for the degrees indicated, and the faculty asks that the degrees be conferred.

[Applause]

PROVOST LERMAN: For candidates in the Elliott School of International Affairs, Dean Michael Brown.

DEAN BROWN: President Knapp, on behalf of the faculty of GW’s Elliott School of
International Affairs, I have the honor of presenting to you the candidates for the following degrees: Bachelor of Arts, Master of Arts, Master of International Policy and Practice, Master of International Studies. The candidates have met all the requirements for the degrees indicated, and the faculty asks that their degrees be conferred.

[Applause]

PROVOST LERMAN: For the School of Public Health and Health Services, Dean Lynn Goldman.

DEAN GOLDMAN: President Knapp, I am delighted to present to you the candidates for the Bachelor of Science, Master of Science, the Master of Health Services Administration, the Master of Public Health, and the Doctor of Public Health. These candidates have completed all requirements for the degrees indicated, and the faculty asks that the degrees be conferred.

[Applause]

PROVOST LERMAN: For the College of Professional Studies, Dean Ali Eskandarian.

DEAN ESKANDARIAN: President Knapp, I am proud to present the candidates for the following degrees: Associate in Professional Studies, Bachelor of Professional Studies, Master of Professional Studies. These excellent candidates have completed all requirements for the degrees indicated, and the faculty asks that the degrees be conferred.

[Applause]

PROVOST LERMAN: And for the School of Nursing, Dean Jean Johnson.

DEAN JOHNSON: President Knapp, I am very honored to present the candidates for the following degrees: Bachelor of Science in Nursing, Master of Science in Nursing, and Doctor of Nursing Practice. These candidates have completed all requirements for the degrees indicated, and our outstanding faculty asks that the degrees be conferred.

[Applause]

PROVOST LERMAN: Will all of the candidates for the class of 2013 please remain standing. President Knapp, before you stand the candidates for bachelor's, master's, Doctoral, and professional degrees of the George Washington University.

[Applause]

PRESIDENT 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.

[Applause]

And now as a symbol of your new status as university graduates, you may move the tassles on your caps from right to left. Congratulations to you all!

[Applause]

PROVOST LERMAN: Congratulations graduates! Please join the University Singers in singing your alma mater. The words are on the back of your program. Then please remain standing for the academic recession.

[Singing the alma mater]

Hail alma mater, to thy spirit guiding,
Knowledge thy closest friend in its strength abiding,
Pledge we fidelity ne'er its place resigning,
Hail thee George Washington.

[Recessional]

[Musical interlude] (End of Ceremony)