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Senior Class Speaker 99th Commencement Address

Ramzi Kaiss

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Remarks to the Class of 2017
by Senior Class Speaker Ramzi Kaiss '17
99th Commencement Sunday
May 21, 2017

Class of 2017, Connecticut College Faculty and staff, friends and families, mom and dad, friends' moms and friends' dads, it is an absolute pleasure to stand here before you today on what is Connecticut College's 99th commencement ceremony. Perhaps before beginning this speech it is worth taking a moment to recognize that we, the class of 2017, would not be sitting here in these seats without the unwavering support and sacrifices of the various individuals who have helped us get to this point. So to all the parents here, to all the siblings, to the wonderful faculty, to the dedicated staff, and to our friends, who we are sitting amongst, thank you.

Class of 2017, my friends my habibis, I suppose "this is it." That allegedly culminating momentous moment that we have spent the last four years working towards has supposedly finally arrived. Yet, in this exact moment allow me to stand here before you and deliver the following message: today is not the true celebration of your last four years at Connecticut College.

You see, today is the pomp and circumstance, the choreographed festivities emulating the illusion of closure, the bagpipes, and the fancy robes worn by our professors, which to be honest, I kinda wish they wore while teaching their classes. But in all seriousness, think about it, if today truly were the celebration of what you have accomplished, you wouldn't be sitting in these seats getting baked in the sun listening to me talk. If this were a celebration of you, you would be doing the talking, you would be doing the dancing, the hugging, the loving, and the reminiscing as you bring closure to your past four years with the friends and faculty who have shaped who you are right now. In many ways, what's so dreadful about commencement ceremonies is that they lack this sense of closure. After all, how does one even come to process the end of four years of transformation, most beautiful friendships, and unending relationships in the matter of a three hour ceremony. So today, as we sit in our seats, soaking up the sun, wearing dark robes and diamond-shaped cardboard hats on our heads, the question remains: what does this all mean? What does this degree mean? And what do our past four years at Connecticut College mean to us today, and what exactly will they mean tomorrow?

Here, my fellow camels, lies the beauty behind this day. Because as we will come to find out, everyday for the rest of our lives, and not just today, will be that real celebration of the lessons we've learned, the relationships we've built, and the love that we've had and shared on this beautiful New London hilltop. You see our experiences cannot be objectified and contained within a piece of paper, they are bigger than that. For they shall pervade the way we got about our lives forever, and I mean it.

Look around you for a moment. Take it all in: Look at the beautiful campus you are surrounded by, but more importantly look the beautiful people you are amongst, Inside and outside these buildings that are surrounding us, and through the people we are surrounded by, we have

discovered the meaning of our time at this institution and of our role in the world beyond its walls. Here we discovered that as we face the world tomorrow, what is more worthy than merely finding a job is finding a good cause to live and work tirelessly for. Through the people we are surrounded by, we discovered that what is more essential than merely making money is making this world a better place for all of its inhabitants, regardless of their sex, race, gender, ethnicity, orientation or religion. Because yes, there is no doubt that you will become successful. There is no doubt that you can become future peacemakers and noble CEO's, instrumental social activists and leaders of NGO's; future dancers and award winning musicians, inspiring academics and pious politicians; future radical educators and mind-blowing performers, and yes, oh yes, righteous revolutionaries and renowned reformers. Nevertheless, as this place has taught us, life is not so much about how far we go, but what about we do with that distance. It is about how we utilize our positions of power to empower the people around us.

And not only did we learn these lessons with one another, but through and because of one another- whether in the classroom or at a ridge party, during office hours or campus-wide discussions, or even right here on Temple Green, as part of the many late-night conversations that I'm sure most of us have had. Because in the end, it is in the people that we have become and in the future work that we will accomplish as a result of this becoming, that the true celebration of our time at Connecticut College will be actualized. And that will take place day after day after day.

We must admit that with a Connecticut College education we are more than ready to take on some of the most important challenges that the human population faces today. At a time in our world where poisonous hatred has already ripped apart communities and destroyed lives, our education and our experiences are the much-needed antidote that can heal and rebuild.

As French philosopher Albert Camus puts it, "there is no sun without shadows, and it is essential to know the night." Now, more than ever, not only do we know why systems of inequality continue to exist, but we know how to dismantle them in order to create a more equitable society.

So, let us also not forget those who have inspired us.

We also most definitely cannot forget that on this day we are missing a beloved camel who should be here with us. Anique Ashraf, we love you and miss you, and so wish that you could be here amongst us. You have inspired us through your commitment to issues of social justice, your sincere friendship, and your sheer sense of humor that it is so missed today.

So In honor of Anique and in honor of every member of the Connecticut College community who has inspired us and influenced who we are, let us do the good work that we have spent the past four years of our lives preparing for. Class of 2017, now we are ready, and now the celebrations shall be actualized. Let the good work begin and I shall see you at our five year reunion. For everything you have done and more, thank you my habibiest of habibies.