

“I see you”

Excerpts from the Class Day address, on June 6, by Bill Clinton, forty-second president of the United States. Clinton discussed the comedians who had preceded him in recent years, and the serious speakers—Martin Luther King Jr., invited to speak in 1968 but murdered before he could address the class, whose widow, Coretta Scott King, spoke in his place; Mother Teresa; and Bono—who had also been chosen to speak.

WHAT DO THEY all have in common? They are symbols of our common humanity and a rebuke even to humorists' cynicism.

Martin Luther King basically said he lived the way he did because we were all caught in what he called an inescapable web of mutuality. Nelson Mandela, the world's greatest living example of that, I believe, comes from a tribe in South Africa, the Xhosa, who call it *ubuntu*. In English, “I am because you are.” That led Mother Teresa from Albania to spend her life with the poorest people on earth in Calcutta. It led Bono from his rock stage to worry about innocent babies dying of AIDS, and poor people with good minds who never got a chance to follow their dreams....

[J]ust think what an exciting time it is. All this explosion of knowledge....

It's also exciting because of all the diversity. If you look around this audience...I wonder how different this crowd would have looked...30 years ago. And how much more interesting it is for all of us.

It's a frustrating time, because for all the opportunity, there's a lot of inequality. There's a lot of insecurity and there's a lot of instability and unsustainability. Half the world's people still live on less than two bucks a day. A billion on less than a dollar a day. A billion people go to bed hungry tonight. A billion people won't get a clean glass of water today or any day in their lives. One in four of all the people who die this year will die from AIDS, TB,



malaria, and infections related to dirty water. Nobody in America dies of any of that except people whose AIDS medicine doesn't work anymore, or people who decline to follow the prescribed regime....

It's an uncertain, insecure time because we're all vulnerable to terror, to weapons of mass destruction, to global pandemics like avian influenza....You all saw it this week in all of the stories about the terrorist attack being thwarted in Kennedy [International] Airport [in New York]....

But...[t]he inequality is fixable and the insecurity is manageable. We're going to really have to go some in the twenty-first century to see political violence claim as many innocent lives as it did in the twentieth century....The difference is, you think it could be you this time, because of the interdependence of the world. So yes, it's insecure, but it's manageable.

It's also an unsustainable world because of climate change, resource depletion, and the fact that between now and 2050, the world's supposed to grow from six and a half to nine billion people, with

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most of the growth in the countries least able to handle it.... That's all fixable, too. So is climate change a problem? Is resource depletion a problem? Is poverty and the fact that 130 million kids never go to school and all this disease that I work on a problem? You bet it is.

But I believe the most important problem is the way people think about it and each other, and themselves. The world is awash today in political, religious, almost psychological conflicts, which require us to divide up and demonize people who aren't us. And every one of them in one way or the other is premised on a very simple idea. That our differences are more important than our common humanity.

I would argue that Mother Teresa was asked here, Bono was asked here, and Martin Luther King was asked here because [those classes] believed that they were people who thought our common humanity was more important than our differences.

So with this Harvard degree and your incredible minds and your spirits that I've gotten a little sense of today, this gives you virtually limitless possibilities.... I hope that you will share Martin Luther King's dream, embrace Mandela's spirit of reconciliation, support Bono's concern for the poor, and follow Mother Teresa's life into some active service. Ordinary people have more power to do public good than ever before because of the rise of nongovernmental organizations, because of the global media culture, because of the Internet, which gives people of modest means the power, if they all agree, to change the world.... Citizen service is a tradition in our country about as old as Harvard, and certainly older than the government....

[T]here is no challenge we face, no barrier to having your grandchildren here on this beautiful site 50 years from now, more profound than the ideological and emotional divide which continues to demean

our common life and undermine our ability to solve our common problems—the simple idea that our differences are more important than our common humanity.

When the human genome was sequenced...the most interesting thing to me was the discovery that human beings with their three billion genes are 99.9 percent identical genetically. So if you look around this vast crowd today, at the military caps and the baseball caps and the cowboy hats and the turbans, if you look at all the different colors of skin, all the heights, all the widths, all the everything—it's all rooted in one-tenth of 1 percent of our genetic make-up. Don't you think it's interesting that not just people you find appalling, but all the rest of us, spend 90 percent of our lives thinking about that one-tenth of 1 percent? [D]on't we all?...

Do I disagree with a thousand things that are going on? Absolutely. But it all flows from the idea that we can violate elemental standards of learning and knowledge and reason and even the humanity of our fellow human beings because our differences matter more. That's what makes you worship power over

purpose. Our differences matter more...

And I leave you with this thought. When Martin Luther King was invited here in 1968, the country was still awash in racism. The next decade it was awash in sexism, and after that in homophobia. And occasionally those things rear their ugly head along the way, but by and large, nobody in this class is going to carry those chains around through life.

But...[t]he great temptation for all of you is to believe that the one-tenth of 1 percent of you which is different and which brought you here and which can bring you great riches or whatever else you want, is really the sum of who you are and that you deserve your good fate, and others deserve their bad one. That is the trap into which you must not fall...

In the central highlands in Africa where I work, when people meet each other walking...on the trails, and one person says, "Hello, how are you, good morning," the answer is not, "I'm fine, how are you?" The answer translated into English is this: "I see you."

Think of that. "I see you."

How many people do all of us pass every

day that we never see? You know, [after] we all haul out of here, somebody's going to come in here and fold up 20-something thousand chairs. And clean off whatever mess we leave here. And get ready for tomorrow and then after tomorrow, someone will have to fix that. Many of those people feel that no one ever sees them...

And so, I leave you with that thought. Be true to the tradition of the great people who have come here. Spend as much of your time and your heart and your spirit as you possibly can thinking about the 99.9 percent....Enjoy your good fortune. Enjoy your differences, but realize that our common humanity matters much, much more.

God bless you and good luck.

"The public is growing restive"

President Derek Bok used his "last occasion to report to the alumni" to "share some parting reflections on the challenges for this University and others like it." He began with a moment of personal reflection: "I realize that more than 55 years have elapsed since I first laid eyes on Harvard as an entering Law School student. I remember coming across a bridge in a top-down canary yellow Chevy convertible, fresh from southern California and ready to scale the heights of legal education." Bok then outlined five subjects facing the modern university, from "whom we should be educating" and "how international American higher education should become" to "how to make the most of opportunities in science" and how universities can best "nurture and inspire the humanities." The second of the five questions Bok posed concerned a subject especially dear to his heart as an educator.

How CAN WE BEST help students to learn?... Technology offers novel ways of teaching whose effectiveness needs to be tested and explored. Advances in cognitive psychology suggest innovative ways of helping students learn more and retain more. New techniques of measurement can help us determine how much progress our students are really making. And these are all promising developments. The question is whether universities will make the most of it. For as we know, academic culture is remarkably resistant to seeking new ways

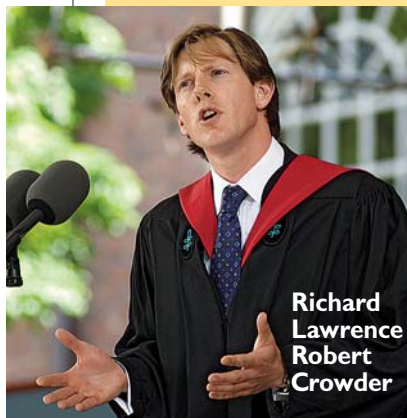
"Listening will be the hardest part"

Let me introduce you to a couple of my ghosts. As I stand here, I think of my two grandfathers—Lawrence Crowder and Robert Styles. Lawrence was English, Robert Irish. Both fought in the First World War: Lawrence in the trenches outside Ypres, Robert in the dust of Palestine. We still have a wrinkled photograph of Robert standing in the Garden of Gethsemane after British forces entered Jerusalem in November 1917. I didn't know either of them personally, but I carry their names in my own, and those images, along with fragments of family stories, have followed me through my life...

[T]here is a sense of possibility which pervades this place, and which can make us each rise to the call of our ghosts.

For me, that vocation is the work of a diplomat. I leave here for Brussels, to [work on] the European Union's collective foreign policy. As it happens, I will be working just a few miles from Ypres, where my grandfather fought. When I contemplate the job ahead of me, I realize Harvard has taught me that listening will be the hardest part. It is all too easy to react to what others are saying with our own views. But finding the space in which to digest, and moving to a response which heals rather than perpetuates conflict, is a much harder task. It forces us to accept that there is no monopoly on the truth.

~Richard Lawrence Robert Crowder, M.P.A. '07,
in the Graduate English Address during the
Commencement Exercises, June 7



**Richard
Lawrence
Robert
Crowder**