

00:06
- Good morning.
00:07
Members of the board of trustees, President Kelly,
00:11
Dean Perlman, esteemed members of the faculty,
00:14
administration, staff of the law school, beloved family
00:19
and fellow graduates, welcome.
00:22
Congratulations to the class of 2020.
00:25
What a great day to celebrate a year
00:27
that has been primarily defined by immense loss.
00:31
For some of us in the class of 2020,
00:33
our law school experience started with the loss
00:36
of our beloved professor Wittenberg.
00:40
And the beginnings of the global pandemic
00:42
created even more losses,
00:44
which ended extracurricular competitions,
00:47
in person classes, and law school as we knew it ended.
00:52
This disruption continued throughout the bar exam.
00:56
And I'm sure as we have all learned, this can,
01:00
that drinks over Zoom just aren't the same.
01:04
Even today, our celebration is limited.
01:08
Now the class of 2020
01:10
sits in a fairly unique position in history.
01:13
And our position is determined by our location
01:16
in time and space.
01:18
For some of us, for our location in time,
01:21
the class of 2020 shares an odious inheritance
01:25
with the classes of 1903, 1929, 1933 and 2009
01:31
of graduating within a recession or economic depression.
01:36
We share the burden of the class of 1918 of graduating
01:40
amidst a global pandemic.
01:43
We share the distinction of the class of 1968 of graduating
01:47

in a year defined by global protests for justice.
01:52
The classes of 2020 and 2021 have had the great privilege
01:57
of experiencing the calamities that defined
02:00
previous classes, synthesized into one great calamity.
02:05
Now for our position in space.
02:08
Today, the class of 2020 is in 4 Jersey Street
02:12
in a city filled with history.
02:14
Today we sit only four miles and 251 years away
02:19
from an example of state violence against protestors
02:23
which resulted in the murder of a young black man,
02:27
inspiring calls for our revolution.
02:30
We are only two miles away from a great reformer
02:33
of this American experiment, Charles Sumner,
02:37
and we're only two miles away from a great perfecter
02:40
of this American experiment,
02:43
a temporary resident of Boston, Martin Luther King Jr.
02:48
Now these markers aren't just a collection
02:50
of interesting facts about Boston,
02:53
but a reminder that as even brief residents of the city,
02:57
we are connected to our city's history.
03:00
The previous two years have featured awful flashbacks
03:05
from our worst moments in our history.
03:08
From police brutality to the storming of the Capitol,
03:13
to a global pandemic which disproportionately affected
03:17
our most marginalized.
03:19
These two years have taught us
03:21
that history is not passive and historical sites
03:25
aren't just a place of quiet contemplation
03:29
or a nice place to take a picture, but that these sites
03:31
are markers of a continued struggle,
03:34
that the issues of the past aren't truly gone.

03:39
We are only five miles away and 16 years away from
03:42
when then Senator Biden instructed a different Suffolk class
03:47
in a most solemn request that defines the struggle
03:49
for the soul of our nation.
03:51
He requested that we appeal
03:53
to the better angels of our nature.
03:56
There have been countless other speakers
03:59
before who instructed various Suffolk Law classes
04:03
on the importance of maintaining our higher ideals.
04:07
Let their words and mine not fall into a historical memory
04:12
of a nice place to take a picture.
04:14
Instead, take their words seriously.
04:17
We have all been trained in a profession which emphasizes
04:21
that for the most part words matter, they have impact.
04:25
Speaking of being trained, I think it's important to think
04:28
about where the class of 2020 started from.
04:32
Here the class of 2020 sits two and a half miles
04:35
and almost four years past
04:37
from where most of our law school journey began.
04:41
Where then Judge Georges of the Superior Court,
04:44
now Judge Georges of the SJC,
04:46
welcomed us to Suffolk Law and instructed us
04:50
that our name must mean something.
04:53
For three, four, and for some of us only two years,
04:57
we spent trying to figure out what our name would mean.
05:01
It has been noted by a previous student speaker
05:05
that this journey of self-actualization
05:08
was grounded by in steps in virtue.
05:10
Another student speaker compared this journey
05:12
of self discovery through the steps of dealing with grief.
05:17

Whether it's seven stages or steps of virtue,
05:20
we did not get through this process alone.
05:23
Our primary guide during the journey was the faculty
05:27
of Suffolk Law who propelled us forward
05:30
through their great instruction.
05:33
Today, we are all recipients of the great alchemy
05:36
of higher education that produces more
05:38
than the sum of its parts.
05:40
We also share a more specific transformation
05:43
that modulated young, curious, and empathetic students
05:47
to old embattled litigators who disagree
05:50
over the definition of the word "is".
05:53
We learned that if you want to know anything about rap,
05:56
the best person to ask is an old white guy from Brooklyn.
06:00
Now that is my legally obligated rules
06:02
against perpetuities joke.
06:04
But if some of you wish to support
06:05
Professor Beckerman-Rodau's musical career,
06:08
you can find him on SoundCloud under
06:10
Little Restrictive Covenant.
06:13
And during our time we were taught to question
06:15
our assumptions, like whether or not the coffee served
06:18
in the cafeteria was really the brand that was on the label.
06:23
We learned that some questions were better left unanswered.
06:27
Like how many times the elevator you were riding
06:29
in Sargent Hall had stalled that day.
06:32
Professor Bishop, aside from teaching us the finer points
06:36
of contract law, taught us it's better not to know
06:38
what exactly is in a hot dog or a bologna sandwich.
06:42
For most of our law school experience,
06:44
the question of what our name would mean

06:46
was primarily an exercise
06:48
in developing technical competence,
06:51
but the tail end of our law school experience
06:53
included non-technical components.
06:56
Primarily the responsibility of professional ethics.
07:00
The expansion of what our name would mean grew once again
07:02
for those of us who are barred and expect to be barred.
07:05
We swore fidelities to the Massachusetts
07:07
and United States constitution.
07:10
The journey of what our name must mean
07:12
doesn't end at technical competence
07:15
or when the legal requirements are met, but it continues.
07:19
Remains an open question
07:21
of how your name will be remembered.
07:23
Now the study of law in its most abstract
07:27
is the study of relationships.
07:28
Various legal doctrines compete
07:30
over the proper guiding, proper principle,
07:33
guiding the dispute between those relationships,
07:36
between justice and efficiency.
07:38
In our continuing pursuit of understanding
07:41
what our name will mean, it is important to take stock
07:45
of when calamities change certain relationships.
07:49
That the law must meet the need of those changes.
07:52
We must acknowledge not just our collective responsibility
07:55
as global citizens or Americans,
07:58
but our responsibility as lawyers
08:01
that we did not inherit a profession of wrote application,
08:05
but reasoned application.
08:07
That as we continue to attempt to answer the question
08:11

of what our name will mean,
08:13
we must also attempt to answer the question
08:15
of what the law must do.
08:19
It is now known where the class of 2020 is.
08:23
It remains an open question
08:25
the role that each of you will play
08:26
in the changes that are required in the law.
08:30
Whether we will be witnesses, reformers or perfecters
08:34
to the changes that are needed.
08:37
I encourage this class to carry the mission of Suffolk Law
08:40
of honesty and diligence into all of your work.
08:44
The work of what your name will mean
08:46
remains a work in progress, but it certainly wouldn't hurt
08:49
to have those two adjectives on your side.
08:52
Congratulations to the class of 2020, and thank you.
08:56
(crowd applauding)