

Global Citizenship and Social Justice
University of California, Santa Barbara
2008 Commencement Address

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Chancellor Henry Yang, Dean Melvin Oliver, Board of Trustees, distinguished faculty, class of 2008 and ladies and gentlemen, it is a distinct honor and a pleasure to have been asked to share this special day with you. I am especially pleased to fulfill a promise that I made to Dean Melvin Oliver over a year ago to be this year's commencement speaker, and I always endeavor to honor my commitments. I have long been a great fan of Dr. Oliver's scholarship and leadership, and I am pleased to

count him as a both a valued friend and a professional colleague.

I also want to recognize my very best friend, my soul-mate, my wife, Dr. Jacqueline Copeland-Carson whose intellect and beauty is only surpassed by the generosity of her spirit.

Graduates of 2008, as you reflect on the journey that you are completing and look ahead with anticipation to the journey that you are about to start, please find a moment to thank the parents and guardians, the immediate and extended family members, and the friends and neighbors who through their prayers, encouragement and financial assistance helped to make this day possible.

Remember – we all stand on the shoulders of others and that no significant accomplishment is ever achieved alone.

Now, I fully recognize that I am the last lecture that you will have to endure before receiving the degree that you have worked so hard and so long to earn. I am reminded of a course that I once taught years ago, and in my teacher evaluation a student wrote that if he had one hour left to live he would like to spend it in my course. And I thought “wow,” until I read ... because that one hour would seem like a lifetime. Rest assured, Dr. Oliver didn't give me a lot of time but I do have some things that I want say. It will just seem like I am taking a lifetime.

Every graduation class likes to believe that the time in which they are coming of age and the challenges and

opportunities that they must face are unique and unlike any other time. Of course, to some extent, they are right. Every year the world changes just a little and, ever so slowly, old beliefs give way to new ways of thinking and new technologies.

However, there are times when the rate of change resembles a light switch rather than a dimmer switch. Such moments in history are known as punctuated equilibrium where the rules that governed a previous age no longer apply. It happened in the pre-historic age when the dinosaurs died and were replaced with other animals that were better able to adapt and evolve to different conditions. It happened when the Neanderthals gave way to the Homo sapiens.

I believe that today we are in the midst of an equally dramatic transformation. We are moving from a narrow view of citizenship that has focused on one's home nation to a view of global citizenship that recognizes that we share one world and have a common humanity. I believe that we are entering a new age in which we will increasingly see ourselves as global citizens who are concerned about and act in ways to make our world a better place.

Simply stated, global citizens make expenditure and consumption decisions based on the understanding that we live in a mutually interdependent world in which our actions affect others and where the actions of others affect us. Global citizens recognize that the world is

interdependent and recognize that exploiting people anywhere undermines their own self-interest. They are people who, aided by the Internet, are building virtual communities in which they share information and ideas that enable them to act on the information that they receive.

Certainly, the concept of global citizenship is not new. For example, the worldwide effort to impose sanctions on South Africa during the Apartheid years was global citizenship at one of its finest moments. What is new today is that the Internet has made it possible for people to develop literally thousands of discreet learning communities.

It has become cliché to say that the world has gotten smaller. Rather than six degrees of separation, we are six clicks away from learning about anything, buying anything, selling anything and voicing an opinion about everything. When I was growing up, like other digital dinosaurs, I believed that knowledge was finite and that all I needed to know in the entire world, A-Z, was on a bookshelf in my room. It was called the Encyclopedia Britannica. It had the answers to anything and everything. Yes, occasionally updates were required but knowledge moved slowly, or so we thought, and knowledge was something to be mastered and memorized.

Today, those of you who are digital natives understand that knowledge is infinite. You have come to

the realization that it is largely pointless to try to memorize information that you can access from your cell phones at any time and that the challenge is sorting through all of the information to find the exact piece of information that you need and to verify its accuracy.

The Internet has made it possible to freely exchange ideas without the hierarchy of age and degrees and has allowed for labor and capital investments to move across international borders in real time. The convergence of around the clock—24/7—media and instantaneous connectivity is creating an emerging awareness that we are global citizens who share one world and whose fates are intertwined.

To date, we have largely reacted to our new instantaneous connectivity with characteristic selfishness in at least two ways. Substantial virtual communities have been created on Facebook, MySpace and YouTube where people spend countless hours viewing and posting pictures of cats or showing their skills in shaking their rear ends. Yes, these individuals are connected, but toward what end or purpose, no one really knows.

At the other extreme, we have used our new connectivity to drive costs down at the expense of less developed countries and our self-interests at home. To avoid the costs imposed by environmental standards in developed countries and paying livable wages, manufacturing is being moved to less developed countries

where goods can be produced at a cheaper cost. These cheaper costs mean that workers are paid pennies a day, work in deplorable conditions, and the environmental degradation associated with the manufacture of many of these products continues, albeit but someplace else. As these manufacturing jobs leave our shores, our workers are unable to secure work at livable wages thereby significantly lowering their standard of living.

While corporate leaders are often blamed for these outsourcing decisions, the real villains are consumers – people like you and me – who relentlessly demand more for less and whose loyalty to a product only remains as long as it is the least expensive product. We seldom ask:

How is it that a company can continually provide me with a better product for less money?

Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said that an injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

Global citizens live by this mantra.

Consider these statistics:

- Today we live in a world where every day, nearly 27,000 children under the age of 5 (9.7 million children per year) die from preventable or treatable illnesses like pneumonia, diarrhea, and newborn complications. Through your leadership as global citizens we can change this.
- Today we live in a world where it is estimated that in 2001, 1.1 billion people lived on less than \$1 a day, and 2.7 billion people lived on less than \$2 a day. Through your leadership as global citizens we can change this.

- Today, we live in a world where nearly 1 billion people live in substandard housing without clean water or adequate sanitation. Through your leadership as global citizens we can change this.
- Today, we live in a world where 250 million children between the ages of 5 and 17—one out of every six in the world—are working. Half work full time, and nearly two-thirds work in hazardous conditions. Through your leadership as global citizens we can change this.
- Today, we live in a world where approximately 25 percent of the world's people receive 75 percent of the world's income. Through your leadership as global citizens we can change this.

In addition to spending for consumer goods, philanthropy has emerged as one of the most significant ways for global citizens to act on their beliefs.

In this context, understanding what encourages global citizenship, how it is formed, what directions it may take

and how values and ethics are formulated that lead to tangible action will have important future ramifications for international politics, commerce, dissemination of social values, and wars as local, national and international interests become less distinguishable over time.

There are endless examples of global citizens expressing their concerns for the world through their philanthropy. And, it is important to note that these individuals understand that being a global citizen requires them to do both/and—meaning support causes abroad and at home.

Astute companies also are increasingly recognizing these trends and acting on them. For every box of Pampers, the company will provide a vaccination through

UNICEF for a pregnant mother in a developing country.

And, many of you are familiar with the Product Red campaign in which companies specially brand a product using the color red and then give a percentage of each sale to the Global Fund to aid women and children affected by HIV/AIDS in Africa.

It is important not to make the mistake of thinking that global citizenship and the philanthropy that accompanies it is one-directional; specifically from the U.S. to other countries. The United States was the beneficiary of foreign aid from both individuals and governments who responded to the suffering caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita when our own government was too paralyzed to act.

We also should avoid thinking of global citizenship and its philanthropy as being limited to the very wealthy. The Internet has made it possible for people of modest means to contribute during well publicized international emergencies and crises.

So what am I asking from the class of 2008? I am asking that you take up the challenge of becoming global citizens and supporting causes both abroad and at home. I am asking that you live your lives asking how your consumption decisions will affect the lives of others. I am asking that you spend your considerable time using the power of the Internet less in pursuit of mindless fun or researching to find the cheapest price but spending your consumer dollars and philanthropic dollars in ways that

promote a broader understanding of our interconnected humanity.

Unlike any other generation before you, you will have access to infinite and instantaneous information to make the world either a better place for all or anarchy ruled by the strongest and most ruthless. Class of 2008, our world is literally and figuratively in your hands. I am confident that you are fully ready and prepared for the challenge. Godspeed to you all!