

## Commencement 2011 Student Speaker

### Natalae N. Anderson, Class of 2011

I would first like to recognize our much loved Dean of the law school, Dean Farmer, as well as all of the distinguished deans and faculty members on the stage today. I would also like to recognize Professor Elizabeth Warren. Thank you so much, Professor Warren, for coming to speak to our graduating class. And I'm extremely honored to be sharing the stage today with Professor Carlos Ball, our faculty speaker who is one of those rare people who combines an immense amount of brilliance with an immense heart.

I'm so happy to see this space filled not only with my class but with everyone's family and friends. You all look as pleased and relieved as we are that the end of this journey has come. On behalf of the class, I want to say thank you for your support throughout law school.



"Remember that although receiving your law degree is a great accomplishment, it is how you choose to use it that will be your legacy."

I also have a few apologies that I want to extend on behalf of all of us. Sorry for all those times that we were a little on edge and got a little snappy with you. You know those times when we were like "I can't talk, my LRW brief is due tomorrow." Or the "No, I can't come to that party. If you were my friend you'd understand." Or my personal favorite "I know you're in graduate school, but law school is different." Sorry for all of the special occasions that we missed, the phone calls and e-mails that we neglected to return. We were just really stressed and sleep deprived and could not think straight.

But we know that it is you, our family and friends, who made us what we are to today and gave us the tools we needed to achieve this accomplishment. I need look no further than my own family and friends to know this is true.

My mother, Dorothy Anderson, is a retired United States Army Lieutenant Colonel, who grew up with very little in the then still-segregated state of Georgia. She is a model of integrity and strength and a living example of the power of faith. My sister, Tiffany Anderson, a stellar elementary school teacher who always sacrifices for those around her. My nephew and niece, Myrian and Vivian, and my goddaughter Brianna who keep me laughing and energized by their youth. My boyfriend Orlando Velez, who believes in my wildest dreams as much as I do. My mentor, Osato Chitou, who guided me through law school.

And last, my father, Frederick Anderson, who passed shortly before I started law school. A man who worked in a steel mill all his life but valued education so much that he earned a master's degree in labor relations while he worked full-time. A man who was a union rep and in retirement taught GED classes because he believed in the potential of all people.

Now, I don't know the stories of everyone in your family. But I know that they were instrumental in shaping you. So, thank you to the mothers, fathers, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, boyfriends, girlfriends, husbands and wives in the audience. And to all of those family members and friends who could not be here today, thank you. I also want to recognize Dean Garbaccio, an unsung hero. Thanks for putting up with us Dean G. And the evening students who add so much to our law school community while often juggling full-time jobs and taking care of families.

So, here we are, Rutgers 2011 graduating class. The centennial class. You have accomplished so many great things.

Just to name a few: this is the class that under the leadership of Heidi Arnesen, Zaara Bajwa, Rob Menendez and Brian Biglin won the Class Fund Competition, raising over \$3,600 for the school in one week – the highest participation rate and donation amount for the second straight year – achieved by our class. This is the class under the guidance of Nicole Barna that started the Student Publishing Initiative so that our students could be published in law journals throughout the country. We have students like Cicero Brabham, student speaker at this year's Minority Student Program Banquet, who is a wonderful father of four and still manages a full-time schedule while being a published member of Law Review. Under the leadership of the SBA and Robert Colby, this class created our own school store and merchandise for that store to support student programming. Not to mention that our class under the leadership of Betsy Grobovsky created the first flash mob dance ever.

And the accomplishments of this class extend beyond the walls of Rutgers University. Andy Kunka worked with the Newark local government to address the intolerance and hate crimes committed against LGBTQ people. Adam Axel and Enes Hajdarpasic held a Haiti Hurricane Relief Drive last year, which was adopted as an annual fundraiser by the Human Rights Forum. And if all of this wasn't enough, we also have students who continued to serve in the military during law school: Ted Westfall, Omar Minott and Chris Dunn. If I had another hour of your time, I STILL could not do the class justice.

But the thing that I will remember most about this class is the relationships that I built. I'm sure we've heard the horror stories of how competitive law school can be, with some students sabotaging their peers. Not the Rutgers 2011 class. Instead, we supported each other – attending our peers' events and cheering them on whenever they accomplished something.

So, CENTENNIAL CLASS, we have our law degrees..... Now what? Some of us are going into private practice, some of us into the public sector. Others have decided that they want to use their law degree to do policy work, while still others will take even more unique pathways, spurred on in their creativity by a job market that is demanding innovation. We will all have different jobs and some of us may even decide not to practice law. So, I don't want to dwell on what everyone's lives will look like as lawyers or to question you about what kind of lawyer you aspire to be. Instead, I want to ask you a different question: What kind of human being will you be?

I recently attended a Peace Summit that was held here at NJPAC. It was hosted by Mayor Corey Booker and in attendance were some of the most inspiring people that I have ever heard speak. The Dalai Lama was here along with other Nobel Peace Laureates. And there were other people in attendance who had endured severe human rights abuses. But instead of being broken and retreating from the world, they found courage to fight to

protect others from the same abuses. For example, Somaly Mam of Cambodia who was sex trafficked as a young girl and now has dedicated her life to saving girls from brothels in Cambodia; she has saved girls as young as five-years-old who have been sold into sexual slavery.

As I listened to the lives of these people, I asked myself, where did they find the courage to face the things that they faced in life and still come out fighters. I ask you again, what kind of human being will you be?

There were many things said over the course of the peace summit that struck me but there were some words shared by a gentleman named Pedro Noguera that reminded me that acquiring an education is only one step in becoming a better person. Mr. Noguera read a letter from a Holocaust survivor named Dr. Haim Ginott. The letter read "I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no person should witness: gas chambers built by learned engineers. Children poisoned by educated physicians. Infants killed by trained nurses. Women and babies shot by high school and college graduates. So, I am suspicious of education."

The letter went on to request that schools teach children how to become more human. See, education without empathy and an understanding that we are all connected will mean very little in the lives of the people that will be affected by our work and our decisions. So I ask you again – What kind of human being will you be?

I have used many international human rights abuses as examples – because that's my passion and I too during my short time in Cambodia saw how people in power and leaders of a country can commit unspeakable atrocities. But there are abundant domestic problems facing us. There is the job market and the economy which first came crashing down the semester that most of us started law school in 2008. There is the war on terror. The growing gap between the rich and the poor. The death of the middle class. I could unfortunately name many other problems that read like headlines of newspapers, devoid of the human stories behind them. But people are losing their jobs and their homes – some are struggling for survival. Many of us will be instrumental, directly or indirectly, in addressing these issues, in writing policy, in administering the law. We will be leaders and our decisions will matter immensely and they will have an impact on human lives. So, I ask you for the last time, what kind of human being will you be?

It is not my place to answer this question for you. You must wrestle with this question. And hopefully, you will wrestle with it often because life will continuously challenge your will and your moral compass. But whenever you do wrestle with it, remember that although receiving your law degree is a great accomplishment, it is how you choose to use it that will be your legacy.

I hope that you all live up to your greatest potential as lawyers, policy makers and entrepreneurs. But most importantly, as human beings. It's been an honor taking this journey with you, Class 2011. I will carry you and the lessons that you have taught me in my heart always. Thank you.

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