

Claremont Graduate University 2005 Commencement, Greeting and Charge to Graduates by Paul Longmore

I have very good news. I am the last speaker on the program and I will be brief and talk fast.

Thank you for that highly motivating response.

I am to give you a greeting and a charge.

It is my privilege to be the first person to address you as "fellow alumni of CGU."

And so this day has arrived. You have labored toward it and yearned for it and often feared it would never come. But at long last it is here. You have made it through this ordeal called graduate education and lived to tell the tale. You have not made it alone. You could not have made it alone. You have been bolstered time and again by partners and parents, by teachers and mentors, by friends and, not least, by one another. There is a special camaraderie among graduate students. This is a moment of achievement and celebration and pride and astonished relief and gratitude and, I hope for each of you, when things settle down a bit, of pondering.

What would I call you to ponder? For I am summoned here not simply to congratulate you, but to charge you, to remind you, to impose on you an obligation, to lay before you a moral choice.

Here is the reminder: You and I are among the most privileged people on the face of this earth. Some of us started out with great advantages. Some of us began behind the eight ball and had to battle deprivations and discrimination. Nonetheless, ceremonies such as this one today mark us all as privileged. That is of course one of the purposes of ceremonies such as this symbolic culmination of - to use an old-fashioned phrase - "the higher learning." This ritual confers on us credentials, hands us keys that will unlock doors for us, open to us wider opportunities, secure us higher status, gain us greater material remuneration, enable us to wield larger powers, claim bigger clout. We are indeed privileged among our fellow citizens and fellow human beings.

Here is the obligation: You have not been afforded these privileges, this education, this learning, these credentials, simply to aggrandize yourself. They entail on you a civic duty, a communal responsibility.

Here is the moral choice: You can further advantage yourself by combining with other privileged people to augment your privileges still more. Or you can serve other people and the community and the planet.

Here is the charge: At a time when so many mindlessly invoke dogma, reflexively operate from ideology, willingly swallow propaganda, it is for you to think critically, speak honestly, and challenge the herd mentality. In an ominous historical moment, it is for you to speak truth to power. In an era when privilege and greed masquerade as equity, it is for you, whatever country

you come from, to stand with the dispossessed and to seek justice, and if you come from this country it is for you see to it that America fulfills the promises of diversity and democracy for all its people.

And so I honor you for your personal achievement, as I call upon you to use what you have learned in service of the greater good.

I have one more charge to give you: Go celebrate.

I wish you well. Thank you.