

00:06
- Chairman Lamb, President Kelly, Dean Toyoda,
00:11
Provost Sandell, and Professor St. Amand,
00:15
thank you all very much for inviting me back to Boston
00:18
and thank you to all the graduates for inviting me back
00:22
to Boston to be with you on this glorious day
00:26
and in this spectacular setting.
00:30
Fenway is a hallowed arena of achievement and joy
00:34
and common purpose.
00:36
Those are the very subjects I want to discuss with you today
00:41
but first things first.
00:42
Deepest congratulations to all of the graduates
00:45
on your achievements.
00:48
As your achievements are recognized in this ceremony,
00:51
you can look back with justifiable pride
00:54
because you have worked hard to reach this day
00:57
and you can look forward with hopeful anticipation
01:00
toward a fulfilling life.
01:03
Congratulations as well to all the family and friends
01:06
who are here physically or in spirit to celebrate with you.
01:12
Throughout your years at Suffolk University,
01:15
they have been by your side, supporting you.
01:19
We owe them our gratitude for all they have done
01:22
to contribute to your success.
01:25
Please give them a round of applause.
01:28
(crowd applauds)
01:37
My own graduation from university was 45 years ago.
01:42
Memories are a little faint now
01:44
but I do remember something clearly.
01:47
I was eager to get on with my life.
01:49
I had a fantastic time in college.
01:52

I had made many friends.
01:54
I had learned a ton and yet, I was itching to move on.
01:59
I was intensely focused on myself, my job, my income,
02:06
my expenses, my living arrangements.
02:09
The universe of my mind was sharply constrained
02:13
and I was at the center of it.
02:16
Like most of my classmates,
02:18
I was overwhelmingly absorbed with self.
02:22
A few months ago, I retired from full-time employment,
02:27
and as I made my exit from The Washington Post
02:30
after eight years as its top editor,
02:32
my thoughts veered from those that occupied me on the day
02:36
I picked up my college degrees.
02:38
I communicated what I was thinking and I'd note
02:41
to my colleagues announcing that I would step away
02:44
from leadership of that storied newsroom,
02:46
one that over decades had changed the course of history.
02:50
Working at the Post, I told my colleagues,
02:53
allows each of us to serve a purpose bigger than ourselves.
02:58
The mission of the Washington Post was the purpose
03:02
I had found beyond myself.
03:05
So was the mission of every other place I had worked
03:07
in Boston, Miami, New York and Los Angeles.
03:12
Like my newsroom colleagues, I found purpose
03:14
in giving citizens of a democracy the information they need
03:19
and deserve to know, found purpose in journalism
03:23
that was honest, honorable, rigorous and unflinching,
03:27
found purpose in holding power to account
03:30
as our founders intended when they crafted
03:33
the First Amendment.
03:36
Working in those newsrooms was, for me, not merely a job.

03:40
It was a calling and I was grateful
03:43
for how those institutions gave form
03:45
to my professional growth and entrusted me
03:49
with their reputations.
03:52
Those newsrooms were more than a random collection
03:54
of individuals working under one roof.
03:59
We shared a common ethic.
04:01
Each of us was expected to act first and foremost
04:04
not in service of our own self-interest,
04:07
but rather in service of the longstanding values
04:10
and principles of the institution as a whole.
04:15
The paycheck came with a duty.
04:17
Wherever we were, whatever we were doing,
04:20
on the clock or off,
04:23
we were to keep this idea in mind:
04:26
make the institution stronger, build it up,
04:30
do nothing to weaken it,
04:32
do nothing to cause it embarrassment.
04:36
We live now in a time when people are intensely focused
04:40
on their own identities as individuals: me, I, my feelings,
04:45
my life experience, my personal brand.
04:49
So what, you might ask, became of that individual identity
04:53
for each of us while working for an institution
04:55
that asked us to subordinate our individual interests
04:59
to the collective interests of the institution?
05:03
We never gave up our individuality, our past personality,
05:07
our soul.
05:09
Of course we didn't.
05:11
Our individuality was our contribution
05:13
to the interest of the group.
05:15

Each of us had something unique and special
05:18
and highly valuable to offer, but we were part
05:22
of a team, just like the teams that play here in Fenway.
05:27
No one person's individuality,
05:29
no one person's individual interests took precedence
05:34
over the interests of the team overall.
05:37
We worked together in pursuit
05:39
of a purpose greater than ourselves,
05:42
and in that way we gained power,
05:44
the power to accomplish what none of us could do alone.
05:50
I'll give an example from almost 20 years ago, right here
05:53
in Boston.
05:55
The Boston Globe, with coverage that began in January 2002,
05:59
disclosed the decades long cover-up of sexual abuse
06:02
by clergy in the Catholic Church, in this region and beyond.
06:07
That investigation had an enduring impact,
06:10
within the church, around the country, and worldwide,
06:15
and it transformed how allegations
06:17
of sexual abuse were handled in other cases since,
06:20
whether at Penn State or in the Boy Scouts.
06:24
The Globe could do all that
06:26
because it was a strong institution.
06:29
It had the capacity to launch months of investigation.
06:33
It could assemble a team of journalists
06:35
known for their skill, drive, collaboration, integrity,
06:40
credibility, and serious work.
06:43
The Globe had the resources to fight the church in court
06:47
for internal documents, allowing it to reveal
06:50
how the bishops had betrayed the most devout parishioners
06:54
and the very values of the faith.
06:58
I witnessed the power of a strong institution more recently

07:02
in the nation's capital,
07:03
especially over the last four years,
07:06
while at The Washington Post.
07:09
Over these years, we at The Post
07:10
and others in the press endured unrelenting attacks.
07:15
We were called garbage, scum, fake news, the lowest form
07:21
of humanity, enemies of the people, traitors to the country.
07:26
We were subjected to endless acts of intimidation.
07:31
They included assaults on our professional reputations,
07:34
costly lawsuits, threats against our businesses.
07:39
Journalists were harassed and physically menaced.
07:43
Many required special security measures to protect them
07:47
from personal harm.
07:50
We were targets for no reason other than that we did
07:54
the work the First Amendment calls us to do.
07:58
We exposed what a president wanted to conceal,
08:01
including abuses of power.
08:04
We pointed to a pattern of deceit and we would never yield
08:07
to a president's bullying insistence on servility
08:12
and sycophancy.
08:14
We were able to withstand this unprecedented assault
08:17
on a free and independent press
08:20
because The Washington Post was a strong institution.
08:24
It had a heritage of practicing journalism of courage
08:27
and credibility.
08:29
All of us in that newsroom adhered to common values.
08:33
They motivated us to get the truth and tell it.
08:37
All of us work together with a shared sense
08:40
of higher purpose.
08:42
It is no exaggeration to say that over the years,
08:45

journalistic institutions have contributed mightily
08:49
to sustaining American democracy.
08:52
None of them was perfect.
08:54
They made and make mistakes.
08:57
Journalists suffer from being human, like professionals
09:01
in any other field, and our institutions,
09:04
like others, are flawed, but whether it was
09:08
during the Watergate scandal that held the president
09:10
to account or when the Pentagon papers were published
09:14
exposing years of lying about the Vietnam War, or today
09:17
while holding law enforcement responsible
09:19
for wrongful arrests and deaths, the institutions
09:23
of journalism have kept citizens better informed.
09:27
They pressed this democracy of ours to stay true
09:31
to its founding ideals.
09:34
My purpose in saying all of this is not to focus entirely
09:37
on journalism, though I believe its contributions
09:40
to our communities and our country routinely are taken
09:44
for granted.
09:45
My purpose here is to talk about the need
09:48
for strong institutions of all types and the need
09:52
for all of you to make them stronger at a time
09:54
when the temptation has been to tear them down.
09:59
Major institutions in this country
10:01
over the decades have suffered a crisis of trust.
10:06
The military and small business still inspire confidence,
10:09
the medical system gained trust during the pandemic,
10:12
but almost all others, religious institutions,
10:16
police, Congress, the presidency, banks,
10:19
technology companies, the press,
10:22
even educational institutions have seen trust erode

10:26
among the public.
10:28
We can understand why.
10:30
Many institutions have failed the public
10:33
and those failings are fresh on our minds:
10:36
abuses by police, court systems that treat
10:39
the powerful gently and the weak harshly,
10:42
technology companies that accumulate revenue
10:45
but evade responsibility,
10:47
financial speculators who escape accountability
10:50
when their gambles bring an economy to its knees,
10:53
a press that acts as if it knows all the answers
10:56
before it has gone seeking them,
10:58
politics that is more lousy performance art
11:02
than serious problem-solving.
11:05
We have been left with weakened institutions.
11:09
They need to be restored.
11:12
They need your help.
11:14
Only with your help can they become stronger and better.
11:19
The past few years have highlighted the urgency
11:21
of this task.
11:23
We once had confidence that our country was different
11:26
from others that had tried democracy and failed.
11:29
Ours, we believed, had a sturdy foundation
11:32
and strong, vibrant institutions:
11:36
Congress, the courts, the press, houses of worship,
11:41
the scientific establishment, but we learned
11:44
in recent years that our institutions were more vulnerable
11:47
to pressure and manipulation than we ever imagined.
11:52
Many turned submissive when a powerful leader demanded it.
11:56
Others went quiet for fear of reprisal.
12:00

The truth suffered.
12:03
Verifiable facts were denied.
12:07
Expertise, experience, education and evidence were devalued
12:14
or outright dismissed.
12:16
Misinformation and disinformation flourished.
12:21
A huge portion of the public was deceived and radicalized.
12:26
Our democracy was pushed to the brink.
12:30
We can either give up on institutions that betray our values
12:34
or we can seek to repair them.
12:37
I urge you to take the latter course: repair them.
12:44
In his brief but remarkable and best-selling book,
12:46
"On Tyranny," Yale professor Timothy Snyder laid out
12:51
20 lessons from the 20th century
12:53
for how to protect our nation's democratic heritage
12:56
and keep us from slipping into tyranny.
13:01
The second lesson was this: defend institutions.
13:06
"It is institutions," he wrote, "that help us
13:08
to preserve decency.
13:10
They need our help as well.
13:13
Do not speak of our institutions
13:15
unless you make them yours by acting on their behalf.
13:19
Institutions do not protect themselves.
13:22
They fall one after the other
13:24
unless each is defended from the beginning.
13:29
So," Snyder urged, "choose an institution
13:31
that you care about: a court, a newspaper,
13:36
a law, a labor union, and take its side."
13:41
I chose a newspaper long ago, straight out of college.
13:45
Choose your own institution.
13:47
Make it more responsible, responsive, make it more just,
13:52
make it more equitable, make it more inclusive,

13:58
make it more creative, make it better.

14:02
Build it up.

14:05
I make this recommendation knowing that it runs counter

14:07
to the tendencies of our times.

14:10
Social media gives each of us a voice and a platform.

14:15
People cultivate their personal brand,

14:17
seeking attention uniquely for themselves,

14:21
often aiming to monetize it.

14:23
Individual celebrity is celebrated and emulated and envied.

14:29
Stop and think though, of what institutions have done

14:32
for you.

14:35
Start with your family.

14:37
That's a social institution.

14:40
The family highlights, above all, how much you rely

14:42
on others and how much others depend on you.

14:46
It demonstrates the importance of shared values and norms,

14:50
a common ethos that is for how we should behave,

14:54
and it illuminates how those qualities can radiate outward

14:58
and yield stronger communities.

15:02
Next, think of this institution, Suffolk University.

15:07
Where would you be without it?

15:09
Where would society be without it

15:11
and without other educational institutions like it?

15:15
Our higher education system has been the envy of the world.

15:19
It has given us some of the world's greatest thinkers,

15:21
inventors, creators, leaders, doers of all types.

15:26
It brought you together with outstanding faculty,

15:29
it brought you together with classmates who were there

15:31
to support you and enrich your understanding of a world

15:35
beyond your own.

15:37

It instilled in you, I hope, a devotion
15:41
to lifelong learning.
15:44
Early last year, Yuval Levin,
15:47
an analyst of American political and civic life,
15:50
published a book called "A Time to Build."
15:53
It was a call for recommitting ourselves
15:56
to American institutions.
15:58
He begins by discussing what we mean
16:00
by the word "institution."
16:02
"They are," he aptly notes, "the durable forms
16:06
of our common life.
16:07
They are the frameworks and structures
16:09
of what we do together.
16:13
An institution," he says, "both protects us
16:15
and empowers us to interact with others.
16:18
We aren't just loose individuals bumping into each other.
16:22
We fill roles, we occupy places,
16:23
we play parts defined by larger holes,
16:26
and that helps us understand our obligations
16:29
and responsibilities, our privileges and benefits,
16:33
our purposes and connections.
16:35
It moves us to ask how we ought to think and behave
16:39
with reference to a world beyond ourselves."
16:45
When I began these remarks, I mentioned that
16:47
at my graduation 45 years ago, I was focused on myself.
16:52
I was the center of the universe.
16:55
That may be the case with many of you today as well,
16:59
or maybe you're better than I was when I was your age.
17:03
Life quickly taught me how I might contribute
17:05
to the greater good, how I could serve a purpose
17:10
beyond myself.

17:12
For the many decades of my career, I found that purpose
17:15
in journalism and the cause of seeking the truth
17:18
and delivering citizens information that should be
17:21
in their possession and ensuring that we have the democracy
17:24
our founders intended, in strengthening news organizations
17:29
that dedicate themselves to such work.
17:33
You too can find purpose beyond yourselves.
17:37
I hope and trust you will.
17:40
Do it in your church, do it in a school or in a business
17:44
or in a hospital or in government
17:47
or for a charitable cause, maybe even in journalism.
17:51
You will enrich the lives of others and you will find
17:54
your own life enriched as well.
17:58
Today is your day.
18:00
We celebrate all you personally have achieved
18:03
but make it a day, as well,
18:04
that you begin to think beyond yourselves, when you plan
18:08
for how you will work with others to serve the common good.
18:14
Congratulations again, the very best of luck to all of you,
18:18
and thank you for the honor of being with you
18:20
on this special occasion.
18:22
(crowd applauds)