

**Clayton S. Rose Remarks
Class of 2020 Celebration
August 14, 2021**

Well, here we are, Welcome to family and friends, here or streaming in. Welcome to our honorary degree candidates. Welcome to my faculty and staff colleagues. Special welcome back to my former colleague at Harvard and friend Robin Smith, class of '05, who is reading today's names.

And welcome to our 2020 graduates. This is the first time that most of you have been back to campus since March of 2020—17 months ago,—and it is so fantastic to have you here and to have you together again, and to commemorate and celebrate your graduation from Bowdoin as a community of students, faculty, staff, honorary degree recipients, trustees, family members, and friends. I'm sorry that there are some who couldn't be here with us today, but I'm really pleased that many are Zooming in.

Please take a moment to give a hand to all the staff who did so much this summer to make this celebration possible, in particular Tony Sprague, Michelle Morin and Ken Cardone and the whole dining team.

Last year, all of you were somewhere that was not here. Eduardo and I sat here together on an empty stage and with an empty quad [show picture], our board chair Bob White plugged in via livestream, as we conferred your degrees. I shared with you then my advice to make nurturing the gift of love from family and friends your highest priority, and that this is the source of the greatest joy you will have over the course of your life. The events of the last year have only served to reinforce this idea.

Today, I want to share with you why, as I look out, I am optimistic in a very troubling time.

Over the course of our [226] year history, there have been particular times when our graduates have entered a world that was incredibly challenging, different from what came before, and where great leadership, tenacity, and fortitude were required—the Civil War, WWI and WWII, the Depression, the Civil Rights Era, and the Vietnam War are the most obvious.

To tell you what you already know, we again live in these times.

And, in each of these moments, our graduates have stepped forward and in visible and less visible ways made a difference, helping those around them, their communities, institutions, and the world navigate the times and move to a better place.

They were able to do this, in part, because of the education and experience they received at Bowdoin, from amazing faculty and staff. Absorbing the knowledge that was imparted, honing the ability to think critically, to listen well, to engage with others who had differing views, to learn, to communicate, to collaborate. As you know so well, this is what happens here.

But more importantly, they were able to do this because of who they were as people—anchored by the characteristics of smarts, courage, compassion, commitment, and grace. And, by a shared belief in serving the common good.

And all of this is true for you. This is what you experienced here and this is very much who you are.

You have graduated at a time of significant challenge—an understatement, for sure—a climate emergency; a recognition that we have so much to do to create racial justice in our country; political, social, and cultural divides that are as stark as we have witnessed in many generations; and divisions that raise serious questions about the direction of our democracy. And, of course, the pandemic.

In this moment you have witnessed the best and the worst. Great triumphs in science, great courage in the fight for racial justice, acts of incredible humanity and leadership and, on the flip-side, acts of violence and hatred, heartbreak from lives unnecessarily and in some cases brutally lost, and bad decisions by those we entrusted with leadership. You learn from these lessons, are motivated by them, and they inspire you to do better.

So, while we are again in a very difficult time—one with high stakes—I am optimistic. Not in a naïve way, where we will wave a magic wand and it will all be better, or because it will sort itself out on its own. There is no magic wand, and benign neglect won't work. I am optimistic because I know you, and I know what you can and will do. I have witnessed it firsthand while you were here, and I have seen it over the course of the last year in all that you have already been doing.

Class of 2020, keep doing it. What you do, and will do, will make the world a better place, and we need you. Congratulations on your graduation from Bowdoin College, and thank you for what you bring to the world.