

**Remarks of Oluwatumise Asebiomo '21**  
**J.D. Class Speaker**  
**Columbia Law School Graduation**  
**Thursday, April 29, 2021**

Class of 2021, it is truly an honor to address you today as we graduate from Columbia Law School. For many of us, this ceremony is far from the pomp and circumstance we've dreamt of, but an opportunity nonetheless to formally close out our law school chapter. And while this moment has felt far off in the distance for some time—thinking back to when we attended orientation and uncovered the joy of Legal Methods or when we first found our assigned seats in JG—we are now graduates.

Please allow me to be one of the first and one of the many people to tell you, congratulations!

And, oh my. All that we've gone through these past three years. Our waking, our sleeping, our attempts to sleep, our attempts to resist sleep, and all the life that has happened in between. We came to Columbia Law School to learn about legal systems domestic and foreign. We came to law school to examine and contend with the law: what it was, where it is now, and what it should be. And knowingly or not, we came to law school to learn about ourselves and our place in the world, our place as changemakers. And, of course, our place as brilliant legal minds.

What we walk away from this experience with today is not one bit what I thought legal education would be. Yet, it has been remarkable in so many ways. Some of the best advice I received beforehand was to be open to the experience, and from that openness, let the experience inform how to engage. Can confirm that's what I did—thank you very much for the advice, Dean Iwerebon. And now, I can see how my openness to Columbia Law has culminated in an unforgettable experience.

Here's one of the lessons I learned: It's been us, the students, who have created some of the most enriching and beautiful opportunities here by using our own time, attention, and labor—all the while paying tuition.

A few examples from this past year: I've proudly witnessed leaders of affinity groups, such as the Black Law Students Association and Empowering Women of Color, provide their membership and the Law School community with resources and programming to support living and learning in a world fraught by COVID-19. Professor Alexandra Carter enabled our Advanced

Mediation Clinic to create and lead a training on antiracism and its ethical imperative for the Eastern District of New York, the American Bar Association, and even the United Nations. And while many of us have been away from Morningside Heights, we have worked tirelessly to build community and support local businesses when we can. Black-owned is a vibe.

As we continue to recognize and celebrate our collective efforts, let's amplify individuals and organizations by giving them the credit they deserve.

If anything, this tells us that institutions follow people. We don't wait for institutions to show us the way. As we celebrate one another and all we have done to move Columbia Law School forward, when we do levy critiques or call out inequities and injustices, we know there are individuals behind the institutions. This academic year has pushed us to think critically about legal education, the infrastructure that is Columbia Law School, and the lawyers these systems produce. I am somewhat comforted by the fact that I am graduating among people who will not only change legal education but who will also change the world.

And as always seems to be the case, this change is urgent. We see this in our own America, especially following last summer's collective awakening—perhaps, a reawakening?—to the racial and justice issues that plague our country up to this very day. It's so urgent, in fact, that if we hadn't been following the news, which we avoid because of its trauma, we would have inadvertently missed honoring many lives that have since been lost to police brutality and white supremacy.

The revolution is not so far away. In fact, many have fought before us, including our beloved Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. The *Review* curated a moving set of tributes to honor her this year, and her teaching that most touched me was this: She was the one who needed to feel most comfortable with her decisions. As we make decisions now and as future lawyers, we must be comfortable that our decisions are resonant with justice. This is a reminder that for some us, myself included, the revolution is reality.

Celebrating ourselves is also a reality. To you, my fellow classmates, know that you did something absolutely marvelous. You completed your legal education during a global pandemic and during a nationwide uprising against racial injustice. Continue to show up for yourselves and those you love, honor your wellness and wellbeing, and celebrate today and always.

I leave you with the words that the 2020–2021 Administrative Board of the *Columbia Law Review* left with me in celebrating our triumphs in the face of adversity.

*Forsan et haec olim meminisse juvabit.*

“A joy it will be one day, perhaps, to remember even this.”

Congratulations, Columbia Law School Class of 2021!