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# Secretary Johnson Delivers Commencement Addresses at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service

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WASHINGTON – On May 18 and 21, Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh C. Johnson delivered the following commencement addresses at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy's 135<sup>th</sup> Commencement Exercises, and at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service's Undergraduate Commencement Ceremony:

## Remarks by Secretary Johnson at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy's 135<sup>th</sup> Commencement Exercises

**As Prepared for Delivery**  
**May 18, 2016**

Congratulations to the U.S. Coast Guard Academy Class of 2016.

Congratulations to your families and friends. Many of you traveled great distances to be here, and have spent years helping your Cadet reach this moment. Congratulations. You've raised a young man or woman of character, integrity, strength and discipline. You should be very pleased that your Cadet wants to devote these things to serving the country. Cadets, always remember: you did not make it here alone.

Class of 2016, you have distinguished yourself in a number of ways.

You established the International Cadet Fund to enable international Cadets' families to be here today.

You have hosted over 100 athletes of the Special Olympics as part of a community service outreach project, something the size of which has not been done in nine years.

You helped refurbish, clean and paint an elementary school in Aruba.

Cadets Tori Sutherland and Taylor Peace both attended the Model Artic Council sponsored by the University of Alaska at Fairbanks.

Cadet Carrie Smith won the Pfizer Travel Award and will present her research at the annual Society of Toxicology meeting in New Orleans.

Cadet Sam Roets placed second in the International Law of Armed Conflict competition in San Remo, Italy.

Cadet Jackie Kubicko is a 2016-2017 Fulbright Scholar who will be spending the next year in the UK.

You have distinguished yourself in other ways, too.

James Engelhardt, known here as "two ribbons," for his inability to distinguish between the "forward" and "reply to all" feature on email.

Several of you were placed on restriction for breaking and entering into the wardroom in the middle of the night to make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. As your service secretary and civilian leader, I hereby absolve you for this action. I absolve you because I once did the exact same thing. Only it wasn't just peanut butter and jelly.

In the 1970s, the food at Morehouse College was terrible. And we had rations; no seconds. For four years, our choice was Church's Fried Chicken, or starve.

One day junior or senior year, the kitchen staff failed to come in because of a snow storm. (A snow storm in Atlanta, Georgia amounts to a half-inch of snow). A group of us commandeered the kitchen. There were no rations that day. We emptied the freezers. We cooked everything in sight. There was a 30-minute break between breakfast and dinner.

Admiral, in the future: know that when a Cadet is hungry and needs a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, the Secretary feels their pain.

Cadets, on a more personal note, I have two college-age children just about your age. My son was born in 1994 and my daughter was born in 1995. Like your parents, I am a Coast Guard dad, as my son is an officer-trainee in the Coast Guard's CSPI program. He looks forward to coming here in just a few days for OCI and a year from now for OCS. Like you, he loves the Coast Guard and all that it does. I've never seen him so excited. I've never seen my son with an iron and an ironing board before. Nor, before last year, had I ever seen him awake before 0700.

I am proud of him, as I am proud of you.

I am my son's Coast Guard Dad literally, and I hope you will consider me your Coast Guard Dad figuratively.

I was with you last year to mourn the loss of two international cadets who were killed in a car accident.

I was here some months ago to deliver a lecture on ethics. Some of you may remember it.

Last year my family and I welcomed several of you to our home for Thanksgiving.

The future is bright for all of you.

The future is bright for all of you, because if you want to put on a military uniform and serve your country, the Coast Guard is the place to be!

On September 11, 2001, you were only about 7-years-old. Many of you may have no recollection of it. For those of us in national security a generation or more ahead of you, we are defined by it.

In the post 9/11 period, we sent thousands of men and women in military uniform off to Afghanistan and Iraq; many never came back. We are still deployed around the world to address the global terrorist threat, but on a much smaller scale.

Today, the homeland security picture is more diffuse, and more complicated. We live with the prospect of terrorist-inspired attacks as well as terrorist-directed attacks. We live with the threat of home-grown violent extremism that could strike in a number of ways on a number of fronts. Cyber attacks and cyber attackers are becoming more sophisticated. Global warming presents challenges.

For today's homeland security, we must be vigilant militarily, in law enforcement, in our partnerships with state and local law enforcement, with the private sector and the public, in counterterrorism, counter-narcotics, aviation security, maritime security, border security, port security and cybersecurity. Today's Coast Guard is involved in almost all of this.

In any domestic table-top or training exercise to emulate possible real-world threats, the Coast Guard often has a piece of the action.

What I'm telling you is that today the Coast Guard's mission is as important and as relevant as it's ever been.

I'm excited for the future of the Coast Guard.

I'm excited for the future of the Coast Guard because we are building you a new fleet of vessels.

With the continued support of the President and Congress, we have built you a new fleet of National Security Cutters, we are building you a new fleet of Fast Response Cutters, and we are on track to build you a new fleet of Offshore Patrol Cutters. We are in the design phase to build you a new heavy icebreaker.

I am excited for the future of the Coast Guard because I see the character and talent of the young men and women who are entering the Coast Guard, continuing to build on the character, dedication and strength of the Coast Guard past and present.

I hope everyone here has seen the movie "The Finest Hours." The movie is a true story, about Bernie Webber, who, despite the slim odds of surviving, successfully led a crew of three men out to sea in extreme weather in the 1950s to find and rescue survivors of a tanker's sinking stern.

Stories like Bernie Webber's continue in the Coast Guard.

In February of this year, the Coast Guard rescued seven fishermen off the coast of Long Island in 10-12 foot waves, strong winds and rain. The Coast Guard vessel capsized, and each crewmember swam safely to shore. A Coast Guard HH-65 helo from Atlantic City acted quickly to finish the rescue.

Piloted by a highly skilled 19-year-old Master Helmsman, last year the national security cutter STRATTON, on a four-month voyage, seized 31 metric tons of illicit drugs worth about \$1.1 billion, and engaged in the largest single drug seizure from a submersible vessel in Coast Guard history – 12,000 pounds of cocaine worth \$181 million.

More and more, the Coast Guard is a vital part of our overall homeland security mission.

That mission is reflected in the new mission statement for the Department of Homeland Security, and all of its components, that I released one week ago. It reflects the input I received from some 3000 of our people across DHS. It was typed on my keyboard, but, hopefully, it reflects your voice:

*"With honor and integrity, [you] will safeguard the American people, our homeland, and our values."*

I expect this to be my last commencement speech here. I'm delivering a total of seven graduation speeches this spring. For this one, I see no reason why I can't share with you what I'm telling the other six civilian audiences.

Look around you at your classmates. This group of 186 of you will never again be together. These are your last moments as a unit. From this day forward, when you gather as a group for a reunion, someone will always be absent. That's the sad part.

The good news is that, in your life, from this day forward, you will see and accomplish things that far exceed your own present imagination. I guarantee it.

Thirty-seven years ago, when I sat where you are as a graduate of Morehouse College, there was no internet, no GPS, no digital camera, no blackberry, no cell phones, no iPhones, no iPods or iPads, no Netflix, no Snapchat, no selfies, no podcasts, no Facebook, no facetime, no Skyping, no WhatsApp?, and no Department of Homeland Security. I listened to music on vinyl records and called home with a dime and a pay phone in the hallway of my dorm. I'm 58. I'm really old.

It would have been inconceivable to me then, that, in my lifetime, the United States would have a black president, or that I would serve in his Cabinet.

How many of you parents have seen the 1967 movie classic: "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?" In the movie a white college student meets an older black man, Sidney Poitier, at a university in Hawaii, falls in love with him, and brings him home to San Francisco to meet her parents for dinner.

The daughter wants her parents to approve of this controversial relationship in just a few hours, before they get married. The parents, played by Spencer Tracy and Kathryn Heburn, are shocked.

The movie was made in 1967, at a time when interracial marriage was illegal in 17 states.

I recently re-watched the movie, on something else that didn't exist in 1979, On Demand TV.

There is an incredible question and answer exchange between Spencer Tracy and Sidney Poitier, which I had forgotten:

*"Have you given any thought to the problem your children are going to have?"*

*"Yes, and we'll have children"*

*"Is that the way Joey feels?"*

*"She feels that every single one of our children will be President of the United States, and they'll have colorful administrations."*

This statement, from a fictional movie in 1967 was made in jest, a throwaway line, to reflect the naïve optimism about the strength and wonder of this country.

But, in fact, at that moment, there was already a six-year-old boy who was the child of a white woman and an older black man who had met at a university in Hawaii and married. And that young man is now the President of the United States.

And, I can tell you first-hand he has a colorful Administration.

Each one of you will enter into service with great responsibility. From the start you will have to manage risks and threats, and will be asked to carry out difficult missions around the globe. After today some of you will go to flight school, will process migrants in the Caribbean, will oversee disaster response in the Gulf Coast, or will lead ships into the Arctic. Your jobs will be difficult and will demand your sacrifice. You will continue to be tested and challenged.

I have high confidence in your ability to do the vital work of the Coast Guard and the Department of Homeland Security.

Congratulations and thank you for embarking on this incredible journey, and for becoming the newest officers of the United States Coast Guard.

## Remarks by Secretary Johnson at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service Undergraduate Commencement Ceremony

**As Delivered**  
**May 21, 2016**

Mr. President, Dean, faculty, administrators, graduates, and your families. Thank you very much for the honor you bestow on me today, and for the opportunity to be your commencement speaker.

There are Hoyas in my family. My wife is a graduate of the Georgetown Dental School, class of 1986.

{interruption from audience}

To those of you who are our international guests: welcome to our wonderful, and sometimes noisy, democracy.

When I was first asked to speak to the School of Foreign Service, I turned to my international affairs team. I asked them to help me develop a speech about the increasing internationalization of homeland security, and to convey, in this age of the foreign terrorist fighter, the increasing need for diplomacy as a component of homeland security. By working with other nations to secure their borders from foreign terrorist travel, we secure our own homeland.

In the meantime, as we just saw, there has been a controversy that has arisen on this campus as a result of the invitation to be your commencement speaker.

After meeting with students on Monday, I decided to scrap the prior approach and address the immediate issue, that you saw, head-on. In the process, I believe I can deliver on the request to talk about the manner in which today's government leaders grapple with difficult issues of national and homeland security. These remarks were written by me and me alone.

First: to the students and alumni who object to me and our immigration policy, I admire your energy and passion. I hope you continue in your cause. Your level of activism and commitment is something I encourage in my own college-age children. In this free country, you have an important role, your views matter, and they contribute to the policymaking of our government. And, do not become disheartened if others oppose you.

It is true that I head the Department of our government that is responsible for the administration and enforcement of our immigration laws. I shall not shrink from that.

When I took this job, I accepted an obligation to enforce the law consistent with the enforcement priorities of President Obama's Administration. What does that mean? Let's take a closer look.

Two years ago President Obama directed me to revise our immigration enforcement policies, to make them more humane and fair. And, in November 2014 we announced new policies that more clearly prioritize public safety and border security.

In fact, therefore, fewer people are now deported from this country and a higher percentage of them are within our priorities for removal, and are convicted criminals.

In fact, President Obama and I want to *expand* upon his Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy – also called DACA -- and make others eligible for deferred action: *adults* who've been here for five years, have kids who are citizens or lawful permanent residents, have committed no serious crime, and who submit to a background check. This is the new "DAPA" policy the President and I announced in November 2014.

This effort is in the Supreme Court right now, and we are fighting to defend it.

At the same time, we must enforce the law consistent with our priorities for enforcement.

If someone who is a priority for removal has received a final order of removal, has no pending appeal, and has not qualified for asylum or other humanitarian relief under our laws, we must repatriate them. There are many who strongly disagree with this. But, we are a nation with borders, and these borders cannot be open to illegal migration.

Is sending a man, woman or child back to the very situation they fled pleasant? No.

As government officials and leaders, we try to do the right thing.

Doing the right thing can be complicated. In government decision-making and policy-making, doing the right thing is rarely simple, pure or perfect. It's rarely one-dimensional, or even two-dimensional. It's often multi-dimensional. And one of those dimensions can be your personal convictions.

In 29 months in this office, I've spent hours meeting and talking with hundreds of children in Border Patrol processing centers on our southern border, in a refugee camp in Turkey, and, just yesterday and the day before, in resettlement centers in El Salvador and Honduras.

I don't mind telling you it has brought me to tears.

As a father and a Christian, I personally want to scoop all these kids up and take them home with me. But we cannot formulate government

policy based solely on my personal reaction to a painful situation.

President Obama said something similar in his commencement address at Howard two weeks ago. Government decision-making and policy-making involve compromise – a compromise between and among different considerations.

In foreign service, there will be times when you will be asked to form alliances with governments with a less than perfect human rights record.

In foreign service, there may be times when you must sit down with a government or organization that is actively working to undermine U.S. interests.

In national security, there will be times when we must send good young men and women into harm's way.

In national security, there will be times when we must authorize military force in circumstances where innocent people may die.

In 2010, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Mike Mullen announced publicly his personal opposition to the Don't Ask, Don't Tell law that prohibited gays from serving openly in the military. Admiral Mullen stated his opposition as a matter of integrity – theirs and ours. As a matter of integrity, he could no longer ask other service members to lie about who they are.

Many agreed, and insisted that we immediately suspend separations under what they believed was an unjust and unconstitutional law. But Admiral Mullen and the Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, who were stewards of a military force of about two million people, knew there were larger considerations. They commissioned a 10-month study of the issue in which we surveyed 400,000 service members. At the end, by this deliberate, thorough approach, we convinced the military community and skeptics in Congress that we could repeal the law.

That repeal went even smoother than we predicted, and contributed, I believe, to the shift in public opinion that followed, toward LGBT rights and gay marriage.

The greatest moral leader of modern times in this country, my Morehouse brother Martin Luther King, had to at times compromise his own principles and disappoint his supporters.

Many of you know about "Bloody Sunday" on the Edmund Pettis Bridge in Selma Alabama, on March 7, 1965. Many of you know about the successful Selma to Montgomery march for voting rights that began two weeks later, on March 21, 1965.

Far fewer know about the aborted march in between, on what is referred to as "Turnaround Tuesday."

In reaction to the televised beatings of the civil rights marchers by police on Bloody Sunday, many energized civil rights advocates rushed to Selma to take up the cause and resume the march. Led by Dr. King, they were prepared to face the same beatings their comrades had suffered two days before.

Inexplicably to his followers, Dr. King led them across the Edmund Pettis Bridge, knelt in prayer before the line of police, and then led the marchers in a U-turn back across the bridge. Many of the marchers were prepared to put their bodies on the line, were furious at Dr. King, and felt tricked and betrayed by him.

But, Dr. King had quietly concluded that he did not want to violate a federal temporary restraining order, and alienate the judge who had issued it, who, Dr. King believed would eventually see it their way.<sup>[1]</sup> In retrospect, Dr. King was right. Judge Frank Johnson lifted his temporary restraining order, which paved the way for the now-famous Selma to Montgomery march, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and a more perfect union.

Even closer to home for me is a story of a man who died 60 years ago named Charles S. Johnson. Dr. Johnson was a sociologist and president of Fisk University, a black college in Nashville, Tennessee. In 1950, Fisk needed a good mathematician on the faculty, and Dr. Johnson hired a gifted teacher named Lee Lorch. Lorch was white, and a committed civil rights activist who was willing to teach at a black college. Lorch was also suspected of being a Communist.

For years, during the height of the McCarthy era, Johnson stood by Lorch. It was a matter of principle. Johnson was even suspected of being a Communist himself. Testifying before federal and state legislative Un-American Activities committees, Johnson – a World War One veteran with honorary degrees from Harvard and Columbia – publicly denied he was a member of the Communist Party. Johnson also said publicly what he thought about these investigations: that they were "witch hunts" and "much more un-American than the un-American activities being pursued."

But, after years of defending Lorch, in 1955 Johnson had to set aside his principles and terminate Lorch's contract, to protect Fisk University, its reputation, its financial standing, and its future.

For my grandfather, this was an agonizing decision that we never talk about in my family, and that, according to a good friend, contributed to my grandfather's fatal heart attack in 1956, at the age of 63. <sup>[2]</sup>

But, today, 60 years later, among many small black colleges that struggle to survive, Fisk continues to exist, financed in very large part by a \$100 million art collection assembled by my grandfather for the school while he was president.

When an action we are called to take offends our personal convictions, we can resign. But, abandoning your responsibility only passes the burden to someone else – and possibly someone less thoughtful, less sensitive and more callous. Resignation relieves you of your personal dilemma, makes a forceful statement, but may not be good for the country or a lot of people who depend on you as their leader.

This is a burden you must be prepared to accept in public service, and as a leader.

Sometimes our options are plenty. Sometimes our options are limited and lousy. But, at all times we try our best to find the best solution and do the right thing.

In a democracy, we are then judged by the voters who elect us, or elect the person to whom we are accountable. Ultimately, we are judged in the pages of history, and by God.

There are graduates here who have stated publicly that they do not want to shake my hand. That is your right and your privilege. I am willing to extend my hand to every one of you.

In our democracy, the people do not owe their government leaders any form of reverence. If anything, in this country it's the other way round. We are public servants. We work for you.

A year ago I met a man named Kamal. Kamal is from Syria. Kamal and his family have been granted refugee status in this country, and now live in Texas. Kamal says that, while living in Syria, he was persecuted and put in military detention, where he was sexually assaulted, subject to electric shocks, and had his kidney removed without his consent. When I met Kamal, he told me "my regime tortured me."

I said to Kamal, "welcome to the United States, I am your new regime, and no one here is going to torture you." I then shook his hand, and gave him a hug.

To this graduating class from the Georgetown School of Foreign Service, I have not said much about the "foreign" aspect of foreign service, but I do hope that I have conveyed to all of you what it means to be in *service* – service to others, service to the public.

I've talked a lot about the burden and responsibility of service, but the truth is, I love what I do.

For most of my career I have been a corporate lawyer. For less than a third of my career I've been in public service. Though I now make less than a 1<sup>st</sup> year associate at the corporate law firm where I was previously a partner, my public service has been the most consequential and gratifying part of my professional life.

I expect to go back to private law practice soon. But, no matter how many cases or clients I win in private practice, I know the first paragraph of my obituary will be my public service.

Public service is about helping others, and within almost all of us as human beings is the basic desire to do good and help others.

When you leave here many of you will acquire the burden of student loan debt, a mortgage, and a financial responsibility to yourself and your family. My hope for all of you, as proceed today on your journey from here, is that you never lose the spark that motivated you to come to this school in the first place.

Thank you very much.

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[1] See John Lewis with Michael D'Orso, "Walking with the Wind," p. 348 (1998).

[2] See Patrick Gilpin and Marybeth Gasman, Charles S. Johnson: Leadership Beyond the Veil of the Civil Rights Era, pp. 237-248 (2003).

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