

J.D. Speaker: Andres Barajas '17

Good morning, everyone! I'm Andrés and I wrote a speech. This is it! It is a thank you speech.

J.D.s, we go way back. In 2014, we started strong as 1Ls. Well, actually as 1Ls, we weren't really strong at all. We worried and stressed about everything. Remember how we were so afraid of bombing a cold call? And then as 3Ls we realized: you can't bomb a cold call if you don't show up to class. So we've come a long way and I've been asking myself: How did we get here? The answer I came up with is: with help.

So first off, thank you to Columbia Law School's amazing facilities workers, librarians, staff, faculty, and administrators. My classmates and I are graduating today because of your help.

I also want to thank two other groups of people for helping us get here.

First, our families. And by family, I also mean our chosen family of friends, mentors, significant others,



and all the people who helped us along the way. Families, thank you for helping us see that education is incredibly important. Personally, growing up in poverty in rural Olivehurst, California, going to college was a reach and law school wasn't even on my radar. But I'm here now because my mom was always telling my brothers and me that education was the key to a better life. Mom, thank you. Families, whatever we accomplish in life, you all accomplish, as well.

I also want to thank our families for always believing in us. Even when we had crazy ideas like: "I think I want to go to law school." I remember first saying that five years ago to a friend—the first law student I had ever known. So when she said, "Andrés, you would love law school and you can totally do this," I was encouraged. If you were lucky enough to have someone root for you like that, be sure to thank them. Thank you, families.

The second group of people we should all be thankful for is each other, our classmates. Classmates, you have been the best part of law school. Thank you for every time you told me, "I don't understand that either." That helped so much. Thank you for the work you put into running student organizations and journals. Thank you for feeding and educating us at the same time with all of the amazing lunch talks and symposiums you put on. Essentially, what I'm saying is, thank you all for caring. We are clearly going through a very challenging time in our country and world right now. But when I look around today and I see these many good people who are about to become lawyers with real power, I feel optimistic.

Finally, Class of 2017, I want to remind you all that we are so privileged to have had the chance to attend Columbia Law School. We are. So I'll end with a quote that I think captures this feeling:

"Listen, for me, I can't worry about what everybody says about me... I'm LeBron James from Akron, Ohio, from the inner city. I'm not even supposed to be here. That's enough. Every night I walk into the locker room, I see a number six with 'James' on the back. I'm blessed."

Class of 2017, LeBron is right—we are blessed! I hope that you feel that way today and every day going forward. I'm a huge fan of you all. Thank you and congratulations!