

Harvard College Class Day
June 3, 2009
Ivy Oration
(Text is as prepared for delivery.
Check against delivery.)

Bull Markets Come and Go, Snobbery is Forever
Will Houghteling

Good afternoon. Welcome to all of the proud parents and grandparents, the world-class professors, the smattering of jaded and unsightly Teaching Fellows and the handful of Asian tourists who were faster than our security guards. To these lucky few, if you want to stay afterwards, I'll be happy dispense some admissions advice, or, even go ahead and bless your children. Most importantly though, welcome to the Class of 2009, we are the most intelligent, accomplished and unemployed class to ever graduate Harvard. Thank you to President Faust, Dean Hammonds, and the Board of Overseers for personally asking me to speak today. Having never once spoken in four years of section, I'm delighted to finally have my voice heard.

Class of 2009, let's face facts—we're screwed. It's actually quite amazing that six short months ago I would have stood up here and congratulated you on your fat-cat jobs in iBanking, marketing, or, my personal favorite, "consulting". I thought the job at Goldman Sachs and hot girlfriend working in Public Relations that awaited me in New York City after graduation validated my decision to take accounting at MIT and post feverishly on the Justice Course blog. Now though, the earlier promise that the world will reward us for being the "best and the brightest", is no longer guaranteed. While 84% of us have been the President of a PBHA organization, during recruiting season I sadly learned that my time leading a hip hop dance troupe of fourth graders qualified me to be a

jazzercise instructor, not a captain of industry. Sadly life isn't like Professor Ben Shachar's Positive Psychology—we won't just get an A for showing up.

Right now it is more difficult than ever to cash in on the tangible benefits of a Harvard diploma. If you concentrated in English, forget about working at Morgan Stanley—you're likely jobless now, or, even worse, signed up to be an Expos Preceptor. If you concentrated in Visual and Environmental Studies--well, let's face it, you probably weren't going to get job in any economy. If you concentrated in Economics, your job is now being performed for 3 dollars an hour in a call center in Mumbai. If you majored in biochemistry— (sigh) I'm terribly, terribly sorry about your college experience.

Everywhere you look the Harvard name has taken a beatdown. So, today I want to perform a Public Relations miracle—I want resuscitate the Harvard brand. I am going to show you how to properly remind the rest of the world that you are amazing. We're Harvard graduates—we must keep our noses upturned, even in a down economy.

In recent years up to 50% of graduating seniors have moved on to work in prestigious fields like finance and consulting. Sadly, absent the five kids whose dads are CEOs at these firms, this is no longer an option. (PAUSE) We must not let this brief unemployment hiccup damage our egos—rather, let's learn to brag about the silver lining in every career path. (PAUSE) If you're working as a bank teller, you're actually reinjecting capital into the market and overseeing the bailout distribution. Stuck interning in the mailroom? Describe your blog as a 'New Media Empire' poised to eliminate the newspaper. (PAUSE) Living in your parent's basement looking at distant high school friend's Spring break photos on Facebook? Nope—you're staying "lean" as you develop a monetization strategy for your "Web 3.0 Hosted Software Solution" company. Drop

enough buzzwords and everyone will confuse you for the next Mark Zuckerberg. Tell grandparents you're "tweeting" for a living—they'll nod and won't ask any follow-ups because they're terrified of computers. If you find yourself volunteering, claim that you were inspired by Obama. If you're dressed like a homeless-person, claim you were inspired by Matt Sundquist.

I guess what I'm trying to say is, over these past four years we've all learned to talk the talk and that's what matters most when we leave. Many of us learned to tie a bowtie without the YouTube tutorial and a select few know the difference between East, North and Bridge Hampton. Sadly, those are some of the lamest skills imaginable and will most certainly never come up again. Academically, we've learned to cite the "categorical imperative" in section without having any real idea what it means. We've mastered the ability of asking our teaching fellows about their personal research while mentally calculating exactly how much the conversation will raise our final grade. These past four years we've learned to BS better than anyone--if anyone tries to call you out, remind them gently, "umm... I went to Harvard".

Next year, when you're crying into your Starbucks barista application, please remember that graduating from here also makes you culturally superior to everyone else. Harvard is the most diverse place on earth. Freshman year my friend whose ancestors came over on the mayflower lived with an Asian military brat, a half-gay, half-black, half-Irish Republican and a Mexican Jew. I didn't even know most of these ethnic groups existed. As a result of our supreme liberal arts education we're all perfectly positioned to understand every inside joke in the Simpsons—laugh heartily and ask your seatmate if he caught that subtle allusion to Freud's coke habit. From our enlightening time in Professor

Nagy's Greek Heroes we have enough knowledge of antiquity to note historical inaccuracies in the movie Troy—disgustedly exclaim that they didn't use oval shields until the classical era! Monet or Manet? Modernism or Post-Modernism? Beirut or flip-cup? Memorize these answers, occasionally pose these debates to friends at dinner parties, and you will immediately feel superior.

After four years fighting with mutton-chops for a seat on Lamont's main floor, we have all earned the right to be 'the jerk who went to Harvard'. We paid \$160 grand for this crown, never avoid an opportunity to flaunt it. Please, wear Harvard football shirts to company picnics even if you never made it to a game and protested athletic recruiting all four years. Buy two class rings, one for each hand. When the first member of our class makes it on the national stage be quick to claim him or her as a close friend, and also quick to denounce him or her as 'not that smart in person'. And when the time comes to wed, I know I certainly plan on advertising that dating me is the most rewarding and important long-term investment—nothing prompts "I do" better than "our kids would be legacies".

Over the next few days and weeks countless people will try to humble us as we enter the "real" world, constantly reminding us that "hardship and failure are facts of life". Don't listen to these people: they are losers, and they clearly did not graduate from Harvard like us. Puff out your chest—over these past four years you became phenomenal—you graduated from the most prestigious college in the world, a place where famous scientists solve tomorrow's problems, where the average grade is between a B+ and an A- and where Domna, the Annenberg swiper lady, is more well-known than

any Professor. (pause) At the end of the day, remember this (pause): when in doubt, parade your Harvard pedigree--girls will want you, guys will want to be you, and family members will want to borrow money. Congratulations Class of 2009. We are literally the greatest people ever.

Thank you.