“Teach Your Children Well”*

The Fletcher Class of 1947 Memorial Award

2013 Convocation

The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy
Medford, Massachusetts

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06 September 2013

• With thanks to Messrs. Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young
Before this summer, I never focused on the fact that universities have convocations as well as commencements. The hoopla is reserved for commencement, which also makes sense. You, and your families, are so excited to be finally getting out, getting started, moving on. It is a day for great celebration.

Commencement speakers for that very reason are in as enviable position as the last of a long line of speakers before dinner, often have little original to say and less that is remembered.

I say that as someone who has been a commencement speaker more than once.

The start of the academic year is a far more solemn and sober affair as you contemplate new courses to take, new readings to get through, new papers to write and new exams to survive. All with the goal to get to that commencement speaker. In recognition of the gravity of the occasion, I will try to do better by you today.

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When Justice Sonia Sotomayor was nominated to the Supreme Court, a member of the US Senate remarked with unintended candor that “she wasn’t the face of American justice as he knew it.”

I will assume, solely for the sake of good manners, that he was referring to her judicial philosophy.

In fact, hers was not the face he knew. She is a she, and she is a Latina and the combination of two “them” was disquieting ...perhaps even frightening.

Fortunately, it was not ultimately disqualifying. Ultimately, it was the content of her character not the color of her skin – or her gender – on which she was judged.

As I look at this afternoon’s convocation, I do not see the face of Fletcher I knew as a student. That is not disquieting and certainly not frightening. That is a very good thing.

To put it in perspective: I was one of 10 women students. There was at least but possibly only one Latino, the Honorable Bill Richardson, and perhaps only one African-American, Ralph Bunche Jr. The statistics are not available. In fact, such statistics were not kept. The question was not yet considered important nor the numbers significant. And, with the decades, the memories are fuzzy. In doing a reality check with some of my former classmates last week, one put it quite well — “the US student contingent wasn’t exactly kaleidoscopic.”

At our convocation (I now know it must have been the convocation), the then-Dean delivered the same joke he had for several years – Women came to Fletcher in order to marry beneath themselves. In 11 short words he managed to (a) conceded our qualifications and (b) dismiss our worth. His office was fire bombed later that year.

That is an example of coincidence, not causation.

The Dean was not alone. My adviser told me he had never met a women student above the B+. Male students received scholarships; women received loans. When one of my funding sources my last semester disappeared, literally, I made it through on dry cereal and reconstituted powder milk.
The School was deeply sympathetic ... and unhelpful.

Why put up with this? Short answer - it wasn’t better anywhere else.

Longer answer – I had fixed, some might say fixated - on a career in the Foreign Service in high school, had structured my undergraduate work toward that goal, had already passed the Foreign Service written and oral exams but knew that I was not ready.

My undergraduate work in Asian studies and American Politics at an aggressively co-educational, large public university in California was unpolished. I needed to experience East Coast culture, focus on international relations beyond Asia and get ready for this thing called diplomacy.

I applied to only one graduate school. It was Fletcher... or nothing. There was no Option B.

My eternal thanks to the Fletcher Admissions Committee.

Despite antediluvian deans, recalcitrant faculty and limited funds, Fletcher was great. It was the right decision and the right place for me. Fletcher was a community of scholars, and a community of policy wonks, or wannabe wonks. It was – and is -a community that saw the world’s challenges not as a reason to retreat but as an opportunity to affect change. It saw service as a calling.

The less-than-kaleidoscopic nature of the US student community was balanced by the broad range of their international experience and by the sizeable and diverse contingent of international students.

The formal learning was balanced by endless hours of endless debates in the library lobby. And, in a perverse way, the chill experienced as an aspiring woman graduate student was useful preparation for the Foreign Service. I was a better person and a better diplomat because of Fletcher. I was also a little less naïve.

Again, thank you Fletcher.

Because, it didn't get a whole lot better.

There were 2 women my Foreign Service Officer entering class. Women were barred from hard language training – Chinese, Arabic, Russian, etc. – and from serving in hardship posts, i.e. most of the world beyond Western Europe. The ban on marriage while on duty was lifted only months before I came in.

The director of the orientation class told me that, as a woman, I could not be a political officer. He, as the Dean had, granted my qualifications, but was adamant and unapologetic that they were trumped by my gender.

His reasoning was eerily reminiscent to that voiced against the first woman FSO’s first overseas assignment in the 1920’s. Lucile Atcherson’s appointment to Bern in 1925 was strenuously objected to on the basis that she could not handle the “personal contact work of diplomacy, the work they do when out of the office, the exclusion from the club life of diplomats where friendships are made over wine and cigars.” She got the assignment, but fifty years later, little had changed. The director told me I had to change to a more “traditional” cone.
I did not change “cones.”

He also pronounced that I should give up any thought of serving in Asia, although a junior officer position at Consulate General Hong Kong was open.

I went to Hong Kong.

So far; so good. For every director, there was someone who said “nonsense” and made change happen.

It was only on my second tour as a Political-Military Officer in Bangkok that I understood how dramatic the change was, and still needed to be.

With a full scale war in Southeast Asia, the Pol MIL section was the senior of the three political sections in one of the largest embassies in the world. The head of the section, the counselor, was the third ranking embassy officer.

Prior to my arrival, the counselor informed the ambassador and the deputy chief of mission that

(a) He was not persuaded women should be FSOs
(b) He was less persuaded they could be political officers, and
(c) He was adamant that no woman officer would be in his section.

As I learned later, the ambassador and the DCM both told him – too bad. Make it work.

I arrived, reported for duty and was shown my office. It had a small refrigerator (mostly beer), a coffee pot and a hot plate.

He put me in the kitchen.

What he lacked in subtlety he more than made up for by studiously eddying all work around me. I was up for tenure and his intent was to ensure that when he wrote what would be a critical evaluation he could tank this career.

What to do?

Ask for a transfer to another section? It was a very large embassy.
Ask for a transfer to one of three constituent consulates? or,
Seek a transfer to another, less hostile embassy?

I tried all three.

When this ultimately reached the Front Office, the ambassador and the DCM refused my transfer to another section; refused my transfer to a constituent post; and, refused my transfer to another embassy.

What they did was arrange the immediate transfer the head of the section – the counselor – back to Washington and to early retirement.
I was tenured six months later.

Bangkok determined the rest of my career. I would not have been Ambassador to Yemen or had the rest of a wondrous career without the courage of those who recognized that change didn’t happen, it was made.

I firmly believe that “well-behaved women seldom make history”, but I also recognize that we cannot make that history on our own. We need, and there are, allies.

Cut to the last scene. When I was appointed Ambassador to Yemen I was asked what I would do if the Yemenis wouldn’t work with a woman. The question was odd. Stupid, really. Governments must grant agreement – agreement in diplo-speak. They knew I was a woman before I landed. I had worked with them for nearly 20 years. No surprises there.

It was also odd because at that time, my Deputy Chief of Mission, my political officer, my economics officer, the vice consul, the vice systems manager were all women. If the Yemenis would not talk to me, they would not talk to the American embassy at all. (Later, we added to that roster with a deputy commander of the Marine Security Guards, the head of the management section, the Legal Attaché (FBI agent), and the senior Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS) agent).

The reluctance to assign women to hardship posts had been breached less than 20 years earlier, as had the policy on language training. The changes were fully manifest in that embassy, and in embassies around the world ... not just in ours.

The face of diplomacy has changed. Today, women make up nearly half of the entering classes and, at 30% among senior officers, are proportionally represented among ambassadorships, many on some of the most difficult and dangerous posts we have.

This change in mirrored in the changing face of Fletcher. Today, and for the last 20 years, half of Fletcher students are women, and 30% are minorities...not further broken down for me, however... along with a continuing strong international representation. In 1972, just two years after I arrived as one of 10, women were 32% (35 women) and African-Americans 5% (6 students). Today, it is over 100 women and nearly 100 of color.

Why do I tell you these stories from the Jurassic Age and what do these stories have to do with you? Today, those numbers are hardly exceptional. Anything less is unimaginable. These changes happened quickly, or so it seems in retrospect. (They seemed glacial at the time.) And, we assume these changes are irreversible.

But the question of diversity remains an issue. Shouldn’t our finest schools, and our government, operate on a strict meritocracy?

Implicit in this question is the notion that a diverse student body, or faculty, or government, is somehow less. That compromises have been made. That “merit” and “diverse” are mutually exclusive and therefore “diverse” is a cost.
Also implicit is that schools, the government, do diversity entrants a favor letting them in, but perhaps a
disservice since they are, with the bigotry of low expectations, not “up to the job.” An act of charity, of
liberal guilt, noblesse oblige, or social engineering.

And finally, there is the notion that such considerations are archaic. The numbers prove that the change
has come. It is here.

Those opposed to diversity can hold all three of these implicit notions simultaneously, by the way.

Our Supreme Court in its evident infinite wisdom may rule on diversity in universities this coming year,
and, with wisdom equal to that evidenced on the Voting Rights Act, confuse progress with success.

I hope not.

I hope the Court re-affirms earlier rulings the recognize the educational merit to the schools, to the
broader student body, to the notion of a liberal and civic education and what it means to be educated of
having an academic community that reflects and advances its society. And that the Court recognizes
that the considerable progress cannot be confused with success.

While any Court ruling may not have a direct impact on the policies and practices at Fletcher and similar
graduate schools, a ruling that stalls or even sets back efforts to continue to make change happen could
affect the pool from which Fletcher and others are able to draw.

A representative student body and faculty is critical to education, perhaps most especially schools of
diplomacy and of public policy.

Without a representative student body, consideration of policy history and policy options in the Middle
East, Asia, Africa or Latin America...or the inner city, the rural midlands or the battered middle
class...become discussions about “them,” about an “other”. What do we do about “them”? “To” or
“for”... but less often “with.”

With a representative student community, it becomes “us.” It fundamentally changes the nature,
content, and outcome of the debates and the debaters themselves are fundamentally changed.

My most memorable teaching moment was a colloquy between a student from a new major aid donor
country and a student from a major aid recipient state on tensions between the need for recognition
and demand for accountability by donors verses the sense of paternalism and an enforced culture of
dependency felt by recipients. No readings could have the impact, the immediacy of this colloquy.

Discussions about the power of dominant cultures and the resentments, coping mechanisms of what
Marc Lynch calls “counter publics” and, thus, avenues for accommodation are flat if everyone in the
room is from one culture, one narrative, one identity. To understand and appreciate identity politics,
those identities need to be in the room. Otherwise, it is an academic debate divorced from the realities
of policy.
That colloquy also exemplified what I believe is the core of education...a social compact between the generations, a set of mutual obligations between the past and the future.

I have spent 11 of the past 12 years at universities. Four, in fact. I never meant to be a teacher but I realize now that my better bosses at State had all been teachers. They were more than mentors. Mentors help guide you through the shoals of a new career, advocate for your advancement.

Teachers share the past with you, a past that is in continuum with your present and the future. It is as old a human tradition as people themselves and in many cultures the story tellers are venerated and honored. My bosses-cum-teachers shared an oral history, their own histories in many cases, with me that gave shape and texture to the crises I confronted. They gave context to the rush of events.

I took that appreciation for conveyed history with me to academia. A rich oral history is not limited to a dry recitation of the “what” or the “how” but makes real an appreciation of the “who” and the “why.”

Taken to a policy level, the lesson becomes that to understand policy as a diplomat, as a policy makers, to be able to shape and to change policy, you must understand the hopes, the fears, the dreams, the oral history and traditions, we would now call it narratives and identity, yours and theirs that drives what is then called policy.

I learned from the wise and patient people I worked with, worked for, that to teach the children well, be they junior officers or students, meant to recognize my place in this continuum.

The obligation on our end of the continuum is to share the history, to make sense of the history, to make it meaningful and relevant. It may be wrapped in any of the numerous schools of international relations, economic theories or in data matrixes, all tools used to create patterns out of events in order to make sense of the past and divine the future, but it’s all history.

- Each generation faces its own existential threats, technological shifts and social upheaval.

Fletcher’s superb faculty when I was here carried the realities of the Depression, the rise of fascism, and communism, a World War and a social structure best represented by Season One of “Mad Men.” Their students were a mix of Vietnam veterans – there were as many active duty mid-career military as there were women – and veterans of the anti-war movement. What did they have to teach that was relevant to our lives and what we would deal with? Ours was a generation actively, noisily trying to break with our parents’ and grandparents’ world.

- Each generation believes it inherited a train wreck from its parents, and they can fix the mess they inherited.

To a certain extent, they are right. Their parents fixed what they could, and probably broke a few things in the process. They – you – will fix what you can, and probably break a few things in the process. Each new generation just breaks something different.

- Each generation brings its own measure of idealism, impatience, absolutism and a touch of arrogance to the table.
I was in a sandwich shop the other day and “The Dawning of the Age of Aquarius” came on. My God! The Boomers once really were that young, that sure of themselves?! In the intervening decades, they learned hard lessons of perspective, patience and perseverance.

So, with these great divides, which is the greater arrogance, to believe there is anything to teach, or there is anything to learn?

This is where your part of the compact comes in.

If we, the faculty and administrators, do our jobs, we can provide you with the opportunity to not just learn the dates and names, the frameworks, schools and theories and how to gather and scrunch the data.

If we are doing our job, we will give you the opportunity to understand how to get to the “whys” behind the data. What were the options, alternatives and processes? How might, should, could the outcome have shifted?

Your part of the contract is to rethink, reimagine, reshape, remold and make change happen.

Fletcher is an opportunity to become part of a community of people motivated, driven, impassioned by a commitment to be part of something larger than themselves and willing to put in the hard work to craft changes, make policies, effect policies that make change happen to the good. That moves us along that continuum.

There is an assumption in this social contract we have along this continuum that is at the heart of the study and the practice of public policy - that there are solutions to critical public issues, domestic, diplomatic, developmental and defense. A presumption that the status quo need not be accepted. Change is possible; change is good; change requires agency.

Perhaps not THE answer, but an answer that can be reached through an appreciation of the precedents — failures and successes; analysis of data; and, as important, a common, shared commitment by those in the public sphere, elected and citizen, that the government, the representation of the political collective, can and should play a role in devising and implementing those solutions.

An appreciation that some public issues are too big to be solved by the individual or small scale communities, and perhaps too important to be left to the market.

Public policy assumes consensus on goals, which requires compromise on means, and a measure of empathy, and of selflessness, what what EJ Dionne calls “communitarians.” Which brings us back to the criticality of schools, and of governments, but of schools that within their student body, their faculties and their administrators come at these issues, understand these goals and can reach compromises on their means from a position of a broader “us” and not a collection of “them.”

There are real challenges confronting you: climate change; ethnic, religious, identity and resource violence; weapons of mass destruction; food security, basic health and education. You will have no end to the Big Issues to tackle. But unless we can recreate a sense of common purpose, we will not be able to take on what one commenter called The Next Big Thing.
And, finally, I was asked to share some basic rules of the road—fortune cookies of distilled wisdom and experience.

Rules of the Road

1. Know your stuff. ... and know the other guy’s stuff too.

   When I was stuck in the kitchen I read everything that came in and went out of the embassy, and tagged along to other people’s meetings. When we got a new Pol Mil Counselor, one person in the section knew both the broad picture and the daily details.

   All of the networking in the world, and the finest of Old School ties do not substitute for knowing your stuff. It is not who you know but what those who know you think of what you know, who you are, how you work.

2. Do the grubby work, not just the glitzy stuff. You will learn more. Grubby gives you the tools to do the glitzy….which generally isn’t all that glitzy anyway.

3. Ask questions. Listen. Learn. You will never know everything. Faking leads to a world of trouble. Asking questions is not the same as asking permission. Knowledge and judgment are what differentiates initiative from recklessness.

4. Get out of your comfort zone, and do not let others put you in a box.

5. Hold on to your sense of humor. This is not to be confused comedy. It is about perspective. Get a life; keep a life. Do not become your job.

6. Hold on to your passion, but temper with pragmatism. Think strategically; work tactically.

7. Patience is not only a virtue, it’s a survival skill. Patience should not be confused with passivity. Patience is persistence on a longer timeline.

8. Hold on to your moral core, your moral compass and your moral courage. They will be tested. Only you will know if you pass or fail that test.

9. Park your ego. It isn’t about you. That applies equally to credit, both earned and unearned, and responsibility, fair or unfair, levied. You need not, will not and perhaps should not win every policy debate. Sometimes you may even be wrong. Don’t confuse leadership with power. One is outward motivated; the other, inward.

10. Understand, appreciate and celebrate that you did not get here... nor will you get there, wherever that may be for you... on your own. Mentor others.

And, with that, I leave you with one final thought – one of my favorite proverbs, from Africa but universally true:

   If you want to go fast, go alone.
   If you want to go far, go together.

Learn our lessons well. Go far.