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# Teach Your Children Well\*

REMARKS AT THE ANNUAL ACADEMIC CONVOCATION  
THE FLETCHER SCHOOL

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When Justice Sonia Sotomayor was nominated to the Supreme Court, a member of the U.S. Senate remarked with unintended candor that “she wasn’t the face of American justice as he knew it.” I will assume, solely for the sake of good manners, that he was referring to her judicial philosophy. But, in fact, she was not the face he knew—she is a she, and she is a Latina—and the combination of two ‘others’ was disquieting, perhaps even frightening. Fortunately, it was not ultimately disqualifying. Ultimately, it was the content of her character not the color of her skin—or her gender—on which she was judged.

## FLETCHER: THEN AND NOW

As I look at this afternoon’s convocation, I do not see the face of Fletcher I knew as a student. That is not disquieting and certainly not frightening. That is a very good thing.

To put it in perspective—I was one of ten women students, one

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\*With thanks to Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young.

Latino—the Honorable Bill Richardson—and maybe one African-American, Ralph Bunche, Jr. The statistics are not available and the memories are fuzzy. In doing a reality check with some of my former classmates last week, one put it quite well—the U.S. student contingent was not exactly kaleidoscopic.

At our convocation (I now know it must have been the convocation), the then-dean delivered the same joke he had for several years—that women came to Fletcher in order to marry beneath themselves. In eleven short words he managed to (a) concede our qualifications and (b) dismiss our worth. His office was firebombed later that year. That is an example of coincidence, not causation.

The dean was not alone. My adviser told me he had never met a women student above the B+ mark. Male students received scholarships; women received loans. When one of my funding sources in my last semester disap-

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peared—literally—I made it through on dry cereal and reconstituted powder milk. The school was deeply sympathetic ... and unhelpful.

Why put up with this? Short answer—it wasn't better anywhere else. Longer answer—I had fixated on a career in the foreign service in high school, had passed the foreign service

written and oral exams, but knew that I was not ready. My undergraduate work in Asian studies and American Politics at an aggressively co-educational, large public university in California was unpolished. I needed to experience east coast culture, focus on international relations beyond Asia, and get ready for this thing called diplomacy.

I applied to only one graduate school. It was Fletcher or nothing. There was no 'option B.' My eternal thanks to the Fletcher admissions committee. Despite antediluvian deans, recalcitrant faculty and limited funds, Fletcher was great. Fletcher was a community of scholars, and a community of policy wonks, or wannabe wonks. A community that saw the world as an opportunity and service as a calling. I had never seen such a thing before.

The less-than-kaleidoscopic nature of the U.S. student community was balanced by the broad range of their international experience, and by the large contingent of international students. The formal learning was balanced by endless hours of endless debates in the library lobby. And, in some ways, the chill experienced as an aspiring woman graduate student

was useful preparation for the foreign service. I was a better person and a better diplomat because of Fletcher.

Again, thank you Fletcher, because, it did not get a whole lot better.

### WELL-BEHAVED WOMEN SELDOM MAKE HISTORY

There were two women in my Foreign Service Officer (FSO) entering class. Women were barred from any hard language training—Chinese, Arabic, Russian—and from serving in hardship posts. The ban on marriage while on duty was lifted only months before I entered. The director of the orientation class told me that—as a woman—I could not be a political officer. He, as the dean had, granted my qualifications, but was adamant they were trumped by my gender.

His reasoning was eerily reminiscent to that strenuously used against the first woman FSO's first overseas assignment in the 1920s—she could not handle the 'personal contact work of diplomacy, the work they do when out of the office, the exclusion from the club life of diplomats where friendships are made over wine and cigars.' She got the assignment, but fifty years later, little had changed. The director told me I had to change to a more 'traditional' cone.

I didn't.

He tried mightily to send the only Asian Studies major to Bolivia, though a position in Consulate General Hong Kong was open.

I went to Hong Kong.

So far; so good. For every director, there was someone who said "nonsense" and made change happen.

It was only on my second tour, as a political-military officer in Bangkok, that I understood how dramatic the change was, and still needed to be. With a full-scale war in Southeast Asia, the political-military section was the pre-eminent of the three political sections in one of the largest embassies in the world. The head of the section, the counselor, was the third ranking embassy officer. Prior to my arrival, the counselor informed the ambassador and the deputy chief of mission that

- (a) he was not persuaded women *should* be FSOs;
- (b) he was less persuaded they *could* be political officers; and
- (c) he was adamant that no woman officer *would* be in his section.

As I learned later, the ambassador and the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) both told him—too bad. Make it work. I arrived, reported for duty, and, was shown my office. It had a small refrigerator (mostly beer), a coffee pot, and a hot plate. He put me in the kitchen.

What he lacked in subtlety he more than made up for by studiously eddying all work around me. I was up for tenure and his intent was to ensure that, when he wrote what would be a critical evaluation, he could tank my career.

What to do?

- Ask for a transfer to another section;
- A transfer to one of our many consulates; or, barring that,
- A transfer to another post.

I tried all three.

When this ultimately reached the front office, the ambassador or the DCM:

- Refused my transfer to another section;
- Refused my transfer to a constituent post; and
- Refused my transfer to another embassy.

What they did was arrange the immediate transfer of the head of the section—the counselor—back to Washington and to early retirement. I was tenured six months later. Bangkok determined the rest of my career. I would not have been ambassador to Yemen or the rest of a wondrous career without the courage of those who recognized that change didn't happen, it was made. I firmly believe that “well-behaved women seldom make history.” Cut to the last scene—when I arrived as ambassador to Yemen I was asked what I would do if the Yemenis wouldn't work with a woman.

The question was odd—stupid, really. Governments must grant agreement. They knew I was a woman before I landed. I had worked with them for nearly twenty years. No surprises there. It was also odd because at that time, my DCM, my political officer, my economics officer, the vice consul, the deputy systems manager and the second ranking Marine guard were all women. If the Yemenis would not talk to me, they would not talk to the American embassy at all.

The reluctance to assign women to hardship posts had been breached less than twenty years earlier, as had the policy on language training. The changes were fully manifest in that embassy, and in embassies around the world ... not just in ours.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSITY IN OUR SCHOOLS AND OUR GOVERNMENT**

The face of diplomacy has changed. Today, women make up nearly half of the entering classes and, at 30 percent among senior officers,

are proportionally represented among ambassadorships. This change is mirrored in the changing face of Fletcher. Today, and for the last twenty years, half of Fletcher students are women, and 30 percent are minorities, along with a continuing strong international representation. In 1972, just two years after I arrived as one of ten, women were 32 percent (thirty-five women) and African-Americans 5 percent (six students). Today, it is over one hundred women and nearly one hundred students of color.

Why do I tell you these stories from the Jurassic Age, and what do these stories have to do with you? Today, those numbers are hardly exceptional. Anything less is unimaginable. These changes happened quickly, or so it seems in retrospect. (They seemed glacial at the time).

Why is diversity an issue—or still an issue? Shouldn't our finest schools, and our government operate on a strict meritocracy? Implicit in this is the notion that a diverse student body—or faculty—or government—is somehow less, that 'merit' and 'diverse' are mutually exclusive and therefore 'diverse' is a cost. Also implicit is that schools, and the government, are doing diversity entrants a favor—an act of charity, of liberal guilt, noblesse oblige, or social engineering. And finally, there is the notion that such considerations are archaic. The numbers prove that the change has come. It is here.

Our Supreme Court, in its evident infinite wisdom, may rule on diversity in universities this coming year, and, with wisdom equal to that evidenced on the Voting Rights Act, confuse progress with success. I hope not. I hope the Court reaffirms earlier rulings that recognize the educational merit to the schools, to the broader student body, to the notion of education and what it means to be educated, to having an academic community that reflects and advances its society.

A representative student body—and faculty—is critical to education, perhaps most especially at schools of diplomacy and of public policy. Without a representative student body, consideration of policy history and policy options in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, or Latin America, or the inner city, the rural midlands, or the battered middle class, become discussions about 'them,' about an 'other.'

With a representative student community, it becomes 'us.' It fundamentally changes the nature, content, and outcome of the debates and the debates themselves are fundamentally changed.

My most memorable teaching moment was a colloquy between a student from a new major aid donor country and a student from a major aid recipient state on tensions between the need for recognition and demand for accountability by donors versus the sense of paternalism and

an enforced culture of dependency felt by recipients. No readings could have the impact, the immediacy of this colloquy. That colloquy also exemplified what I believe is the core of education: a social compact between the generations, a set of mutual obligations between the past and the future.

### TEACH THE CHILDREN WELL

I have spent eleven of the past twelve years at universities. I never meant to be a teacher but I realize now that my better bosses at State had all been teachers. They were more than mentors—those who help guide you through the shoals of a new career, advocate for your advancement. They passed on an oral history, their own histories in many cases, which shaped and informed the crises I confronted. They gave context to the rush of events.

I took that appreciation for conveyed history with me to academia.

- The lesson of the limited utility of the ‘what’ or the ‘how’ if not informed by an appreciation of the ‘who’ and the ‘why.’
- The lesson that to understand policy—as a diplomat, as a policy maker—to shape and to change policy, you must understand the hopes, the fears, the dreams—we would now call it narratives and identity, yours and theirs.
- I learned that to teach the children well—students or junior officers—meant to recognize my place in this continuum.

So the obligation on our end of the compact is to share history. It may be wrapped in any of the numerous schools of international relations, economic theories, or in data matrices; all tools used to create patterns out of events in order to make sense of the past and divine the future, but it’s all history.

Each generation faces its own existential threats, technological shifts and social upheaval. Fletcher’s superb faculty when I was here carried the realities of the Great Depression, fascism, communism, a world war, and a social structure best represented in season one of *Mad Men*. Their students were a mix of Vietnam veterans—there were as many active duty mid-career military as there were women—and veterans of the anti-war movement. What did they have to teach that was relevant to our lives and what we would deal with?

We shared a Cold War, but little else.

- Each generation believes it inherited a train wreck from its parents—and they can fix the mess they inherited. To a certain extent, they are right.

- Their parents fixed what they could, and probably broke a few things in the process.
- They—you—will fix what you can, and probably break a few things in the process ... just not the same things.
- Each generation brings its own measure of idealism, impatience, absolutism, and a touch of arrogance to the table. I was in a sandwich shop the other day and “The Dawning of the Age of Aquarius” came on. My God—‘the boomers’ once really were that young, that sure of themselves?!

In the intervening decades, they learned hard lessons of perspective, patience and perseverance. So, with these great divides, which is the greater arrogance—to believe there is anything to teach, or there is anything to learn? This is where your part of the compact comes in.

If we—the faculty and administrators—do our jobs, we can provide you with the opportunity to not just learn the dates and names, the frameworks, schools and theories, and how to gather and crunch the data. If we are doing our job, we will give you the opportunity to understand how to get to the ‘whys’ behind the data—the options, alternatives, and processes. How might, should, could the outcome have shifted? Your part of the contract is to rethink, reimagine, reshape, remold, and make change happen.

Fletcher is also the opportunity to become part of a community of people motivated—driven—by a commitment to be part of something larger than themselves.

A second social contract at the heart of the study and practice of public policy is the presumption that there are solutions to critical public issues—domestic and diplomatic. The status quo need not be accepted. Change is possible; change is good; change requires agency.

Public policy assumes consensus on goals, which requires compromise on means, and a measure of empathy, and of selflessness, what E.J. Dionne calls communitarianism.

As we have become more comfortable with social diversity, this sense of common weal, of community of shared interests and goals, seems to contract. Our social tolerance is not matched by a political tolerance. There are real challenges confronting you: climate change; ethnic, religious, identity and resource violence; weapons of mass destruction; food security, basic health and education. You will have no end to the ‘big issues’ to tackle. But unless we can recreate a sense of common purpose, we will not be able to take on what one commenter called ‘the next big thing’.

And, finally, I was asked to share some basic rules of the road—fortune cookies of distilled wisdom and experience.

## RULES OF THE ROAD

- 1) Know your stuff ... and know the other guy's stuff too.

When I was stuck in the kitchen, I read everything that came in and went out of the embassy, and tagged along to other people's meetings. When we got a new political-military counselor, one person in the section knew both the broad picture and the daily details.

Former Secretary Clinton famously walked into policy meetings better prepared than anyone else in the room. All of the networking in the world, and the finest of 'old school' ties do not substitute for knowing your stuff. Yes, these are critical career skills, but it is not whom you know but what those who know you think of what you know.

- 2) Do the grubby work, not just the glitzy stuff. You will learn more. Grubby gives you the tools to do the glitzy ... which generally isn't all that glitzy anyway.
- 3) Ask questions. You will never know everything. Faking leads to a world of trouble. Asking questions is not the same as asking permission. Knowledge and judgment are what differentiates initiative from recklessness.
- 4) Patience is not only a virtue; it is a survival skill. Patience should not be confused with passivity. Patience is persistence on a longer timeline.
- 5) Hold onto your sense of humor. This is not to be confused with comedy. It is about perspective. Get a life; keep a life. Do not become your job.
- 6) Hold onto your moral core, your moral compass, and your moral courage. They will be tested. Only you will know if you pass or fail that test.
- 7) Park your ego. It isn't about you. That applies equally to credit given and responsibility accepted. Two corollaries: Don't confuse leadership with power. One is outward motivated; the other is inward motivated. Second, don't think you got here—or will get there—on your own.

And, with that, I leave you with one final thought—one of my favorite proverbs, from Africa, but universally true:

If you want to go fast, go alone.

If you want to go far, go together.

Learn our lessons well. Go far. *f*