

Stanford Law School**Graduation Address****June 12, 2010**

Friends, family, faculty, staff, and students—good afternoon.

On behalf of the Class of 2010, I want to say thank you. Thank you to the faculty for your guidance, for teaching us how to think like lawyers, and for your friendship outside of the classroom. Thank you to the administration and staff for supporting all of our endeavors, for helping us get grants and loans and transcripts, and for ensuring that student activities went off as planned. Thank you to our friends, for putting up with our lame law school jokes and reminding us that we were something else before we were law students. And most importantly, thank you to our families, for supporting us throughout these last three years, and long before that.

I would like to acknowledge my own family, my brothers and sisters and especially my parents, and I invite all of my classmates to look for their friends and family in the audience and acknowledge them as well. *Muchísimas gracias*, mom and dad, *por su apoyo todos estos años*, and for struggling so hard and sacrificing so much for me to be able to stand here today. We appreciate all of the people who have stood behind us; who have high expectations of us. We hope we have made you proud today.

The Class of 2010 is about 200 students strong, from all over the country and the globe.

We have master's degrees and PhDs; we are talented musicians, authors and athletes; before law school we were management consultants, high school teachers, filmmakers, and labor activists; we were Fulbright Scholars, Peace Corp volunteers, members of the military, and entrepreneurs. Some of us were even professional poker players, lifeguards, bartenders, and sandwich artistes. The list goes on and on, and the diversity of experiences, interests, and talents is astounding.

Yet, however different we were before we came to law school, we leave it with at least one thing in common: an amazing degree...of debt. Yes, ladies and gentlemen we all owe some bank a ridiculously large amount of money. But that's not the kind of debt I'm talking about. I mean that we owe a debt to society at large. We are graduating from SLS; the doors of opportunity are wide open to us. Sure, we all worked hard and struggled to get to where we are today. But now that we are here, we have to recognize just how privileged we truly are. And because of this privilege, we owe it to those who have not had the same opportunities—often because they have been denied those opportunities—to give back.

It is critical for lawyers to give back to the community and to use their legal skills to protect and advance the rights of the most vulnerable populations—people who often don't even know that they have rights. I know that not everyone is going into traditional public interest careers, but, as we have been reminded over and over again by the Dean and other faculty members, each one of us should strive to make *pro bono* work part of our lives. It is worth repeating at least once more before we leave this school.

(Here, I make a brief pause for those of you who remember me from the law school musical. This is your chance to exact some revenge. Anyone want to shout “boring” or get up on the stage? Anyone?)

Now, the Class of 2010 has seen a lot of changes during our time at SLS. The new Munger dorms went up, and Kresge Auditorium came down. We shifted away from the semester calendar to the quarter system. We had a critical mass of students opt out of numerical grades during 1L year, ushering in grade reform. Now, our transcripts have a mix of 3.4s, Hs, Ps, MPs, Ks, and book prizes. (Friends and family, don’t worry, we don’t understand what book prizes are either.). These last few weeks, somehow Ls become the most highly sought letter of the alphabet, because it meant we could actually graduate.

However, these changes are minor compared to the changes that have occurred throughout the world over the last three years.

Some of us campaigned in Iowa, Nevada, New Mexico, and California to help elect the first person of color to the Presidency of the United States. And that President nominated the first Latina onto the highest Court of our Nation.

After months of political infighting and public debate, Congress finally ensured that millions would be insured.

We witnessed as the economy took a dive so low it’s been compared to the Great Depression. Once secure Big Law firm jobs became scarce, and deferral dates moved further into the future.

Frustration with our national government, and persistent xenophobia, coalesced in places like Arizona where a newly signed law will inevitably lead to increased racial profiling of people who look “illegal.” In Texas, the Board of Education nixed Thomas Jefferson from a list of historical figures whose writings have inspired revolutions, because he coined the term “separation between church and state.”

We are also in the middle of the most devastating environmental crisis in decades.

I know, I know, I sound *really* depressing. I don’t mean to be. This is a celebration after all. But it is worth reminding ourselves why we came to law school in the first place. We can be agents of change. We can help find solutions to the world’s problems. We can be leaders.

I want to share a few inspirational words, and many of you will be relieved to hear that they are not my own. The quote is from Nelson Mandela, who is, among many other things, an accomplished lawyer. He said, and I’m paraphrasing here, “a degree [is] not in itself a guarantee of leadership and [it] mean[s] nothing unless one [goes] out into the community to prove oneself.”

The last three years at SLS have been transformative. We leave this place (some of us this week, some of us after the bar exam) with high hopes and expectations for the future. We also leave with friendships that will last a lifetime. So, I end by asking that each one of you turn to the person next to you and give them a high five, a hug, or a fist bump.

Congratulations to the Class of 2010!