

The George Washington University Commencement
Sunday, May 17, 2015
Full Transcript
Day-of Rush Edition

>> Steve Lerman: Ladies and gentlemen, good morning and welcome, it's my honor to serve as provost of the George Washington University I am Steve Lerman. I would like to ask everyone to please rise, those of you who are able, and welcome the graduating class of the George Washington University.

(APPLAUSE)

(Music.)

>> Steve Lerman: Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the faculty of the George Washington University.

(APPLAUSE)

(APPLAUSE)

>> Steve Lerman: Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the George Washington University board of trustees, chair Nelson Carbonell, President Steven Knapp, members of the administration our awardees and honorees escorted by the George Washington Police Department Honor Guard.

(APPLAUSE)

(Music)

>> Steve Lerman: Welcome. On behalf of my colleagues on stage and my colleagues throughout the university, I am delighted to welcome to all of you the spring commencement in the 194th year of the George Washington University as all who are able to, please stand. We will start with the presentation of the colors by the George Washington University Naval Reserve ceremonial color guard and National Anthem sung by the University Singers, a mixed group of graduate and undergraduate students. I ask that you remain standing for the retiring of the colors and followed by the invocation from the Rabbi Lauren Holtzblatt from the Adas Israel congregation.

(music)

>> 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 night O'er the ramparts we walked were so gallantly streaming and the rocket's 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.

(APPLAUSE)

(APPLAUSE)

>> Rabbi Holtzblatt: Ribono shel Olam, master of the world, you the holy one that taught us in Deuteronomy that the teaches of righteousness justice and kindness are not in heaven above not across the sea not far away, but very close to us in our mouths, and in our hearts. Bless this class with the ability to hear their own gifts, give them the strength to use their hands in the world to create, to innovate, to lift up, to transform so that our precious world will move towards peace and healing.

Ribono shel Shalom, master of peace, let this class be inspired by your love of Isaac and Yishmael, Jacob and Esau. May they go out from this graduation with patience, persistence, and courage in a world that desperately needs help lifting up the stranger, the oppressed and the down trod deny. Ribono shel Bracha, master of blessing, may you rain above these graduates the awareness that they are truly blessed and loved and that they stand stronger today because of the dedication of their families, their loved ones, their teachers and their studies. May they be given the awareness of gratitude and the courage to stand on the shoulders of those who came before them to take us further than we could have imagined traveling. Ribono shel Hesed, master of love, may we leave here today with the courage, the energy, and the conviction to make this a kinder world. May our intellectual explorations and work lead us to action in the world. May we be blessed to be your partner in the great task of making life better for all of the citizens of this great world, whether in Washington, D.C., in Ferguson, Cape Town, Mumbai or Katmandu, bless us with the constant reminder that we were put on this earth to create, to praise, to labor, and to love. Let us hear these words today and go out to build a new tomorrow and let us all say amen.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Steve Lerman: Please be seated. Class of 2015, it's my pleasure to open the ceremony with truly one-of-a-kind setting here in the National Mall. To gather here in the shadow of the monument dedicated to the nation's first president and of course our university's namesake is a fitting tribute to your achievements in granting your degrees. It's now my privilege and honor to invite the president of our university to join me at the podium. Dr. Steven Knapp is concluding his eighth year as president of the George Washington University. He 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.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Dr. Steven Knapp: Good morning. And thank you Provost Lerman, Chair Carbonell, university trustees, honorary degree recipients, university leaders, distinguished faculty, ladies and gentlemen, good morning. And 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.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Dr. Steven Knapp: I join the provost remarking how delighted we are to gather at the very base of what we, I think, rightly regard as our monument.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Dr. Steven Knapp: Now, that monument was dedicated 130 years ago this year, and this is the first time in recent years that it has not been covered with a scaffolding that is needed for the repairs following the damage that occurred in the 2010 earthquake we are delighted to see it in its full glory directly behind the stage. I would thank to thank our host the National Park Service and the park service staff for their gracious and generous help in preparing this majestic setting for today's ceremony.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Dr. Steven Knapp: Now I would like to continue an important commencement tradition. Will the parents, the families and the friends of the class of 2015 please rise to accept our congratulations and our thanks.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Dr. Steven Knapp: It is now my pleasure to recognize the special guests today who will receive the university's highest honor. Please join me in welcoming the former acting chair of National Endowment of the Humanities, an early champion of civil rights and alumna of Columbian College of the Arts and Sciences, Carole M. Watson.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Internationally recognized HIV and AIDS researcher, infectious disease expert, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and the National Institutes of Health, Anthony S. Fauci.

(APPLAUSE)

>> And prominent American business leader and the chief executive officer of Apple, Incorporated, the world's largest technology company, Tim Cook.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Dr. Steven Knapp: Now I have the honor of introducing Nelson A. Carbonell, Jr. chair of the university's board of trustees. Mr. Carbonell.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Nelson Carbonell: Thank you President Knapp, and welcome all of you. One of my jobs as chairman of the board of trustees is to arrange the weather, so you are welcome.

(LAUGHTER)

>> Nelson Carbonell: If it rains it's somebody else's fault. So I am honored as the chair of the board of trustees to join President Knapp and my fellow trustees, many of whom many are alumni, parents, relative and friends of GW students, in welcoming all of you on this very significant occasion as we celebrate the class of 2015 and their many achievements and accomplishments. First, may I ask the trustees to have joined us this morning to please rise and be recognized by the audience?

(APPLAUSE)

>> Nelson Carbonell: Trustees, thank you for your leadership and service on the board of the George Washington University. We are grateful for your commitment to GW it's honorary degree recipients Dr. Anthony Fauci, Carole M. Watson as well, along with our commencement speaker Tim Cook. Welcome.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Nelson Carbonell: We appreciate all of you being here not only to celebrate our graduates but also to recognize the hard working commitment of the faculty and the staff and the love and caring of their family and friends that helped them through their journey at GW. 32 years ago I sat where you sat today, I graduated from the George Washington University with a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Nelson Carbonell: That's all you got?

(LAUGHTER)
(APPLAUSE)

>> Nelson Carbonell: Okay. That's better, thank you. From my own experience, I can tell you that the time I spent here, the education I received and the friends I made have stayed with me and continue to enrich my personal and professional life. GW prepared me well for the opportunities and challenges that I faced throughout my life. And I will forever be grateful and loyal to the university. I along with my fellow trustees have an opportunity to play a leading role in the growth and development of GW into one of the most respected and admired universities in the world. All of you, as the newest 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 that you have gained for your alma mater into the world as its citizen leaders. Remember, what you are has been shaped by your experiences at the George Washington University. The university is currently in a transformational \$1 billion philanthropic campaign Making History. This campaign to date has raised over \$740 million.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Nelson Carbonell: But to exceed our goal and go beyond that, we need all of you, don't wait to be asked, spend time visiting the campus, you will be amazed in the short time how much it will change. Let us know about your accomplishments. Share your expertise. Hire a fellow GW alum and make gifts to support the institution. And encourage others to follow in your footsteps here at the George Washington University. I want to conclude saying we are all proud of you and I know that you will always be proud to say, I am a graduate of the George Washington University. Congratulations to you all.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Nelson Carbonell: It is now my pleasure to turn the program back over to Provost Lerman.

>> Steve Lerman: I now have the privilege to recognize this year's recipients of the George Washington awards. This award is conferred for extraordinary contributions to the GW community. The students, staff and faculty who receive the GW award have each in their own way shaped our university, making it the extraordinary institution that it is today. It gives me great pleasure to announce the honorees. As I call your name please, rise. Avra Bossov.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Steve Lerman: She is a 2015 candidate for the Bachelor of Arts degree in the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences. She finishes a year of service as the executive vice president of

the association. She also donated time to the local community as a member of the Alpha Phi Omega.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Steve Lerman: Heidi Bardot.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Steve Lerman: She is an alumna with a Master's of Arts degree and director of the university's art therapy program. Under her leadership the program has expanded to over 100 internship sites in the community and gained an international reputation and focus. She has won the Advisor of the Year Award and given GW's art therapy program national recognition.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Steve Lerman: Third recipient is Catherine Chandler.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Steve Lerman: She is a program officer with the university honors program and has been so for over a decade. During that time she has supported students, and guided them through difficult situations and become a reliable and constant resource for countless students. Thank you all for your service to GW. And now please join me once again in congratulating the winners of the GW awards.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Steve Lerman: And now I would like to introduce Steve Frenkil, president of the GW Alumni Association, he will offer a few remarks and introduce our student speaker.

>> Steve Frenkil: Good morning everyone. I am a proud graduate of the Columbian College of the Arts and Sciences.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Steve Frenkil: And honored to be the president of your George Washington Alumni Association. Joining us today are members of the association's board of directors. And together we congratulate the class of 2015. On behalf of the entire GW community, graduates of every GW school and college, welcome. GW embarked on an important philanthropic campaign, Making History, devoted to supporting students, enhancing academics and breaking new ground. The Making History campaign will carry GW into the third century. This university is built on the solid foundation strengthened by many, including our alumni emeriti, these are alumni graduated 50 or more years ago, sitting up front in gold gowns and caps. Lets honor them as they stand to be recognized.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Steve Frenkil: Thank you. A defining feature of any university experience is the diversity of ideas that you encounter as students. And the students to explore new concepts at GW are vast. My interactions with many of you leave no doubt that GW has imparted in you a passion

for sustained inquiry and also for the exploration of new ideas. One of the greatest challenges that you confront is maintaining that passion in the face of the many realities that lie ahead. Those include the opportunities and also pressures of new jobs, communities, relationships, and families and life's daily routine. Each of those is important, but so too is the need to be vigilant in sustaining that hunger for inquiry and for remaining truly open to new ideas. In striking that balance and working to achieve your goals, you may need some support for advice along the way. Fortunately you have a GW alumni family to help you. This is a lifelong worldwide community: 275,000 and in 150 countries; the network would fill a space more than 10 times larger than today's commencement exercise. That network is powerful because a central theme of GW alumni is promoting a culture of Colonials helping Colonials. This means that students, faculty and staff and volunteers are committed to looking out for each other opening doors for each other and helping each other become successful. Colonials helping Colonials is your commitment to answer when a Colonial reaches out seeking help finding a job making business contacts anterior connecting in a new city. That is Colonials helping Colonials when you help each other in this way you change people's lives. There are concrete actions you can take to actualize your Colonials network and accomplish your goals. You can connect with alumni on social media - young alumni network. Offer professional opportunities to other Colonials. Participate in alumni networking events and reunions. Get advice or get advice on the online career advisor network. And visit the campus, your professors and of course the alumni house. No matter where you work, live or play, you are always Colonials and always members of your George Washington Alumni Association that is here to help you.

It is now my privilege to introduce our student speaker, Captain Richard Ruiz, the winner of the student commencement speaker competition. The son of immigrants from Mexico, he struggled to learn English and repeated the first grade. As a high school senior he became a father and worked a midnight shift to provide for his son. Though homeless and working full-time he graduated and enlisted in the Marine Corps. Captain attended and graduated Oregon State University, becoming the first person in his family to earn a college degree.

(APPLAUSE)

>> And following Marine officers leadership school, he reported to Okinawa and then deployed to Afghanistan. He was awarded the Bronze Star Medal with valor for demonstrating heroism under fire. Later he redeployed, holding leadership at Camp Dwyer, including commanding officer. In 2014, he was selected for GW's leadership education and development master's program. He graduates with honors. After commencement will join U.S. Naval Academy as a company officer and adjunct professor of leadership.

(APPLAUSE)

>> How fitting is it this university inspired by nation's first commander-in-chief, George Washington, and gathered together at the foot of the national monument built in his honor, should have as its student speaker a decorated member of our armed forces serving with courage and distinction. Join me in welcoming Captain Richard Ruiz.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Captain Ruiz: Thank you. Thank you Mr. Frenkil. O. M. G.!

(LAUGHTER)

>> Wow, such an honor to be here as a Colonial of George Washington University. I want to say thank you to the professors, mentors, faculty and staff, for all of your hard work and dedication. And to you the family and friends who gave us all of your love and support, and especially my lovely wife Katie and my boys, I love you with all of my heart.

(APPLAUSE)

>>Now, it's been a long journey for many of us. Therefore, I must ask the graduating class of 2015 - are you ready to graduate?

(APPLAUSE)

>> I am too! But first, I would like to reflect upon how imagination made this moment possible. When I was a young child struggling to understand the English language, I tried to imagine this moment. When I was a teenager struggling to graduate high school, working midnight shift to provide for my newborn, I tried to imagine this moment. When a young man fighting for this great nation in mountains of Afghanistan, after nearly losing my life multiple times, I tried to imagine this moment. You see, I tried to imagine a life of education and success. And today, we have all achieved this through the power of our imaginations.

When we found ourselves submerged in books at Gelman Library trying to find that perfect citation...

(LAUGHTER)

>> Many of us used a lot of our imaginations.

(LAUGHTER)

>> When researching for our biomedical, engineering, business, political science, or leadership classes, we imagined how one day we would use that knowledge to change the world. When GW students inspired kids from the D.C. community to become entrepreneurs through Lemonade Day, we helped others imagine their future possibilities. Because only at GW do you literally walk down the street to the White House or Capitol Hill and intern and imagine how you will change the world. Only at GW do you take a study break on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and gaze above the Reflecting Pool and imagine how you will make history. It was the great Einstein that said, "Logic, it will get you from point A to point B, but it's imagination that will get us anywhere."

Just look at Tim Cook and Apple and what have their imagination brought us, right? All you got to do is feel in your pocket, right?

(APPLAUSE)

>> Imagination is the reason why we are here right now. In the heart of our nation's capitol. The epicenter of the world, a place that we will forever call home as GW alumni. That is why we must keep imagining because we change the world. We make history. Colonials make the world say O.M.G.

(LAUGHTER)

(APPLAUSE)

>> Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Steve Lerman: Wow, thank you very much, and thank you for inspiring all of us Captain Ruiz. We now turn to the part of the program where President Knapp will confer the honorary degrees.

>> Dr. Steven Knapp: Thank you again, Captain Ruiz. The recipient of our first honorary degree will be introduced by Alyson Engle, who graduates with Doctor of Medicine. she was recipient of intramural research training award from the National Institutes of Health, where she spent two years at National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. The summer between her first and second years at the School of Medicine and health sciences she was accepted at a special program at Children's National Medical Center Sheikh Zayed Institute. She was involved in projects related to congenital heart surgery and tissue engineering, which led to additional publications and abstracts over the past several years.

>> President Knapp, I am honored to present to you, Anthony S. Fauci, for the degree of Doctor of Public Service, honoris causa.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Dr. Steven Knapp: You are a leader in the world of health and medicine and have spent your career contributing to the prevention diagnosis and treatment of infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS influenza, tuberculosis and malaria. You grew up in Brooklyn and are a graduate of the College of Holy Cross and Cornell University Medical College. In your distinguished career you have made contributions to the understanding of how the human virus HIV destroys the body's defenses. You have been instrumental in developing therapeutic strategies for patients living with HIV/AIDS. As director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, a position you have held since 1984, you oversee an extensive portfolio of basic and applied research. You serve as a key advisor to the White House and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on global AIDS issues and on initiatives to bolster medical and public health preparedness against emerging infectious diseases appeared the threat of bioterrorism. You are an architect of the president's emergency plan for AIDS relief, made many contributions to basic and clinical research that enhance our understanding of infectious diseases. Your contributions extend to the classroom. A renowned speaker who has shared his ideas and forums all over the world, you have graciously delivered major lectures at the George Washington University in recent years including one this past winter to students at our School of Medicine and Health Sciences. You are the recipient of numerous awards including the Presidential Medal of Freedom the National Medal of Science the Lasker-Bloomberg Public Service Award and the George M. Kober Medal of the Association of American Physicians and 39 honorary doctoral degrees, including the one you are received today. You are with the National Academy of Science, the Institute of Medicine, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American College of Physicians, the Infectious Diseases Society of America and the American Association of Immunologists. You served on the editorial boards of many scientific journals and are author, co-author or editor of more than 1,200 scientific publications. Last night your medical expertise was fully in evidence, when at our commencement dinner you saved a life by skillfully deploying the Heimlich maneuver. That's true.

(APPLAUSE)

>> So, Anthony S. Fauci, the George Washington University proudly confers upon you the degree of Doctor of Public Service honoris causa with all of the rights, duties and privileges pertains there to. Congratulations.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Thank you very much President Knapp, Chairman Carbonell, Provost Lerman, trustees, Mr. Cook, Dr. Watson, members of the faculty and above all you the graduates of the class of 2015. It is really with sincere humility I accept this wonderful honor from your great and historic institution. I am truly appreciative. I will make very brief to-the-point remark to the graduating class. As I look out at you, I can recall with great clarity when I was sitting where you are now, albeit decades ago at different institutions as I graduated from college and four years later from medical school, it's understandable on this day you feel you are no longer really a student. Let me tell you that this is just an illusion. With all due respect, Captain Ruiz, we are and they are ready for graduation, but I call it the paradox of graduation. Because I learned very quickly after completing my formal studies that we are all perpetual students in the mosaic of our knowledge and experiences is eternally unfinished and unfolding. And despite the fact that I am so generously honored by your institution for whatever accomplishments I may have achieved, as odd as this sounds, a large part of me wishes that I were back in your shoes where the learning curve is so very steep and exciting. You have ahead of you excitement, many challenges, and importantly a lot of surprises. So, embrace the unknown. Congratulations and good luck.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Dr. Steven Knapp: Thank you very much. Our second honorary degree recipient will be introduced by Alexa Dectis. She graduates with a bachelor's in communication and a minor in criminal justice, a member of Kappa Delta sorority and served on the E-Board of the GW Entertainment Society. She interned at Clear Channel Communications, SiriusXM Satellite Radio and Discovery Communications and she begins law school in the fall.

(APPLAUSE)

>> President Knapp, I am honored to present you with Carole M. Watson for the degree of Doctor of Public Service honoris causa.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Dr. Steven Knapp: You were born in Kansas and developed a passion for the humanities. You have spent your career as a devoted educator and civil servant working to strengthen art education programs. You were an early champion of civil rights. In 1958, two years before the famed lunch counter sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina, you participated in a sit-in at the Dockum drugstore in Wichita. As a result of your and fellow students' courageous actions, the drugstore chain opened its lunch counters to people of all races throughout the city.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Dr. Steven Knapp: You are a graduate of Pittsburgh State University, St. Louis University and the George Washington University, where you learned a Ph.D. in American cultural history in 1978.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Dr. Steven Knapp: You began your career as an academic, directing intercultural programs at the Lindenwood Colleges in St. Charles, Missouri, and appointed the first chair of the English department at Abraham Lincoln Opportunity School in St. Louis. As part of your academic work, you wrote "Prologue," a study of novels written by African-American women. Public service is your passion. You helped improve America's cultural institutions museums and archives, libraries and universities through your more than three decades of service with the National Endowment for the Humanities. During your tenure, you directed the division of state programs, a network of statewide organizations that reaches communities with innovative humanities programs throughout the nation. As assistant chairman for partnership and national affairs, you oversaw NEH's key collaborative efforts. You were named deputy chairman of the NEH in 2009 and served twice as acting chairman, first in 2009 after being appointed by President Barack Obama. And from 2013 to 2014 you organized "Standing Together," an initiative to help Americans understand the experiences of service members as they run to civilian life. You also have been honored with Blewett and Ford Foundation fellowships and named a fellow of the Council for Excellence in Government. Carole M. Watson, in recognition of all of the forgoing, the George Washington University proudly confers upon you the degree of Doctor of Public Service honoris causa, with all of the rights, duties, and privileges pertaining thereto.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Good morning. To receive this recognition is such an honor. President Knapp, Chairman Carbonell and members of the board of trustees, Provost Lerman, and members of the faculty today's graduates, your family and friends, I am very proud to receive this honorary degree. And I am so inspired by the like stories and accomplishments of my fellow honorees. This occasion is also a wonderful opportunity for me to thank the university's Columbian College of Arts and Sciences.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Because my graduate studies there profoundly influenced my life and career. And in the most positive ways. President Knapp, thank you for citing the participation I had and other young people in the 1958 lunch counter sit-ins at Dockum drugstore in Wichita, Kansas. I am a product of the Midwest. A child of the Midwest. I am also the grandchild and great, great grandchild of farmers, farm wives and mothers, coal miners, teachers and small segregated one-room country schools. Of people who left the South to make a better life. Many, many years ago growing up in Kansas, first in a small college town not far from my grandparent's farm where I recall being very happy. I learned even as a young girl that the community I belonged to was one where we occupied a particular position in that place. And one that was not just. Life in Kansas was my initiation to the complexities of that long and varied story of all of us as Americans. So, perhaps in these aspects of my personal history, and what came afterward, and a lot came afterward, you can see some of the reasons why my years of study at George Washington University and my time at the NEH, an organization dedicated to the self understanding of the American people, have been so rewarding. I have the university to thank, and my family. What I learned from all of these experiences over the years is that in trying to reach for that higher purpose that each one of us feels in our heart, no matter what life brings us, or what career path we choose, what I take away is that cynicism is a great threat to us. As we as individuals aspire to achieve our highest ideals. So, what I hope for you today is that as you encounter your life struggles and challenges, you will keep reaching for your best self. And

for your highest purpose. However you may define it, because each one of you, every individual always is so important to our world. Congratulations graduates and good luck.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Dr. Steven Knapp: Thank you very much. Our final honorary degree recipient will be introduced by Alex Whisnant. Alex graduates with bachelor's degree in psychology. He has been a student staff member with our university police department, a research assistant in the diverse families and relationships lab and an intern with the Psychological Group of Washington

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

(APPLAUSE)

>> Dr. Steven Knapp: You are the leader of one of the world's most iconic companies and a model of the power of business to do well while doing good. You were raised in Alabama and are a graduate of Auburn University, which has honored you with its Lifetime Achievement Award. You earned a master's degree in business administration from Duke University, Fuqua School of Business where you were recognized as a Fuqua scholar, the school's highest academic honor. You joined Apple in 1998 to lead worldwide sales and operations and later became chief operating officer. In 2011, you became Apple's chief executive officer, succeeding the company's legendary founding CEO Steve Jobs. As CEO of Apple, you have overseen the development and launch of innovative products that are ubiquitous across our university's campuses. You worked to improve conditions for workers who make the company's products, to advance human rights and increase charitable giving at Apple and beyond. You have personally led the way, pledging to give away your considerable wealth to benefit others. In addition, you are overseeing a company-wide effort to use 100% renewable energy at all Apple facilities.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Dr. Steven Knapp: You have used your position as a platform to speak out about injustices and press for societal progress in the United States and around the world. As you recently told Fortune magazine, you "wanted to be the pebble in the pond that creates the ripples for change."

In recognition of your leadership, you were named the Financial Times person of the year for 2014, and one of the Time Magazine's 100 most influential in the world in both 2012 and 2015. Fortune ranked you number 1 on its list of the world's greatest leaders. Tim Cook, in recognition of all of the forgoing, the George Washington University proudly confers upon you the degree of Doctor of Public Service, honoris causa, with all of the rights duties and privileges pertaining thereto.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Ladies and gentlemen, your commencement speaker, Dr. Tim Cook.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Dr. Tim Cook: Hello GW.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Tim Cook: Thank you very much President Knapp for that kind intro. Alex, trustees, faculty and deans of the university, my fellow honorees, and especially you the class of 2015. Yes.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Tim Cook: Congratulations to you, to your family, to your friends that are attending today's ceremony. You made it. It's a privilege, a rare privilege of a lifetime to be with you today. And I think thank you enough for making me an honorary Colonial.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Tim Cook: Before I begin today, they asked me to make a standard announcement. You've heard this before. About silencing your phones.

(LAUGHTER)

>> Tim Cook: Those of you with an iPhone, just place it in silent mode. If you don't have an iPhone, please pass it to the center aisle.

(LAUGHTER)

>> Tim Cook: Apple has a world-class recycling program.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Tim Cook: You know, this is really an amazing place. And for a lot of you, I'm sure that being here in Washington, the very center of our democracy, was a big draw when you were choosing which school to go to. This place has a powerful pull. It was here that Dr. Martin Luther King challenged Americans to make real the promises of democracy, to make justice a reality for all of God's children.

And it was here that President Ronald Reagan called on us to believe in ourselves and to believe in our capacity to perform great deeds. I'd like to start this morning by telling you about my first visit here. In the summer of 1977 -- yes, I'm a little old -- I was 16 years old and living in Robertsdale, the small town in southern Alabama that I grew up in. At the end of my junior year of high school I'd won essay contest sponsored by the National Rural Electric Association. I can't remember what the essay was about, what I do remember very clearly is writing it by hand, draft after draft after draft. Typewriters were very expensive and my family could not afford one.

I was one of two kids from Baldwin County that was chosen to go to Washington along with hundreds of other kids across the country. Before we left, the Alabama delegation took a trip to our state capitol in Montgomery for a meeting with the governor. The governor's name was George C. Wallace. The same George Wallace who in 1963 stood in the schoolhouse door at the University of Alabama to block African Americans from enrolling. Wallace embraced the evils of segregation. He pitted whites against blacks, the South against the North, the working class against the so-called elites. Meeting my governor was not an honor for me.

My heroes in life were Dr. Martin Luther King, and Robert F. Kennedy, who had fought against the very things that Wallace stood for. Keep in mind, that I grew up, or, when I grew up, I grew up in a place that where King and Kennedy were not exactly held in high esteem. When I was a kid, the South was still coming to grips with its history. My textbooks even said the Civil War was about states' rights. They barely mentioned slavery.

So I had to figure out for myself what was right and true. It was a search. It was a process. It drew on the moral sense that I'd learned from my parents, and in church, and in my own heart, and led me on my own journey of discovery.

I found books in the public library that they probably didn't know they had. They all pointed to the fact that Wallace was wrong. That injustices like segregation had no place in our world. That equality is a right.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Tim Cook: As I said, I was only 16 when I met Governor Wallace, so I shook his hand as we were expected to do. But shaking his hand felt like a betrayal of my own beliefs. It felt wrong. Like I was selling a piece of my soul.

From Montgomery we flew to Washington. It was the first time I had ever been on an airplane. In fact it was the first time that I traveled out of the South. On June 15, 1977, I was one of 900 high schoolers greeted by the new president, President Jimmy Carter on the south lawn of the White House, right there on the other side of the ellipse.

I was one of the lucky ones, who got to shake his hand. Carter saw Baldwin County on my name tag that day and stopped to speak with me. He wanted to know how people were doing after the rash of storms that struck Alabama that year. Carter was kind and compassionate; he held the most powerful job in the world but he had not sacrificed any of his humanity. I felt proud that he was president. And I felt proud that he was from the South.

In the space of a week, I had come face to face with two men who guaranteed themselves a place in history. They came from the same region. They were from the same political party. They were both governors of adjoining states. But they looked at the world in very different ways. It was clear to me, that one was right, and one was wrong. Wallace had built his political career by exploiting divisions between us. Carter's message on the other hand, was that we are all bound together, every one of us. Each had made a journey that led them to the values that they lived by, but it wasn't just about their experiences or their circumstances, it had to come from within.

My own journey in life was just beginning. I hadn't even applied for college yet at that point. For you graduates, the process of discovering yourself, of inventing yourself, of reinventing yourself is about to begin in earnest. It's about finding your values and committing to live by them. You have to find your North Star. And that means choices. Some are easy. Some are hard. And some will make you question everything.

Twenty years after my visit to Washington, I met someone who made me question everything. Who upended all of my assumptions in the very best way. That was Steve Jobs.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Tim Cook: Steve had built a successful company. He had been sent away and he returned to find it in ruins. He didn't know it at the time, but he was about to dedicate the rest of his life to rescuing it, and leading it to heights greater than anyone could ever imagine. Anyone, that is, except for Steve. Most people have forgotten, but in 1997 and early 1998, Apple had been adrift for years. Rudderless. But Steve thought Apple could be great again. And he wanted to know if I'd like to help.

His vision for Apple was a company that turned powerful technology into tools that were easy to use, tools that would help people realize their dreams. And change the world for the better. I had studied to be an engineer and earned an M.B.A. I was trained to be pragmatic, a problem solver. Now I found myself sitting before and listening to this very animated 40-something guy with visions of changing the world. It was not what I had expected. You see, when it came to my career, in 1998, I was also adrift. Rudderless.

I knew who I was in my personal life, and I kept my eye on my North Star, my responsibility to do good for someone else, other than myself. But at work, well I always figured that work was work. Values had their place and, yes, there were things that I wanted to change about the world, but I thought I had to do that on my own time. Not in the office. Steve didn't see it that way. He was an idealist. And in that way he reminded me of how I felt as a teenager. In that first meeting he convinced me if we worked hard and made great products, we too could help change the world. And to my surprise, I was hooked. I took the job and changed my life. It's been 17 years and I have never once looked back.

At Apple we believe the work should be more than just about improving your own self. It's about improving the lives of others as well. Our products do amazing things. And just as Steve envisioned, they empower people all over the world. People who are blind, and need information read to them because they can't see the screen. People for whom technology is a lifeline because they are isolated by distance or disability. People who witness injustice and want to expose it, and now they can because they have a camera in their pocket all the time.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Tim Cook: Our commitment goes beyond the products themselves to how they're made. To our impact on the environment. To the role we play in demanding and promoting equality. And in improving education. We believe that a company that has values and acts on them can really change the world. And an individual can too. That can be you. That must be you. Graduates, your values matter. They are your North Star. And work takes on new meaning when you feel you are pointed in the right direction. Otherwise, it's just a job, and life is too short for that. We need the best and brightest of your generation to lead in government and in business. In the science and in the arts. In journalism and in academia. There is honor in all of these pursuits. And there is opportunity to do work that is infused with moral purpose. You don't have to choose between doing good and doing well. It's a false choice, today more than ever.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Tim Cook: Your challenge is to find work that pays the rent, puts food on the table, and lets you do what is right and good and just.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Tim Cook: So find your North Star. Let it guide you in life, and work, and in your life's work. Now, I suspect some of you aren't buying this.

(LAUGHTER)

>> Tim Cook: I won't take it personally. It's no surprise that people are skeptical, especially here in Washington.

(LAUGHTER)

>> Tim Cook: Where these days you've got plenty of reason to be. And a healthy amount of skepticism is fine. Though too often in this town, it turns to cynicism. To the idea that no matter who's talking or what they're saying, that their motives are questionable, their character is suspect, and if you search hard enough, you can prove that they are lying. Maybe that's just the world we live in. But graduates, this is your world to change.

As I said, I am a proud son of the South. It's my home, and I will always love it. But for the last 17 years I've built a life in Silicon Valley; it's a special place. The kind of place where there's no problem that can't be solved. No matter how difficult or complex, that's part of its essential quality. A very sincere sort of optimism. Back in the 90s, Apple ran an advertising campaign we called "Think Different." It was pretty simple. Every ad was a photograph of one of our heroes. People who had the audacity to challenge and change the way we all live. People like Gandhi and Jackie Robinson, Martha Graham and Albert Einstein, Amelia Earhart and Miles Davis. These people still inspire us. They remind us to live by our deepest values and reach for our highest aspirations. They make us believe that anything is possible. A friend of mine at Apple likes to say the best way to solve a problem is to walk into a room full of Apple engineers and proclaim, "this is impossible."

(LAUGHTER)

>> Tim Cook: I can tell you, they will not accept that. And neither should you. So that's the one thing I'd like to bring to you all the way from Cupertino, California. The idea that great progress is possible, whatever line of work you choose. There will always be cynics and critics on the sidelines tearing people down, and just as harmful are those people with good intentions who make no contribution at all. In his letter from the Birmingham jail, Dr. King wrote that our society needed to repent, not merely for the hateful words of the bad people, but for the appalling silence of the good people.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Tim Cook: The sidelines are not where you want to live your life. The world needs you in the arena. There are problems that need to be solved. Injustices that need to be ended. People that are still being persecuted, diseases still in need of cure. No matter what you do next, the world needs your energy. Your passion. Your impatience with progress. Don't shrink from risk. And tune out those critics and cynics. History rarely yields to one person, but think, and never forget, what happens when it does. That can be you. That should be you. That must be you.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Tim Cook: Congratulations Class of 2015. I'd like to take one photo of you, because this is the best view in the world.

(LAUGHTER)
(APPLAUSE)

>> Tim Cook: And it's a great one. Thank you very much.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Steve Lerman: Graduates, Commencement is a time to celebrate your accomplishments. Now many of us are quite aware some of you started celebrating in your own ways a couple of days ago.

(LAUGHTER)

>> Steve Lerman: Yeah, we heard you.

(LAUGHTER)

>> Steve Lerman: But it's a time to reflect about what comes next, not so much in those specific terms of what job you are going to do tomorrow or the next day, but rather what it means to be on a trajectory to be a citizen of our world and how you might draw on what you have learned to become an ever more engaged member of our society. At GW we help you along that path with traditional graduation ritual: the charge to the graduates. President Knapp I invite you to come to the podium to offer your charge to the graduating class of 2015.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Dr. Steven Knapp: Thank you Provost Lerman, and Tim Cook for the inspiring and very relevant words. Ladies and gentlemen, I now do have the honor of welcoming our new graduates to the lifelong and worldwide community of George Washington University alumni now numbering 275,000. Class of 2015, you are exceptional young men and women and I am proud to call you graduates of this great university. This is a very significant day for you and the family and friends who have supported you throughout your educational journey. Where we gather at this setting on the National Mall to celebrate your accomplishments, applaud your hard work and perseverance and honor your commitment to serve as active and engaged citizens of your communities your nations and the world. I charge you to keep alive the spirit the energy and imagination and 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 that you have learned for all persons, especially those whose cultures, traditions and opinions differ from your own. You are our future. We again call 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.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Steve 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 your schools. Graduates, as your dean announces

degrees from your college or school, please rise and remain standing until all of the degrees of the university are called. For degrees in Columbian College of Arts and Sciences, Dean Ben Vinson.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Dean Ben Vinson: President Knapp, it is with great pride that I present to you the relentless, the intelligent, the brilliant, the passionate candidates for the degrees of Associates in Arts, Associate of Fine Arts, Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Fine Arts, Bachelor's 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, and Doctor of Philosophy. These candidates have completed all requirements for the degrees indicated and the faculty asks that these degrees be conferred.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Steve Lerman: For degrees in the School of Medicine and Health Sciences, Dean Jeffrey Akman.

(APPLAUSE)

>> President Knapp, as alumna of this 11th oldest School of Medicine, I am so proud to present the candidates for the following degrees: Associate in Science, Bachelor's of Science in Health Sciences, Master of Science in Health Sciences, Doctor of Medicine, and Doctor of Physical Therapy.

(APPLAUSE)

>> These candidates have completed all requirements for the degrees and the faculty asks that these degrees be conferred.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Steve Lerman: For degrees in the Law School, Dean Blake Morant.

(APPLAUSE)

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

(APPLAUSE)

>> Steve Lerman: For degrees in the School of Engineering and Applied Science, Dean David Dolling.

(APPLAUSE)

>> President Knapp, I am pleased and honored to present to you the candidates for the degrees Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor's of Science, Master of Science, Applied Scientist, Engineer, Doctor of Philosophy, and Doctor of Science.

(APPLAUSE)

>> These candidates have completed all of the requirements for the degrees indicated and the faculty asks that the degrees be conferred.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Steve Lerman: For degrees in the Graduate School of Education and Human Development, Dean Michael Feuer.

>> President Knapp, I am deeply honored and so proud to present the extraordinary candidates for the following degrees: Master of Arts in Education and Human Development, Master of Arts in Teaching, Master of Education, Master of Arts Education Specialist and Doctor of Education. These candidates have indeed completed all of the requirements for these degrees, and their superb faculty ask that the degrees be conferred.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Steve Lerman: For degrees in the School of Business, Dean Linda Livingstone.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Thank you. President Knapp. It is my distinct honor to present to you my first graduating class as dean, students that are candidates for the following degrees: Bachelor of Accountancy, Bachelor of Business Administration, Master of Accountancy, Master of Business Administration, Master of Science in Government Contracts, Master of Science in Business Analytics, 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.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Steve Lerman: For candidates in the Elliott School of International Affairs, Dean Michael Brown.

(APPLAUSE)

>> President Knapp.

(cheering.)

(APPLAUSE)

>> On behalf of GW's Elliott School of International Affairs, the most dynamic school of international affairs in the world.

(APPLAUSE)

>> The only school that can truly call itself the E Street Band.

(APPLAUSE)

>> I am honored to present the candidates for the following degrees: Bachelor of Arts, Master of Arts, Master of International Policy and Practice, Master of International Studies.

(APPLAUSE)

>> These candidates have met the requirements for the indicated degrees, and the faculty asks that their degrees be conferred.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Steve Lerman: For the Milken Institute School of Public Health, the Michael and Lori Milken Dean of Public Health, Lynn Goldman.

>> President Knapp I am delighted to present the candidates for the degrees: Bachelor's of Science, Master of Science, Master of Public Health, Master of Health Administration, Master of Health Services Administration, Doctor of Public Health, Doctor of Philosophy. These candidates have completed all requirements for the degrees indicated and the faculty ask that the degrees be conferred.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Steve Lerman: For the College of Professional Studies, Dean Ali Eskandarian.

>> President Knapp, I am very proud to present the candidates for the degrees of Bachelor of Professional Studies and Master of Professional Studies. These candidates have completed all requirements for the degrees indicated and the faculty asks that the degrees be conferred.

(APPLAUSE)

>> For the School of Nursing, Dean Pamela Jeffries.

(APPLAUSE)

>> President Knapp, last but not least, I am proud to present the candidates for the following degrees: Bachelor's of Science in Nursing, Master of Science in Nursing, and the Doctor of Nursing Practice.

(APPLAUSE)

>> These candidates have completed all requirements for the degrees indicated and the stellar faculty asks that the degrees be conferred.

(APPLAUSE)

>> Steve Lerman: President Knapp, before you stand the associate's, master's, doctoral and professional degrees of the George Washington University.

>> 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)

>> Dr. Steven Knapp: And now as a symbol of your new status as university graduates, you may move the tassels on your caps from right to left. Congratulations to you all!

(APPLAUSE)

>> Hail to the buff, hail to the blue, hail to the buff and blue!! All our lives we'll be proud to say, we hail from GW. Go big blue. Oh, by George, we're happy we can say, we're GW and here to show the way. So raise high the buff raise high the blue loyal to GW. You bet we're loyal to GW. Fight!

(APPLAUSE)

>> Steve Lerman: Congratulations graduates, please join the University Singers in singing your alma mater, the words are on the back of your program and then please remain standing for the academic recession.

>> 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!

(APPLAUSE)

(APPLAUSE)

(music)

-GW-