

“To the Only Class That Will Ever Graduate as both Calhoun *and* Hopper!”  
REMARKS AT 2017 DIPLOMA CEREMONY

Professor Julia Adams

To Seniors, Families and Friends; Dean and former Master Jonathan Holloway and Associate Master Aisling Colon; Former Master William Sledge and Associate Master Betsy Sledge; Janet Berg and Everett Siegel; Calhoun Fellows and Members of the Calhoun Staff, thank you. We are almost there! In my final five minutes, I am going to talk principally about one among the many reasons that the Class of 2017 is a very special class.

Seniors, I know that simply from having heard the wonderful Mellon Forum presentations of your theses throughout this past year. Your academic excellence shines forth. The way that you are unusually closely networked with one another – more so than other classes are, everyone agrees... Your sense of humor and fun, your community.

You're also the only class that will ever graduate as both Calhoun and Hopper. Personally, I think this is grand. Calhoun at Commencement, for the last time. Calhoun at Class Day – no, wait, what about my fierce dolphin Class Day hat, fashioned by our college aides in homage to the new shield? Then there are your senior swag bags, with their Calhoun plates and Hopper mugs. Your certificates, some Calhoun, more Hopper, for many of you, both.

One year ago, at our 2016 diploma ceremony, I spoke about liminality, the state of being in-between, on the threshold. Seniors last year were graduating just after President Salovey and the Yale Corporation's initial decision to retain the name of Calhoun. That decision was swiftly followed by the students' own ceremony, right outside the college's gates on Cross-Campus Green, which symbolically withdrew the name. Then came the interesting moment of CFKAC (for parents and friends, that translates as 'College Formerly Known as Calhoun'). Remember the pins and t-shirts? The freshman Phoenix Rising shirt you saw in the dining hall? BLANK College?

What a contrast with *this* year's naming announcement, when so many of you rushed to the House, and then danced in our courtyard. And yet even before that moment, it had been a fascinating period, with respect to even just this one dimension of naming and renaming. Challenging, at times really frustrating, but interesting. You all were troopers. You hung in there - and more than that. You rose to the occasion; dealt with differences of opinion civilly and with empathy, and grew over time, individually and collectively. You have most definitely been campus leaders.

I know it wasn't easy. And I know that not everyone was deeply into the years-long debate here, the Teas, symposia, dining hall gatherings, the visit with the Corporation members, and so forth. Yet even informal conversations in suites and dining hall played their part as well, contributing to the spirit of community in the college, which made it possible to deal with the protracted period of liminality.

Throughout, your voices have definitely made a difference. You might laugh at this, but I think that you have changed history. To give you one example – the naming of our dining hall this past autumn after Roosevelt L. Thompson '84. I know this because many of you personally inspired me in my part of the project. Rosey Thompson was a remarkable student who had already accomplished much before he died in a car accident during the spring break of his senior year. I did know Rosey Thompson's admirable and poignant story, even before Hans and I came to Calhoun – but I did not know the extent to which his ardent life and goals of national public service, informed by knowledge, still moved *you*. And that, as well as his story, made an enormous difference for me.

That impact resonated with the Thompson family, too, when they visited New Haven. With former President Bill Clinton, whose letter about Rosey was read at the ceremony. With people in Little Rock, Arkansas, who contacted me and were impressed by your enthusiasm for Thompson's memorialization and knowledge of what he stood for. And with Dean Holloway and President Salovey, who signed on to the idea and were greatly moved by the ceremony in the college.

A seemingly local change – but the dining hall naming was part of a national (indeed international) conversation, and struggle, of continuing importance, in which you will participate as graduates and citizens. It was also a healing moment for our college. It helped us stand together and gather our forces during a particularly tough autumn. And it brought together people who care about the students in our college -- including Corey Menafee, who had worked in our servery and who attended the Thompson naming ceremony.

Recently, in both the Yale Daily News Commencement Issue and at a talk at St. Anthony's, I wrote and spoke about iconoclasm, freedom of speech and free enquiry as part of the scholarly life. Don't worry – I won't begin a new half hour lecture now – in fact I'm coming to my conclusion. (But email me later if you want to know more!) For it *is* intriguing how such things as stained glass windows, paintings, stonework, carvings and now even whimsical shields do matter. They have an important aesthetic dimension, of course, and they're also vehicles for larger meanings as they come to symbolize identities, political and religious projects, selves & others.

In however small a way they remind us of Emile Durkheim's observation that "the soldier who falls defending his flag certainly does not believe he has sacrificed himself to a piece of cloth." Portraits are not just portraits, and panes of glass not just panes of glass.

The fact is that we've all been participants in a rather curious phenomenon: we've replayed a good part of the range of the Enlightenment right here in Calhoun, soon to be Hopper College, in miniature: the clash of word against word; symbol against symbol... The contrast between iconoclastic violence on the one hand and ritualized modes of civil disobedience on the other. It has been ... educational.

Colleges and universities, including Yale, are in their present form a wonderful legacy of the Enlightenment. The replacement of wars of religion with the iconoclasm of images, and then the iconoclasm of knowledge, was a hard-won triumph of modernity. It is part of liberal self-governance, dearly purchased, and is most assuredly beleaguered in the current political climate. It's no coincidence that freedom of scientific enquiry, of scholarly knowledge, is also under threat. We faculty, administrators, students at Yale – and, crucially, you soon to be alumni -- have a special responsibility to safeguard, promote and defend the store and practices of knowledge on behalf of all. It's a tall order ... and we are still learning.

I hope you come back and visit soon! When you do, I know that you'll see wonderful new traditions, ever-evolving. Grace Hopper's brilliance in math and computer science, her naval career and dedication to public education make her an amazingly inspiring figure. I am very excited about this.

You'll also see, in keeping with President Salovey's recommendations, that we've also re-envisioned the Hopper Parlor so as to preserve the fascinating traces of the fact that Calhoun students have lived here and shaped our college. I've convened a multigenerational committee of alums to think with me about how best to memorialize *not* John C. Calhoun – for that has never been the issue in the college – but 'Hounie-dom'. And as part of that space, embedded in that story of name and change of name, we'll try to capture some of what it's meant to the generations of students who have lived within the college's walls, and contributed so much to its culture.

Seniors, you've been a huge part of this. Thank you, Class of 2017, Hounies and Hoppers, and best of luck!

---