

**Remarks of Romane Paul '18, J.D. Class Speaker
Columbia Law Graduation
Monday, May 14, 2018**

What a tremendous honor it is to stand before you.

As I look out at all of you, I am reminded of how nervous, anxious, and excited we were to start on this new journey just a few years ago. We found ourselves complaining together, reading together, exchanging outlines, and yes, we'd sometimes have a drink or two. It was through these shared experiences during 1L that we recognized the potential for lifelong friendships.

Before we knew it, we were back as 2Ls, many of us ready to engage the world outside JG. It was then that I watched so many of you in awe as you fought for the things you believed in. I literally remember watching so many of you drop what you were doing to race over to JFK, LaGuardia, and Newark airports to help Muslim families who were being denied entry into this country. I watched as you spearheaded efforts to help our brothers and sisters in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria. I watched you write reports to the U.N. on human rights abuses, work on issues of mass incarceration, protect both men and women from domestic violence, and the list goes on. None of this was done for recognition, but rather because you knew it was the right thing to do.

Which brings me to this moment.

Today, I think about how the world is very different from what we thought it would be when we first started law school. We see it in the strength of so many women who are telling their truths through the 'me too' movement, with communities of color who are mobilizing to demand better policies especially related to how they are policed, and with the debate over gun laws being driven in part by students. Something is happening in our world today, and I can't quite put my finger on what it is. We can't ignore what's happening because it's starting to shape our culture.

To the Class of 2018, let's embrace this unusual moment. Please do everything you can to be part of what is right. I'm not really in a position to give advice- but if there is one thing that I hope you remember- it is to never feel that you have to leave your conscience at the door because you decided to go into a certain kind of work – you can still do good. No matter where we find ourselves in life, we have been blessed with the ability to think and the gift of imagining the world as it should be.

To conclude, I love you all so much. You have made these past few years some of the best of my life, whether through events you planned, through traveling with you, and through your encouragement on hard days- you have made this journey so worth it. I want to leave you with the words of a school principal, written almost 120 years ago, that I believe speaks to this moment, and I hope will inspire you to keep going, as it has for so many who have set the path for me:

Lift ev'ry voice and sing, Till earth and heaven ring. Ring with the harmonies of
Liberty; Let our rejoicing rise, High as the list'ning skies, Let it resound loud as the
rolling sea. Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us, Sing a song full
of the hope that the present has brought us; Facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
Let us march on till victory is won.

Congratulations to the Class of 2018, and let's get to work!