

**Remarks of Manel Chibane '20 LL.M.  
LL.M. Class Speaker  
Columbia Law School Graduation  
Wednesday, May 20, 2020**

Faculty, parents, LL.M.s, friends.

Class of 2020. A year we will remember.

For those of you who have been waiting to see if I could actually speak in public, following my unusual election campaign, I'm afraid you'll have to wait a little longer, since this speech is being sent out to you from my living room. Being back home, I can only be grateful to my family. Our loved ones helped us get to this day, and whether we are with them or not, now is the time to thank them.

When I look back on this year, I see people who share somewhat unusual traits for the widely held image of a lawyer—yet essential to overcome our current challenges—curiosity and empathy.

You all have certainly taught me how to better approach both as I met classmates from all backgrounds who are genuinely curious and refuse to make sense out of something that does not make sense. A class that seeks academic excellence, doing thorough research with fantastic professors, with the rigor and attention to detail that leads to the indescribable excitement known as the “Bluebook Exploration.” Beyond the confines of our Law School, some of you studied computer science or business and biology. And when the opportunity was nonexistent, we created it, enriching the university with new organizations that now constitute more chances for students to thrive. Thanks to our energy, judges at the International Court of Justice and activists and general counsels of the biggest companies came to our campus to speak with us. And sometimes, maybe, a J.D. also spoke to us. Us: loving parents, New York marathon runners, stage performers, and WhatsApp spammers.

Now curiosity lays the ground for empathy. Not kindness, nor pity, but the ability to connect to others' experience engendered by curiosity. Off-campus, empathy drove us to team up and use technology to design platforms to further access to justice or to protest around New York City for Kashmiris' rights and against religious discrimination. And it's empathy that allowed us to build our community on campus. I couldn't have made it without my daily dose of uplifting words from Raj; and without the help of Abed, who explained to me that the Low library was not the Law library (and that it's in the latter that I should be). This year, we formed true friendships. We shared on a daily basis free meals and overpriced coffee and celebrated life-changing events with those who got married or those who just got the urge to dance! We turned up, to support those who were and are going through grief.

None of this is virtual.

We might have been carried away by the feeling that everything is possible at Columbia, a place where every door opens. Perhaps everything is even more possible now, because nothing is certain. When will we find a cure? When will we meet again? How many Oreos have I had today? Believe me, I can answer none of those questions with certainty.

What is sure is our Columbia degree is a key that opens doors to political and influential spaces. Spaces that matter most when disinformation is rampant and inequality systemic. As trite as it may sound, our world is currently such that the same words uttered by different mouths are not heard equally. Ours are heard, and yes, we earned it, but this is called privilege. Let's use it well and own these spaces, to restore trust in knowledge while highlighting our narrative.

As you know, my name is Manel which in Arabic translates into "attaining one's goal." Last year, I wrote in my personal statement to Columbia University that I was seeking a platform to amplify my voice. Class of 2020, little did I know that this platform would be you.

Our graduation is called commencement for a reason. This is just the beginning, and let us celebrate together soon.

Congratulations, LL.M. team, we made it. Now the world has our attention.