

Hunter College  
The City University of New York

Commencement Address  
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By David A. Caputo  
President

\* First Commencement Address of the Millenium

## COMMENCEMENT COMMENTS-----

1/26/00

I just want to assure everyone that my mother did not write that introduction, but she would agree that it is all true! It is indeed a great honor to be your president and to help guide this great institution. But I want to pause for a moment and tell you that it isn't often that we get to be in the presence of heroes -- but today we have two and probably more in our midst. Rabbi Schneier has spent a lifetime battling injustice and working for social progress and Hugh Scott has spent a lifetime of accomplishment working to improve this nation's schools, educating our teachers, and increasing the opportunities available for all. So please join me in another round of applause as I ask these two to stand.

I also want to thank VP Fishman and everyone who helped to make today possible -- from the ushers, to the security officers, to everyone in Student Services and Institutional Advancement, and to those who helped us refurbish this magnificent hall to its past glory, and to all who have helped you reach this important milestone. To each and everyone of them, a sincere thank you and please join me in a round of applause for their efforts.

You may wonder why your president is speaking to you today and not someone rich and famous with great star quality or someone running for public office? Let me give you some possible answers and see which you choose:

- a. College could not afford the rich and famous?
- b. Faculty could not agree which individual running for office should be asked?



- c. All the rich and famous were in warmer climates and refused to come back to the city!
- d. All of those running for political office were either out of the state raising money or campaigning in New Hampshire?

Now which is it? A? B? C? D? Final answer? Well you are wrong. I decided to speak today because there were some things I wanted to say to you, the first Hunter students to graduate in not only the year 2000, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and indeed the new millennium. Now if that does not make you extra special, I don't know what does. You are part of history and I congratulate you on that --- this will be a very special bond for each and everyone of you and just as last June's graduating class will have something special to tell their friends and children, so will you. I want to have you think about a few things this afternoon which I hope will challenge you. Take a moment and ponder

these comments. Both were made by unique and distinguished Americans.

Mark Twain once commented --- “Let us endeavor to live that when we come to die even the undertaker will be sorry!”

Or the more direct and down to earth spiritual advice offered by Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.-- “If a man has done nothing for a cause worth dying for, then he is not fit to live.”

I think both offer sound advice --- one to help you guide your daily activities with others and the other to make sure you have your moral compass pointed in the right direction. As Hunter graduates it is important that you realize that you are not only to be part of society you are expected to help change that society into a more responsible and more equitable place for more people. Now that is a cause certainly

worth living for. You'll have many opportunities to accomplish each goal - in your daily activities and interactions with others and over your lifetime as you are confronted with basic moral issues.

So now that I have hopefully caused you to think about the essential nature of your very being, let me add another dimension for your consideration: the importance of your education and the obligation you have to those who follow in your footsteps.

President John F. Kennedy once commented: "Let us think of education as the means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is...a dream which fulfilled, can be translated into benefit for everyone and greater strength for our nation." Thus we now have the endorsement of pursuing our individual dreams and in so doing also helping our society.



So as you pursue your dreams and fulfill your aspirations, be sure that society also benefits.

Now I'd like to quote George Bush, that is President Bush and not George W, who once commented "If we are to improve our standard of living, protect and defend our democratic freedom and strengthen our moral character as a nation, nothing is more important than education." Anyone want to disagree with that assertion? Certainly few on this stage would. Your education did not stop when you took your last exam, turned in your last paper, or completed your last course. One of the benefits of a Hunter education is the development of your critical reasoning - use that facility throughout your life, it will lead you to a world of countless riches and a world where the uncertain becomes known.

What both Presidents Kennedy and Bush are

saying is that education is not an end in itself, but rather a means to an end which transcends the individual and benefits the larger society.

Education implies social responsibility at all levels — in interpersonal relations, in group relationships, in policy making and in how you allocate your scarce resources. Do you share? Do you assist others? Do you think of the social implications of your decisions? I hope you do and more importantly I hope you will in the future because the fate of this city and planet are in your hands and I am confident they are hands which will nurture and heal and be welcoming hands rather than hands raised in anger or clenched fists due to frustration!

Now let me read a quote from Janet Harris ---  
“No student ever pays the full costs of their education. We’ve all been helped by our college to achieve success...and we owe it to



ourselves to put something back in the pot.” Now to my knowledge Ms. Harris was not a college president, but she echoes our feelings. You have an enormous obligation to the state and city for the financial support provided so that you could have the opportunities you have had at Hunter. If Hunter is to remain strong and to offer the opportunities you have had to the next generation of students, it is imperative, I repeat imperative, that you put something back in the pot. We know that public education across this country is not receiving the support it has in the past. Whether it be your political support for public higher education, your time supporting your alma mater or a share of your monetary growth, all matter to your institution and will make a difference in the life and future of the college. You can assist Hunter by meeting with fellow alumni, supporting political candidates whose voting records indicate support for public higher education, and as your

economic means permit, financial support to the College. Generations before you have done this and we are dependent on you for the generations which will follow you.

Now let me summarize, I have asked you to live a life of valor and commitment, I have asked you to realize the importance of education and how it truly does shape our society and I have asked you for your support of Hunter College. Since you are about to be Hunter graduates I am confident you will meet these challenges! But meeting them is not enough.

In closing, I want to ask you for something else. Your commitment to live a fulfilled life, a life of challenges undertaken, and a life where you attempt to do what is right instead of what is expedient. Perhaps Time Magazine's Man of the Century, Albert Einstein said it best when he commented "The ideals which have lighted my

way, and time after time given me new courage to face life cheerfully, have been kindness, beauty, and truth.”

To that I would only add my heartfelt congratulations to each of you and to those who have given you such support to help you accomplish your goal of obtaining your degree from Hunter College and The City University of New York. I join everyone in the Hunter community in wishing you only the best both today and in the future. We are very proud of you.