

Speaker 1 ([00:05](#)):

Welcome to the graduates of the class of 2022. Welcome also to all of the families and friends of the graduates who are here to see you graduate today. It is such a pleasure and a joy to see you all. Please join me in thanking all of the university and law school staff who planned and implemented our outdoor graduation, and then turned on a dime this morning to implement this contingency plan. It takes enormous work and we are so grateful to them.

Speaker 1 ([00:54](#)):

This was not our original plan. And I know many of you wish we were outside as do I, but there are some benefits like air conditioning. Uh, and I get to talk longer, which may or may not be a benefit. Um, all of that said, it seems only fitting that we should graduate you in an arena where star athletes who have honed their skill, stamina and grit for months at a time, come to be recognized and cheered on. And where rock stars come to play, where the many come to celebrate the accomplishments of the few, where character is tested and where broadcast allows for those not present to be celebrated and celebrate as well. All of that is true today in this arena. As other days, we celebrate the skill, stamina, grit, and character. You have shown over the past three years, and especially the past two, you are all star athletes and rock stars who deserve, and no doubt are receiving the adoration of the fans in this arena, as well as those watching on the live stream.

Speaker 1 ([02:03](#)):

Law school is never easy. In fact, it's rigor and intensity is the stuff of legend, which makes you all who have now run that legendary gauntlet, legendary in and of yourselves. You have gained the quote, extensive learning and air addition that are the hallmarks of the learned profession of the law. You immersed yourselves in this new field were vulnerable without your ideas, allowing them to be tested for the truth. You read thousands of pages mastered a new vocabulary answered in numerable cold calls, wrote papers and deciphered exams. You spent hundreds of hours in clinics, externships moot courts, pro bono projects, mock trials, and transactional competitions. And you used your hard earned skills to advise nonprofits and entrepreneurs prepare patent applications and parole petitions and brief and argue cases. On top of all that these past few years, you had to learn a whole new way of learning on zoom.

Speaker 1 ([03:04](#)):

And in hybrid classes, you had to abide by frustrating and annoying protocols and rules. You had to take care of your own health, physical, and mental, and that of your loved ones. And you experienced losses big and small beyond the challenges of law school itself. You have been tested as our society and the law have been tested over and over again by a pandemic and its many reverberations by a national reckoning on race, racism and inequality by contentious politics and contentious elections and by war and violence near and far throughout it all you have maintained your characteristic, collegiality and generosity. You came to this law school from so many different backgrounds, with a wide variety of views, experiences, hopes, and dreams. And I have marveled at the joy, humanity, respect, dialogue, and collaboration. You have extended to one another across your differences. It has not always been easy but far more often than not.

Speaker 1 ([04:09](#)):

And this is graduation. So we're gonna overlook the knot. You achieved the aspirations of a public spirited profession, dedicated to the productive exchange of ideas. You were committed to engage

citizenship and reason debate to the search for truth in a community of respect and empathy to listening so that others. So to speaking so that others can listen and listening, even when it is hard to hear at your best, you are models, not only for this law school or any law school, but for our profession, our nation and our world. Isn't it good that we're inside now? Cuz the rain is clearly come. So what does all that represent if not skill stamina, character and grit. And what does that make you if not stars to be adored in an arena. Of course, when I call you rock stars and star athletes, I mean that metaphorically now I wanna turn to what today makes you literally lawyers, which means you are not only stars, but also superheroes.

Speaker 1 ([05:10](#)):

Okay. I'm back to the metaphors powerful beings with knowledge skill and yes, literal power. That is truly extraordinary. The law is not only a job or a career. It is not only a learned profession, but a noble one professed to the ideals of justice and the rule of law that might sound hokey. And it might be easier to believe sometimes than others, but it's true. Joining this profession means entering into a public trust. That must be discharged with integrity, judgment and humanity. You have already embraced and begun to discharge that trust to serve the public and the profession here in Charlottesville, as well as across the Commonwealth, the nation and the world. As far away as South Africa, you collectively logged over 15,575 hours in pro bono service. 99 of you met our pro bono challenge, supporting prisoners, children, disabled veterans. You helped Afghan refugees seek humanitarian parole in the United States and local residents avoid eviction during the COVID pandemic, holding this trust means exercising, tremendous power.

Speaker 1 ([06:19](#)):

The law puts people in prison and gets them out. Again. It allows for treaties and, and wars. It merges companies or allows them to go bankrupt. I hope that over the past three years you have learned this power of the law, that it is not a constant external foreign thing that exists in some vacuum out there. It is made not found and it is made by lawyers, which means it is now made by you. Your legal education is the key to the kingdom in a society committed to the rule of law. And it is the key to your superpowers. So bringing together the rather large number of metaphors I have used in these rather brief remarks with stamina, grit, character, and skill, and because you are rock stars, each of you has cast your own set of keys, transformative keys to this kingdom. So I urge you be ambitious, thoughtful, generous, and humane with the keys. You now hold use them for justice, for freedom, for democracy, for the rule of Y law, use them to shape the law and in a truly grand fashion shape our government, our economy, our society, and our world. In other words, graduating in this arena might have begun as an unwelcome contingency plan, but it turns out to be a fitting tribute to you all holders of the keys to this kingdom stars and superheroes. Every one of you thank you for being here.

Speaker 1 ([07:53](#)):

I'm now pleased to introduce Nico orphan eighties. The president of the student bar association, Nico will announce the class gift and will introduce today's speaker. Nico grew up in Greensboro, North Carolina, and he graduated Summa K Ladi from the graduated sum from the university of South Carolina. In addition to his role as president of the student bar association, Nico in, during his time at law school participated in RNA investments, the Virginia sports and entertainment law journal and the law and business society. He will be joining the emerging companies and venture capital group of Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw and Pitman. This fall in New York city. It has been such a pleasure to work with Nico in his role as SBA president. And it is a pleasure now to introduce him, Nico,

Speaker 2 ([08:47](#)):

Good afternoon. And thank you, Dean Guy B for that introduction. How cool is it that after what we've been through the last several years that we are all here today, celebrating properly for the first time, since the class of 2019, who better than our class to help reignite this tradition. I want to thank all the people that are here to support us, our friends, our family, our professors, and our deans. This is a really special moment. And I know I speak for all of us graduates. When I say that we are extremely grateful for their support over the last three years at its core. Today is the day of celebration. For many of us. Graduation is the culmination of a decades long dream of becoming a lawyer for all of us today marks the beginning of a once in a lifetime opportunity. Make no mistake to graduate from Virginia law is to achieve something truly remarkable. This degree will open doors for us, not only for the rest of our careers, but for the rest of our lives. Just look at those who have come before us. Look at those who have paved the way

Speaker 2 ([10:09](#)):

For generations, Virginia law graduates have been leaders of the legal industry, pioneers in business and in government advocates for change. They sit on federal benches, serve in Congress and represent clients from all walks of life in every type of matter imaginable. Today it today we have the distinct honor of joining this community of alumni. The time for us to create our own legacy to leave our own mark is officially now. And we should be incredibly proud of ourselves for having made it to this point

Speaker 2 ([10:44](#)):

In the midst of our celebration. However, let us not forget to reflect because it is impossible to fully appreciate the journey of the past three years without acknowledging that it wasn't always a smooth ride in March of 2020 when we were less than two months away from completing our first year of law school, which by many accounts is already the most challenging and consequential year of the three. The entire world was upended. The school was shut down. We were forced to learn complex legal doctrine via audio recordings. We conducted our oral arguments, a Rite of passage for UVA, one LS via zoom, a platform that at that time we'd never even heard of. And while our professors did an incredible job of transitioning us to these new virtual mediums, it was all still difficult to process as the legal industry scrambled to adapt to this new reality. Our future suddenly felt uncertain. Private sector, job interviews were postponed. And yet in the face of this adversity, our class didn't miss a beat. We prioritized others over ourselves. We supported local business owners served as mentors for first generation college students and lent helping hands to those in need of a friend. Somehow during the darkest days of our law school careers, our humanity managed to shine through

Speaker 2 ([12:11](#)):

As we move on <affirmative> as we move on to the next chapter, there will be days when the going gets tough. We will all be faced with problems that seem unsolvable. There will be times in practice when we'll feel as though we're not capable. Not good enough. Let me be clear if that were the case, we wouldn't be here today. Our experiences over the last three years, the lessons we've learned by attending law school during one of the most uniquely challenging times in history have prepared us for whatever lies ahead to paraphrase the esteem. Sean, Michael Anderson, the higher we go, the more strenuous decline, but at the peak, the stronger our muscles and the sharper our minds, Every last one of us is destined for great things. As commendable, a feat as graduation is it marks, but one of many inevitable achievements that await us stay hungry, always remain humble, maybe all utilize our platforms and our future positions of power to make an impact to better our communities. An

overwhelming majority of our class is already committed to giving back to the law school by contributing to scholarship funds, public interest grants in organizations like the innocence project, BSA Lambda, the student bar association, just to name a few, let us continue to pay it forward. Both in our practices and in our daily lives. After we leave north grounds, let's continue to embody the qualities that best represent what it means to be a part of this Virginia law community.

Speaker 2 ([13:53](#)):

Be kind, be compassionate, uplift others, do the little things right each and every day. We all have the potential through the law to leave the world a little bit better off than how we found it. And the one thing we cannot do under any circumstances is take this opportunity for granted. I'm so thankful to have been able to share this journey with you. And it's been an honor to serve as your SBA president

Speaker 2 ([14:34](#)):

And now without further ado, it is my distinct honor and pleasure to introduce our commencement speaker today. Kim Keenan, Ms. Keenan graduated from Virginia law in 1987 and she's since been a trailblazer in every sense of the word in the legal industry. She began her career by clerking for judge Penn in the us district court for the district of Columbia. She subsequently worked many years as a successful litigator in private practice in 2007, the same year she founded her own law firm. Ms. Keenan was named woman lawyer of the year by the women's bar association of the district of Columbia. Ms. Keenan was the youngest person and only the second woman to serve as general counsel and secretary of the NAACP, a role she held from 2010 to 2014. She is the former president of both the DC bar and the national bar association. Ms. Keenan was also the first black female president of the international women's forum for the district of Columbia. Today. She serves as a mediator, arbitrator and neutral evaluator for a private alternative dispute resolution provider in Washington, DC. Ms. Keenan also teaches trial advocacy as a senior adjunct professor at the George Washington university school of law. It goes with that saying that we are incredibly fortunate to have you here with us today, ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming home. Ms. Kim Keenan class of 1987.

Speaker 3 ([16:11](#)):

I would've made the drive to Charlottesville just to hear that introduction. <laugh> thank you, Nico it's as if he wrote his speech looking forward and I wrote my speech looking backward. So greetings Dean, faculty, family, and friends tonight, we have the privilege of celebrating the class of 2022 on the occasion of their graduation from the university of Virginia school of law. As I stand here and the memories flood back, I am grateful for the invitation to share your special day from the first year immersion in the law to the second year of learning, to work harder and smarter. And finally to the third year recognition that this is really happening to you. And yes, I also recall that while many people will not remember the graduation speaker, everyone, including your cousins will remember if the commencement speaker pontificates too long, you can be sure that the trial lawyer in me will not let this happen tonight. I stand before you today as a first generation lawyer who was born in Buffalo, New York. I say those words, yes, please plant for Buffalo, Buffalo strong.

Speaker 3 ([17:49](#)):

I say those words with all the weight and heartache that it carries in this time, had it not been for a perfect storm of grace, including the prayers of my grandparents, my United auto worker father, and my social worker mother, I might still be in Buffalo and even possibly somewhere near the tops friendly market on Jefferson avenue, but fate intervened. And I am here with you today. Our time will be brief

and I want to make sure we make the most of every second we have together. We live in a time of unimaginable opportunity and unimaginable tragedy. It might seem that the problems of our time are too entrenched in another era, too complicated or too impossible to resolve. But I submit to you that there are many days when law school and even our beloved law school may have seemed entrenched in another era, too complicated and too impossible to envision this day of triumph.

Speaker 3 ([19:01](#)):

Yet, here we are basking in the accomplishment of a lifetime. Today, you have demonstrated that you know how to lean into your resilience, getting your law degree during a global pandemic with all of that extra life and death pressure on your ability to learn, to focus and engage with the faculty. And your classmates is more than remarkable. This building block in your toolkit creates a future so bright. We will need sunglasses to prepare for your next chapter. Take all of this well earned resilience and use it to leave your fingerprints all over your community, your city, our nation, and yes, the world. Take a minute to just salute yourself for getting here intact and in par.

Speaker 3 ([20:02](#)):

So as I reflected on my career in preparation for tonight, I smiled as I remembered my year off between college and law school at the time, my parents who were so happy, I had a job were stunned. When I quit my fortune five company to go to the university of Virginia school of law. I didn't even know any lawyers when I arrived in Charlottesville. I wasn't sure what kind of law I would practice. I just knew I was supposed to be here. And to really be honest, I had no idea what this experience would hold. There was some good, some bad and yes, some truly ugly. I think I wore the same outfit for every exam and it wasn't for luck. It was just a one piece black flight suit that didn't wrinkle. Okay. It was a onesie only, you know, what you had to overcome to get to today.

Speaker 3 ([21:00](#)):

And it's that sacrifice that will stay sustain you. When the going gets tough. I started out on an all too familiar path. I clerked in the federal court in DC, and then I went to work for the largest law firm in the country. The book about that firm is called shark tank. I know that title is a little off putting, but with the passage of time, I realized that I met some brilliant lawyers. I learned how to avoid the pitfalls of practice. And I came to understand that success and disappointment are partners in my progress. As a young associate, I remember working late and encountering a senior associate who had never spoken to me before. But this one evening on a Friday I was working late. He turned to me and asked me to make some photocopies because his secretary had left early for a party.

Speaker 3 ([21:57](#)):

Of course I was inwardly livid. This is not what I spent three years at the university to do. I confess for the moment I held my tongue. I went off to make some really bad copies <laugh> it was not my finest moment. Either. I returned to his office. I closed the door. I plopped the sheet of papers on his desk. And I said, I'm a team player willing to help with any aspect of the case. But my highest and best use is not making copies. He was a bit stunned, but we are lawyers. So you could only tell by the twinkle in his eye, it was as if he finally saw me, I presented him with my authentic self and he got it. He became my champion, a mentor. He taught me to write some very persuasive arguments. I think I learned one of the most important lessons of my career. First, you have to be ready, willing, and able to share your authentic self. Second, your mentor may not look anything like you. So stop focusing on what people

look like and lean into people who connect with you and recognize your talent. I left the firm. Thank you.

Speaker 3 ([23:26](#)):

I left the firm for a boutique law firm that focused on litigation of catastrophic torts. This was an important growth period for me because not only did I have the opportunity to represent people from all walks of life, I managed to squeeze in the presidency of two bar associations, teach trial advocacy, serve on the board of a national civil rights organization and appear on the first season of one of the first west coast. Reality legal television shows see how versatile your university of Virginia law degree can be. It still brings a smile to my face a few years after starting my own firm, I was offered the opportunity to interview and then serve as the ninth secretary and general counsel of the NAACP, the national association for the advancement of color people,

Speaker 3 ([24:23](#)):

Keeping in mind that I live by our honor code. I have to honestly say, I kept thinking me Thurgood Marshall's job. It really took me by surprise. But after two months of every type of interview imaginable, suddenly, all I could think about was how I could leave my fingerprints on the strategy of voting rights and housing cases. All of that experience, volunteering for civil rights organizations and nonprofits prepared me to recruit pro bono lawyers and weigh in on everything from first amendment law to the finer points of local and national marches. And my love of negotiation finally found the perfect place. I know it will sound see there. I brought joy to someone already <laugh> and my love for negotiation found that perfect place. I know it sounds totally nerdy, but it is fun to negotiate a network deal and hire a production company. The NAACP has a union, a television show, a magazine, a foundation, and the largest intellectual property collection at the library of Congress to name a few of the job requirements, but most important, it has a one of a kind international membership consisting of the boldest, the most feared and the most revered activists in the world.

Speaker 3 ([25:42](#)):

Needless to say, you don't just give them advice. You have to prove to them that your advice is sound or people will not listen. My time at the NAACP was a once in a lifetime experience, I traveled the nation from sea to shining sea. And from top to bottom, it was a 25, 8 that's 25 hours a day. You'll know this eight days a week, opportunity to exercise, sound legal judgment, and move the ball forward. The general council doesn't need to know everything, but they have to know everything in general. This leads me to my next piece of advice. Own your career, your brand, and use your talent to create the outcome that you believe in. While I was at the NAACP, I was invited by the us department of state to go to Jamaica, to lecture, to citizens from all over the island on the importance of the right to vote.

Speaker 3 ([26:41](#)):

Imagine your country's calling. I've invited you to Jamaica to discuss your favorite aspect of American democracy. One person, one vote. This is truly living the dream. I know it sounds like a boondoggle. And when I explained it to the CEO, it sounded like a boondoggle, but I have to tell you when I got there, I was scheduled like a Swiss watch. I may have driven by a beach, but I really spent 10 hour days in Jamaica discussing why civic participation matters and why every eligible citizen must have the right and the unfettered ability to vote in a true democracy. I even shared with them, my experience with reporters, with reporters around our nation, who always queried me everywhere. I went, why are you

so passionate about this? You know, what about voter fraud? First, countless people known and unknown have sacrificed in blood, sweat, and tears so that I can walk without fear to a poll and vote.

Speaker 3 ([27:53](#)):

Not one reporter then or now has ever proven or offered proof of statistically cognizable voter fraud. It wasn't an easy sell. Most of the people in Jamaica don't vote and they're all the same color. So it's not an issue of color, but they don't vote because of the political obstacles and the intimidation. Should they choose to vote? It definitely hit close to home. I always figured that if the IRS can find me with a simple nine digit number, then we should be able to solve this problem. Today is the beginning of a lifelong career with more twists and turns than a Shonda rhymes drama. Whether you choose to work at a firm or government service, or whether you are a public defender or prosecutor, whatever you choose to do, find your place and own it. What is the secret sauce to a decades long career in law that still bubbles with joy take ownership over your career, do not abdicate your career to a partner, HR or an outdated notion of the impact and the power of being a lawyer.

Speaker 3 ([29:02](#)):

I am excited to get up in the morning because I choose how I get to use this amazing toolkit part and parcel of my decades. Long love of the law is a difference is the ability to make a difference whether it's election protection. So every community can vote freely developing policy to bridge the digital divide, resolving a sports dispute, or creating a landlord tenant self-help center. Yes, you can still be an IP lawyer and fight for climate change. When I hear that people are disillusioned or burned out, I know it's because they haven't balanced their professional life to include family and serving community. Imagine your appointed trustee of a university, and you work to green light, a community college, a new student center, and of course, a new building for the law center in your free time. My legal training has helped me to see even when others cannot.

Speaker 3 ([30:02](#)):

I'm not just talking about how you make your living, but how you live your life. I love my clients who are type a and my clients who can't advocate for themselves. Every time I've worked on a project in my community, it's left me better than I found it. We may have done something for the city, but I have come away profoundly impacted. By the difference we make, maybe the more you use these tools, the more you fall in love with what they can do. It doesn't matter whether you work for a corporation firm or the government. You can still use this skillset to work, to make a difference. You were built for this specifically, right? You remember that first year of law school, when you figured out that civil procedure was a foreign language professor Jeffries, I still have Pena versus NAF flashbacks.

Speaker 3 ([30:58](#)):

We have the tools. We know how to find answers. We have to have the will to get these issues, right? Our very democracy depends on us. I've noticed that lawyers are always at the heart of strategy and change. Our modern problems have a lot in common with our historical problems. We cannot keep doing what we've been doing, because we're gonna keep getting more of what we got. Denial, silence, division, and more hate will not fix what happened in Buffalo. Whether you view the mass shooting in Buffalo as another act of domestic terrorism in a long line of public attacks at schools, houses of worships worship or big box stores, or whether you see it as unlawful gun violence, mental illness, or online radicalization, there is a lot of work to be done. Whether it's creating a country where every

citizen can cast their vote securely without fear, whether everyone has access and the tools to adopt broadband or people can move about freely without gun violence.

Speaker 3 ([32:07](#)):

There are countless opportunities. As many as there are the personalities and talents in this room to make a difference, a difference that is a direct byproduct of the education you celebrate today. I am ever hopeful that you will dwarf the accomplishments of those who came before you. So I leave you with this. There is no testimony without a test. There is no triumph without a trial, and there have never been diamonds without fire. You have passed the test and prevailed in your trials. So you can be fearless knowing that you were built for this congratulations.