

**Commencement Address for Union Institute and University's Sacramento and Los Angeles Academic Centers**  
**"A Place at the Table"**  
**August 10, 2008**

President Sublet, Trustee Lorimer, Provost Hansen, Dean Rocheleau, Assistant Dean Pastores-Palffy, Faculty, Graduating Class of 2008 and family and friends. . . It is an honor for me to be here today. Indeed, it is a privilege to address you at your graduation—as you move out into the world with new letters attached to your name, with newfound knowledge to enhance your journey, and with well-earned confidence to harness your dreams.

Each and every one of you has met the demands of a higher education. This commencement is the icing on your cake; your diploma is the proof of the pudding. Your diploma is also a key—an earned golden key to open doors. Whether as educators, social scientists, managers, leaders in criminal justice, or officials in local and state government, you have decided to actively participate in improving the quality of your life and the lives of others—those near and dear and those unknown to you. I applaud you for this.

Your graduating class is more than two hundred strong and sixty-nine of you are commencing in this beautiful hall, here, today. I am struck to see more than half, forty-three, of you are women. I looked into national averages and we are on target! Nationwide, 60% of bachelor's and master's degrees are now earned by women across the country; likewise are nearly half of all doctorates, law degrees, and medical degrees.

More and more, women are earning degrees to secure good jobs and equal pay. However, I also looked into the current economic statistics. Unfortunately, women working full-time jobs, on average, earn only 80 cents to every dollar men earn--in all categories. Female elementary school teachers earn 95 cents on the dollar, psychologists 83 cents, college professors 75 cents on the dollar, and lawyers and judges earn only 69 cents on the dollar. (And what a bad idea to discourage women from entering the courtroom; we are pretty good at legal arguments as well as with making the peace.)

We now have statistics which means two things: One, someone is paying attention and two; to rectify this percentage must improve. Women must demand equal pay and expect promotions when qualified. And men, seeing the obstacles your sisters

face please be the conscious man on the block, in the office, at home. Work in solidarity with her and support her goals.

I am not talking about such a radical idea. Every person has the right to work and to earn, dollar for dollar. We all want to live in a world where equality is not a slogan but a way of life. You have all worked hard for your degree. Now put it to work for you!

Today, thirty-nine of you are graduating with a major in Education, with a focus on Early Childhood Education. I invite those of who have completed a major in Education to stand.

Yes, indeed, children are our future, so I thank you, thank you, and thank you. Having just completed your course of studies, you know, better than I, how our children must be nurtured with love and guided with intelligence. You also know how many fine educators there have been in the world and how many there are now. Learn from all of them. You have most likely read theories and philosophies about teaching, educating, mentoring. You know, therefore, how much valuable information is available about the importance of positive early childhood experiences and how to be a gentle, but firm, guide. You have learned about child development: physical ability, verbal acuity, cognitive reasoning. And, oh, you have learned what a difference one year can make; the answer to  $4 + 3$  may not come quickly to a  $4 \frac{1}{2}$  year old, but by  $5 \frac{1}{2}$  it's a snap.

I hope you feel great pride in and enjoy your role as Educator. Use well your knowledge of child development and remember don't forget the importance of equal expectations and abilities of boys and girls. Remember what it was like to be little in school and how far empathy goes. And, as you, as mature students, might remember as both parent and child, patience is truly a virtue.

Under your caring wing, children will relax, know, trust, and love to learn. This work is powerful, essential, and blessed. Go with care. Again, I thank you. Please be seated.

Today, twenty-five of you are graduating with a major in Criminal Justice. I invite those of who have completed a major in Criminal Justice to stand.

True justice is the basis of a civil society, so I thank you, thank you, and thank you. You have probably had a taste of your work—in books you have read, in research you have done (with friends, with enemies) on the news, and in the classroom. Your desire to fix what is broken and engage in a field demanding assertiveness, assurance, and fearlessness also requires good listening, humility, and calm.

Last year, I lectured at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City about the repatriation of material culture from private and public sectors back to rightful Native American owners. What this talk was really about was the conquest of the Western Hemisphere and the demise and dislocation of 20 million Indigenous Peoples on this continent at the hands of European explorers, monarchies, and conquerors. Greed and opposing worldviews were led to some of the most heinous acts in history. The First Peoples of this land whose losses were the result of cultural genocide, theft, or economic duress. And so I titled the lecture, “Who is the Criminal, Where is the Justice?” This question, I believe, needs to be posed by every generation.

Your innate ability not to shy from aggression is the same ability that enables you to observe with care, to be aware, to process information with diligence. This is powerful stuff. Local and state laws have been affected by recent national policies, including extraordinary rendition, condoned use of torture, suspension of habeas corpus, and the rejection of the Geneva Conventions. These immoral legalizations are rippling, ripping, into our communities and our neighborhoods in a myriad of dangerous ways.

It will take grit and hard work to put back the moral ideals of our democratic republic—to hold true to our Constitution, our Bill of Rights, our civil and human rights. Go with care. Again, I thank you. Please be seated.

I invite those of who have completed a major in Psychology, Social Work, Human Services, Business Management, and Interdisciplinary Studies to please stand.

In all of your chosen fields, each of you can make a difference for thousands of people as well as for one. For this I thank you, thank you, and thank you. We live in a demanding, competitive culture where marketing can overpower personal sensibilities, greed can overpower compassion, force can overpower goodness, and falseness can overpower truth. You have committed yourselves to fields that provide you with the opportunity to do battle against the forces undermining the foundations of a healthy

society. Your education has prepared you to do battle against unwarranted abuse, to do battle against destructive greed, replacing obsolete paradigms with constructive, healthy approaches to life, to living.

How you work—holding firm to integrity and choosing with care the forks in your road—and the ways in which you reach your goals, these will be the measure of your success and your personal best. Look. Consider the results of your actions. Please help our society return to a clarity of purpose, help our communities unite in service, and help revitalize our personal and national health. Go with care. Again, I thank you. Please be seated.

Commencers, I congratulate each of you and all of you. You are graduating up and out with mettle to match the challenges you have determined to engage and to effect changes in your world, in our world. You now have a place at a new table. Your options have increased. Your goals can be as high and as wide as you decide. You own a new power and a new responsibility. As you take a place at the table of your chosen fields in your communities, in your cities, in your states, and in your country, just think: *You are history in the making*. As with every generation (though it does feel particularly critical at this moment in time) your choices, your commitments, and your accomplishments shall determine the future of your life, of your children's lives, and of your grandchildren's lives.

I applaud you all for your perseverance and congratulate you on the successful completion of your courses of study. As graduates from the Union Institute and University, you are prepared for a multitude of challenges. For many Union Learners, the rigor of a great education combines with an innate desire, maybe even a burning motivation, to improve our lives, to serve our communities, to make things right in our world.

You are the catchers and you are the visionaries. You are the cushions and you are the creators. You are the ears and you are the voices. Go with care and I thank you.