



Commencement Address
May 5, 2018
William J. Brennan

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to Maine Maritime Academy to help us celebrate the Class of 2018. Congratulations! You have worked hard to earn your degrees and all of us here today are proud of your accomplishments.

I also want to join you in acknowledging and thanking those who have helped you reach this milestone in your lives: your parents, families, friends, teachers and professors, and others who have supported you along this journey. I hope you've had the chance to acknowledge all of the other members of the MMA community who helped you along the way, including those in health services and the dining services, or, those at the waterfront, or in IT, folks in the administrative offices, or your coaches and even your neighbors from the town of Castine. It is a great day for all of us.

We are honored to have with us today Maritime Administrator Rear Admiral Mark Buzby who will deliver the Commencement address. The Maritime Administration is significant in the maritime education and training partnership that we and the other state maritime academies enjoy and I am very pleased that Admiral Buzby is here to celebrate with us today. I am sure that he will have much to impart to the Class of 2018 and I'll have more to say later in our program about his many accomplishments.

I would like to recognize some of the other people here behind me who are important partners of the Academy. Capt. Michael Baroody of the U.S. Coast Guard, and Captain Timothy Cooper of the United States Navy, thank you for being here to administer the oaths to our graduates. There is another individual here who I know many of you recognize. Commandant of Midshipmen Captain Nathan Gandy, I thank you for conducting the Regimental Change of Command. There are others up here with me who will be introduced as our program proceeds.

As you leave here today, I want you to know that you have contributed to my education as president of Maine Maritime Academy, and as a human being. My students touch my life in many different ways and I am richer for that, and proud to have been part of your lives. I wish only the best for you and trust that we have prepared you well for the years ahead. I know that each of you will have made life-long friendships; that you will stand with each other no matter what the future holds; and I am confident that you know that you are Mariners and will be forever. I know that you will help each other, rely on each other, and support one another.

While I still have a few more minutes with you, I wish to leave you with these thoughts. We are an academic institution, that is true, and much of what we do happens in classrooms and in

laboratories, the simulators, the machine and welding shops, and on our vessels. There, you learn the theory and the practice that will keep you in good stead throughout your careers. But, in my view, our most valuable role has been to help develop you as a person, to enhance your character, to bring more fully to the fore those attributes that will enable you to be successful in your lives.

To lead, you first must understand what it is to follow. Those of you in the Regiment recall your time as a MUG blindly following the head of the person in front of you. But, during your time here, regardless of your major, I trust that we have helped develop in you the skills you need in order to judge which path you choose to follow in life.

With the unlimited sources of information you have access to, my hope for you is that you will stay informed and continually learning. We enjoy an incredible freedom of speech and a freedom of the press and, while we might not always agree with what we see or hear, that freedom is a privilege we need to value and protect. It is what makes it possible for us to be informed about the issues that affect us – our community, our society, our way of life. It is part of what makes it possible for us to judge the character and substance of those who represent us.

News bombards us every day—good, bad and ugly. Some of it is what has been described as “fake news.” It is up to each and every one of us to sift through the chaff to find the grain of truth in what we see, read and hear. This requires critical thinking and I hope most sincerely that your time here has helped you to develop that skill which involves observation, analysis, evaluation and reflection.

My hope is that you will always remember that we are a decent society. We listen and think before rushing to judgment, and we evaluate others not by their skin color, ethnic background, sexual preference, religious beliefs, or political party. Remember to stop and consider all sides of an argument before making a decision in casting your hard-won vote. We live in a democracy – a government by the people, for the people, where each of us has a say in the way we are governed.

In all of your dealings, I urge you to speak and act thoughtfully, and with civility. Don't be quick to withhold respect and understanding from those who may appear different from what you perceive to be “the norm.” You will encounter those whose views are diametrically opposed to yours, yet it is still vital that you treat them with respect for—that is what it means to live in a civil society.

Having said that, standing up for your beliefs may not always be easy, but if you work toward your goals in a civilized manner, you will ultimately prevail. There are many examples in history of those who pursued a civil and non-violent course and who left their mark to the benefit of all: the Reverend Martin Luther King, Emmeline Pankhurst who fought for women's suffrage, Rosa Parks, Mahatma Gandhi and Lech Walesa. Think outside the box, analyze carefully all that you see and hear, and do not simply follow the crowd.

And so, as I spend my last few minutes with you, my students, let me share my greatest hope and dream for you as you prepare to take on the world: I want you to act, and not just think and talk.

People who are truly committed to making a difference get off the bench and get into the game. No commentator or critic ever changed a thing; only those who act make a difference. Whether one's impact is great or small, whether it is advancing a positive or slowing a negative is beside the point. For one does not get into the game to make the world a better place in some abstract sense; one gets in the game to make the world a better place than it would otherwise be if you sat it out.

You have heard me say this time and time again: I am proud of you. I am proud of what you have accomplished and I have great hopes that you will continue in the Maine Maritime Academy tradition. I trust that you have become independent thinkers with the critical analytical skills to help you go far. The Mariners who came before you forged a path demonstrating the strengths and abilities of our graduates. Over the past seventy five years, our stature as an academic institution has risen to new heights and we have become even more well-known throughout the nation and throughout the world for the quality of the education we provide and the hands-on, can-do characteristics of our graduates.

It is now up to you to continue that heritage. And, as you do so, I hope that you will honor those who came before you and lend a helping hand to those who come after you. It is part of our tradition – we are Mariners forever. You are the keepers of our heritage. You have made me proud, now go out into the world and make yourselves prouder than you are today – make the community proud – make us all proud of the Maine Maritime Academy.

Congratulations.