

USC COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS DELIVERED BY
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HISTORY, POLITICAL SCIENCE, INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS GRADUATES
ERIC GARCETTI—MAY 16TH, 2003

THANK YOU PROFESSOR LAMY FOR THAT KIND INTRODUCTION. THANK YOU TOO TO DEAN KANN AND PROFESSORS SHAMAS AND MEYEROWITZ.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE CLASS OF 2003. BREATHE IN. BREATHE IN.

YOU'VE WORKED HARD, YOU HAVE PLAYED HARD, AND NOW IN THE WORDS OF THE IMMORTAL POET BRITNEY SPEARS, YOU'RE NOT THAT INNOCENT.

A SOMEWHAT LESSER-KNOWN POET, SADLY, PABLO NERUDA, ONCE SAID, "IT FEELS GOOD EVERY SO OFTEN TO TURN OUR FACE TOWARDS INNOCENCE AND BREATHE IN DEEPLY."

AND TODAY IS ONE OF THOSE DAYS WHEN IT SEEMS LIKE THE HORIZON IS ENDLESS AND ANYTHING CAN POSSIBLY COME TRUE. TODAY IS A CELEBRATION. A CELEBRATION NOT ONLY FOR YOU, BUT FOR ALL THOSE PEOPLE IN THE AUDIENCE WHO HELPED BRING YOU HERE. THOSE PEOPLE WHO PROVIDED FOR YOU DURING DIFFICULT TIMES, THOSE PEOPLE WHO MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR YOU TO ATTEND USC, THE ENABLERS WHO WERE STANDING READY TO HELP MAKE THIS POSSIBLE. SO CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OF YOU AS WELL. TAKE A MOMENT TO THANK THOSE PEOPLE FOR THEIR FRIENDSHIP, THEIR SACRIFICE AND THEIR SUPPORT.

YOUR FINAL FINAL EXAMS ARE OVER. YOUR GRADES ARE IN. YOUR LAST PAPER IS TURNED IN. EXCEPT FOR THE TWO OF YOU UP HERE. ARE THEY ACTUALLY LETTING YOU WALK ANYWAY. TALK ABOUT DECLINING STANDARDS.

AND NOW YOU ARE ALL ASKING YOURSELVES A FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION: WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED LAST NIGHT AT STAPLES CENTER?

I MEAN I CAN HARDLY GIVE THIS GRADUATION SPEECH. I MEAN FORGET THIS GRADUATION THING AND ALL. ALL OF THE UNDERGRADS COULD HAVE GONE FOUR FOR FOUR. YOU COULD HAVE HAD A CHAMPIONSHIP RING FOR EVERY YEAR YOU WERE AT USC. BUT THE LAKERS BLEW IT.

BESIDES THREE LAKERS CHAMPIONSHIPS, YOU HAVE SEEN MUCH HAPPEN IN YOUR FOUR YEARS. IN YOUR TIME HERE AT USC, SOME 10 MILLION PEOPLE HAVE DIED OF AIDS AROUND THE WORLD AND SOME 15 MILLION MORE PEOPLE BECAME INFECTED WITH THE DISEASE.

WE ELECTED A NEW PRESIDENT, ALLOWED SOMEONE ELSE TO TAKE HIS OFFICE.

WE CAPTURED SLOBODAN MILOSEVIC AND PUT HIM ON TRIAL FOR WAR CRIMES. THE WORLD COMMUNITY ESTABLISHED AN INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT, THE PREVIOUSLY UNREALIZED PROMISE OF NUREMBERG, TO PROSECUTE CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY, GENOCIDE, WAR CRIMES, AND AGGRESSION.

WE EXPERIENCED THE MOST VIOLENT ATTACKS ON THE UNITED STATES IN OUR HISTORY ON 9/11/2001. WE'VE GONE TO WAR IN BOSNIA, AFGHANISTAN, AND IRAQ.

YOU KNOW THESE THINGS. AND WITH THAT COMES THE RESPONSIBILITY TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THEM. YOU ARE THE HISTORIANS, THE POLITICAL SCIENTISTS, AND THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS EXPERTS WHO HAVE SEEN MODERN HISTORY AND POLITICS CHANGE OVER THE LAST FOUR YEARS AND CAN WEAVE THESE THREADS INTO YOUR FUTURE ACTIONS.

WHILE YOU STAYED IN THIS ONE PLACE FOR FOUR YEARS, THE WORLD HAS SHIFTED FROM UNDERNEATH YOUR FEET. SOME SHIFTS HAVE EMBUED THE WORLD WITH HOPE, OTHERS HAVE CHALLENGED US NOT TO FALL INTO HOPELESSNESS. THESE GREAT CHALLENGES HAVE BEGGED US TO DEFINE WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE STAND FOR.

IN FOUR YEARS. WELL ACTUALLY FIVE FOR SOME OF YOU. BY THE WAY, DON'T THINK THAT YOUR PARENTS ARE GOING TO LET YOU OFF FOR FREE FOR THAT EXTRA YEAR.

IF YOU THOUGHT YOU WERE GOING TO PUT THEM IN A GROUP RETIREMENT HOME, THEY JUST GOT THEMSELVES AN ADDITION TO YOUR HOUSE AND IN-HOME CARE. YOUR FUTURE SPOUSE IS GOING TO LOVE THAT.

SPEAKING OF TUITION, I READ IN THE DAILY TROJAN THAT USC HAS FOUND A GREAT GIFT IN RETURN FOR ALL OF THAT MONEY YOU HAVE PUT UP OVER THE YEARS. YOU HAVE SPENT UP TO MORE THAN \$100,000, AND THE SCHOOL IS GOING TO GIVE EVERY GRAD, YES, EVERY GRAD, A FREE E-MAIL ADDRESS.

CAN ANYONE SAY: "YAHOO?"

ANYWAY, IN FINDING LESSONS TO IMPART, IT'S TEMPTING AT GRADUATION CEREMONIES TO SPEAK ONLY IN CLICHÉS, TO GIVE EASY TRUTHS, WRAP UP TIDY PACKAGES OF KNOWLEDGE, AND TO TRY AND SUMMARIZE ALL THAT YOU MAY HAVE LEARNED. BUT LET ME CHALLENGE YOU TODAY TO THINK

OF THE LAST FOUR YEARS AS A PROCESS AS MUCH ABOUT UNLEARNING AS IT HAS BEEN ABOUT LEARNING. IT'S ABOUT EMBRACING THE NUANCE AS IT IS ABOUT HOLDING ON TO TRUTHS. IT'S ABOUT DEALING WITH AND LIVING THE CONTRADICTIONS INSTEAD OF TRYING TO FIND THE EASY WAY OUT.

HERE IN LOS ANGELES, YOU HAVE SPENT THE LAST FOUR YEARS IN A CITY OF MARVELOUS CONTRADICTION. A CITY WHERE OUR SMOGGY SKIES GIVE US SOME OF THE WORLD'S MOST BEAUTIFUL SUNSETS. A CITY WITH MORE LANGUAGES SPOKEN AND CULTURES PERCOLATING THAN PERHAPS ANY IN HUMAN HISTORY YET ONE WHERE WE MOVE FROM PLACE TO PLACE SEALED IN CARS, A CITY MASQUERADING AS A GIANT SUBURB.

I WANT TO GO BACK IN HISTORY A LITTLE BIT BECAUSE THIS IS USC'S 124TH GRADUATING CLASS. 1880, THE YEAR THAT THIS GREAT INSTITUTION WAS FIRST ESTABLISHED, WAS THE SAME YEAR THAT THE FIRST STREET (MAIN STREET) WAS PAVED IN THIS CITY. TODAY WE HAVE OVER 21,000 MILES OF PAVED STREETS. IN 1880, THE FIRST OIL PIPELINE WAS LAID IN THE CITY AND A RAIL LINE WAS BUILT OUT TO THE NEW PORT. IN TURN, OIL FUELLED THIS CITY'S GROWTH AND WEALTH, AND TODAY, THE COUNTRY'S LARGEST PORT RECEIVES 40 PERCENT OF ALL CARGO ENTERING THE UNITED STATES. IN 1880 THE FIRST TWO PERFECT GAMES WERE PITCHED BY JOHN RICHMOND AND MONTE WARD—INCIDENTALLY, THE NATIONAL LEAGUE WOULD NOT HAVE ANOTHER ONE FOR 85 YEARS. FURTHER OUT FROM LOS ANGELES, GEORGE EASTMAN TOOK OUT A PATENT ON A FLEXIBLE ROLL OF FILM FOR USE IN CAMERAS—AND HIS HEIRS THANK YOUR PARENTS TODAY. THE CHINESE EXCLUSION TREATY WAS SIGNED IN ORDER TO RESTRICT CHINESE IMMIGRATION. 1 OUT OF 8 AMERICANS WAS FOREIGN-BORN.

ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FOUR YEARS AGO, JUST OVER 11,000 PEOPLE LIVED IN LOS ANGELES. AND WITHIN THE SPACE OF A CENTURY AND A QUARTER, TEN MILLION PEOPLE LIVE IN THE SAME METROPOLITAN AREA. THERE HAS NEVER BEEN IN HISTORY A CIVILIZATION WITH THAT SORT OF GROWTH.

WHAT BROUGHT THOSE PEOPLE HERE? WHAT BROUGHT YOU HERE TODAY?

THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES STARTED NINETY-NINE YEARS BEFORE THE FOUNDING OF USC, WHEN 42 POBLADORES, WHICH MEANS "SETTLERS" IN SPANISH, TREKKED FROM THE MISSION IN SAN GABRIEL TOWARDS THE OCEAN IN 1781. BEFORE THEY REACHED THE SEA, THEY HAPPENED UPON A SMALL INDIAN VILLAGE CALLED YANG-NA, NEXT TO THE CURRENT LOCATION OF CITY HALL AND THERE THEY FOUNDED THE CITY OF NUESTRA SEÒORA, LA REINA DE LOS ANGELES DE PORCIUNCULA.

IN MY OWN FAMILY, MY FRATERNAL GRANDFATHER CAME TO LOS ANGELES

FROM A SMALL TOWN IN MEXICO CALLED HIDALGO DE PARRAL DURING THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION. HE CAME TO LOS ANGELES, GREW UP IN EAST L.A., NEVER FINISHED JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL, BUT AFTER FIGHTING IN WORLD WAR II AND BECOMING A CITIZEN, HE OPENED UP A BARBER SHOP NEAR THIS CAMPUS, ON THE CORNER OF OLYMPIC AND VERMONT.

MY GRANDFATHER USED TO CUT THE HAIR OF PROFESSORS FROM USC. BECAUSE OF THIS, MY FATHER, WHO GREW UP IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD, LEARNED OF USC, APPLIED AND WAS LUCKY ENOUGH TO WIN AN ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIP HERE. THEN HIS SON, ME, THE GRANDSON OF THAT IMMIGRANT FROM PARRAL, A FEW YEARS AGO BECAME A PROFESSOR AT THIS CAMPUS AND NOW I AM SPEAKING AT A COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY, ONE OF THE GREATEST HONORS OF MY LIFE. AS WE MOVE FORWARD IN LIFE, IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THE CIRCLE OF HISTORY AS IT MOVES FORWARD.

NOW THE STORY COULD END THERE, BUT IT DOESN'T. A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO, WHEN I WAS TEACHING HERE, I BECAME INVOLVED WITH THE CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT THE HEALTH CARE AND WAGES OF THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO HAVE CLEANED YOUR DORMITORIES OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS AND WHO HAVE SERVED YOU FOOD AT THE CAFETERIA. THE UNIVERSITY WAS THINKING OF TAKING ACTIONS THAT WOULD HAVE THREATENED THE ABILITY OF THESE FOLKS TO SUPPORT THEIR FAMILIES SO A GROUP OF STUDENTS, FACULTY MEMBERS, AND POLITICAL LEADERS TOOK PART IN AN ACT OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AND GOT ARRESTED AT THE CORNER OF 32ND AND HOOVER. I SPENT THE NIGHT IN JAIL (NO DOUBT TO MY PARENTS GREAT PLEASURE) AND IN JAIL I MET ONE OF THE DINING HALL WORKERS FROM USC AND HE HAILED FROM PARRAL, THE SAME TOWN MY GRANDFATHER WAS FROM. HISTORY COMES FULL CIRCLE.

AS A RECOVERING PROFESSOR, I CANNOT LEAVE THIS STAGE WITHOUT A MODICUM OF RESPONSIBLE ADVICE AS YOU HEAD OUT INTO THIS NEW WORLD TODAY. AS A DISCLAIMER, WHAT THE HELL DO I KNOW. I ONLY HAVE A DECADE ON YOU.

NEVERTHELESS, LET ME TRY. SO HERE ARE FOUR FINAL LESSONS BEFORE YOU GRADUATE, LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP.

LESSON ONE: BE FEARLESS

DO THAT WHICH YOU FEAR THE MOST. NEVER BE AFRAID. TO TAKE A RISK, TO CONFRONT POWER, TO JUMP INTO THE UNKNOWN.

AND AS YOU GO FORTH INTO THIS WORLD, NEVER LOSE THE FEARLESSNESS OF BEING A STUDENT BECAUSE IF YOU CAN'T MOVE ON THAT RIGHT NOW, YOU NEVER WILL. GRADUATION IS AN ACT OF FEARLESSNESS.

WHEN I WAS WORKING IN THE LIBERATED AREAS OF BURMA, ALONGSIDE MEN AND WOMEN WHO NOW HAVE BEEN FIGHTING FOR MORE THAN FIVE DECADES AGAINST ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST OPPRESSIVE GOVERNMENTS, I MET A MAN AFTER I HAD TRAVELLED FOR THREE DAYS BY PLANE, TRUCK AND BOAT. AND THIS MAN HAD LOST HOMES, FAMILY MEMBERS AND MOST OF HIS LIFE TO WAR. I ASKED HIM WHY HE KEPT FIGHTING, INSTEAD OF MERELY GIVING UP AND BECOMING A REFUGEE IN THAILAND. AND HE TURNED TO ME AND TOLD ME WITH WORDS THAT I WILL NEVER FORGET AND TOLD ME: "I HAVE NO CHOICE TO BE FEARLESS. IF I EVER FEARED, I WOULD STOP LIVING. REMEMBER," HE SAID, "YOU HAVE LIVED WITH DEMOCRACY BEFORE. I WANT TO TASTE DEMOCRACY BEFORE I DIE."

EMERSON SAID THAT FEAR DEFEATS MORE PEOPLE THAN ANY OTHER ONE THING IN THE WORLD.

LESSON TWO: BE HUMBLE

MY SECOND PIECE OF ADVICE IS WHILE YOU ARE FEARLESS MAKE SURE THAT YOU ARE HUMBLE. YOU ARE NOT THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE. YOU ARE ONLY A SMALL PART OF IT. AND ALTHOUGH WE MUST GO FORTH BOLDLY, REMIND OURSELVES OF WHOM IT IS THAT WE SERVE.

THE MARK OF TRUE INTELLIGENCE AND MATURITY IS REALIZING THAT YOU WILL NEVER HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS, IN REALIZING WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW.

SHARE CREDIT, HONOR THOSE WHO MAKE YOUR SUCCESSES POSSIBLE.

LESSON THREE: LISTEN

ALL OF YOU BEFORE ME; WHETHER YOU ARE SITTING DOWN HERE OR UP ON THE STAIRS ARE LEADERS. EACH AND EVERY ONE OF YOU. SO OFTEN WE THINK OF LEADERS AS PEOPLE THAT ALL OF US FOLLOW, BUT WE FORGET THAT A VITAL PIECE OF BECOMING A LEADER IS LEARNING HOW TO FOLLOW, NOT JUST HOW TO LEAD. MY PIECE OF ADVICE IS TO ALWAYS LISTEN. TO LISTEN. TO LISTEN. THE TRULY GREAT LEADERS AMONGST US ARE THOSE WHO

ASK NOT WHAT VOICES CAN YOU HEAR AND WHO IS IN THE ROOM, BUT WHAT VOICES ARE NOT BEING HEARD AND WHO IS NOT IN THE ROOM.

LESSON FOUR:

FINALLY, ALWAYS LEAD WITH LOVE.

DOSTOEVSKY ONCE WROTE THAT IT IS EASY TO LOVE HUMANITY, THE DIFFICULT PART IS LEARNING TO EMBRACE YOUR NEIGHBOR. AND THIS IS OUR WORK. WE ALL SAY WE WANT THINGS LIKE PEACE AND

BROTHERHOOD, BUT THEN WE CAN'T STAND THAT PERSON IN OUR CLASS, THAT ANNOYING NEIGHBOR KEEPS BOTHERING US, OR WE DON'T LIKE THAT COLLEAGUE AT WORK. BUT IF YOUR LEADERSHIP IS TO HAVE MEANING, YOU MUST EMBUE IT WITH LOVE AND YOU MUST LEAD WITH YOUR HEART.

SO, MY FRIENDS, SEEK NOT WHAT YOU WANT TO BE, BUT SEEK WHAT YOU WANT TO DO.

JUDGE YOUR SUCCESS BY THE QUALITY OF YOUR LIFE, NOT JUST THE QUANTITY OF YOUR OUTPUT

AND IF YOU HAVE YOUR LIFE CHARTED OUT TODAY, THEN USC HAS FAILED YOU.

AS SOCIAL SCIENTISTS, KNOW THAT YOU HAVE LEARNED VALUABLE SKILLS THAT NO EMPLOYER WANTS. I HATE TO DISAPPOINT YOUR PARENTS, BUT YOU CANNOT GET A JOB. UNLESS OF COURSE, YOU WANT TO TEACH OTHERS THESE SAME NON-APPLICABLE SKILLS. THAT WOULD BE CALLED A PROFESSOR. TRUST ME. I'M A RECOVERING ONE.

JUST KIDDING. THANK YOUR PROFESSORS. THESE ARE PEOPLE WHO HAVE CHANGED YOUR LIVES AS DID MY PROFESSORS WHEN I WAS IN SCHOOL. YOU WILL HEAR THEIR WORDS IN YOUR THOUGHTS FOR YEARS TO COME, WHICH BRINGS TO MIND A MEMORABLE WH AUDEN QUOTE: A PROFESSOR IS SOMEONE WHO TALKS IN SOMEONE ELSE'S SLEEP.

FOR OUR MAJORS:

FIND POLITICS EVERYWHERE—FROM THE HOME, TO YOUR JOB, FROM YOUR CLOTHES TO YOUR CAR, THIS WORLD IS POLITICAL.

AND FEEL HISTORY AROUND YOU—ITS PROMISES, ITS FAILURES, ITS HOPE, ITS LESSONS.

ALWAYS SEEK THE FACE OF THE WORLD IN THE PLACE THAT YOU ARE.

AS YOU LEAVE THESE GATES, I NEED NOT TELL YOU TO REMEMBER YOUR TIME HERE. FOR IN THE WORDS OF PABLO NERUDA, LOVE IS SO SHORT. FORGETTING IS SO LONG.

I WISH YOU COULD ALL SEE YOURSELVES FROM THIS STAGE. I WAS TOLD BY A FRIEND THAT YOU COULD TELL A LOT ABOUT A PERSON BY THE FEELING THAT THEY HAVE WHEN THEY LOOK OUT AT THE OCEAN. LOOKING AT THE OPEN EXPANSE OF WATER, SHE TOLD ME WE FEEL OUR HIGHEST ASPIRATIONS AND OUR DEEPEST FEARS. FROM UP HERE, GAZING OUT AT

THE OCEAN OF YOUR FACES AND THE SEA OF TROJAN RED, I SEE VERY CLEARLY—OUR PAST, YOUR FUTURE, OUR POSSIBILITIES.

BUT MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE, WHAT I SEE IS HOPE. PROFOUND, DEEP, AND WONDERFUL HOPE.

CONGRATULATIONS.