

# For Class of 2020, Exactly What Are You Graduating Into? A Mess

Physical distancing measures created an alternate universe for college students in 2020 - shortened semesters, closed dorms, online classrooms and geographical barriers between dear friends.

Now, schools are attempting to honor graduates with noble and inspiring online recognitions.

My oldest son lost his last-ever college semester to the virus. He and his friends looked forward to their graduation week in Boston, recalling fond memories and dreaming of potential futures.

They were ready to take on the world, but then the virus brought everything to a halt.

Now, they communicate over Zoom, wondering and waiting for what's next. They enter a bleak economy and job market never before seen.

The [official unemployment rate](#) for April was 14.7% with 36.5 million Americans filing jobless claims since the start of the pandemic.

Meanwhile, aging employees who were ready to retire are now contemplating delaying their retirements because of their investment losses.

Over the last three months, the world has changed for everyone. However, if there is one generation that has grown accustomed to global change, it's the graduating class of 2020.

They lived through the following events and tragedies:

- September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks
- Afghanistan War
- Iraq War II
- The Great Recession
- Climate change emergency
- Increase in school shootings

- The Boston bombing
- The massacre at Mother Emanuel AME Church
- Police shootings of young black men
- The emergence of Trumpism
- Largest human migration since World War II
- Charlottesville, Virginia, confrontation
- Impeachment of a president
- Coronavirus

As I think about my son's fellow graduates and the events they endured, a stark reality emerges that both troubles and inspires my soul.

I am troubled when I hear older generations criticize younger ones based upon unsubstantiated stereotypes and a generational arrogance rooted in nostalgia. Those criticisms are unfounded and unjust.

The 2020 graduates are remarkable young adults, raised during a global shift not seen since the Protestant Reformation.

They have come of age as the Greatest Generation (World War II generation) passed to eternal glory.

Their grandparents are Baby Boomers, shaped and molded by civil rights, the Vietnam War, Watergate and the 1960s revolution.

Their parents, my generation, are the first generation in some time without the expectation of greater economic and cultural security than previous generations.

This uncertainty about the future influenced our children, the current generation entering adulthood.

You would think this might be a negative influence on them. However, the acknowledgment of uncertainty was not a detriment to this generation.

In fact, economic and cultural uncertainty raised their resolve to be more determined, more courageous and more committed to changing the world for the common good.

This generation gives us Malala, Greta Thunberg, Yara Shahidi, Avi Schiffman and masses of students standing to declare their lives matter.

The graduating class of 2020 and their generational colleagues are an inspiration.

As they enter a volatile job market, many unceremoniously returned home to live with parents. I am sure this is quite depressing.

Therefore, I want to offer some encouragement to those who may be asking, "What in the world did I graduate into this year?"

First, you are bright, passionate and courageous. Do not let anyone ever tell you otherwise.

Second, your resolve will get you through this moment. As you have witnessed with your own eyes throughout your life, the world is constantly changing. Your determination will propel you through this current crisis.

Third, use those experiences as tools for good. While you endured numerous global crises, remember to use those lessons to make the world a better place.

Fourth, lean into your instincts regarding community. There will be powerful forces in the world that will attempt to divide you from others. Don't let them. Let the voices and actions of those working for the common good drown out those who sow division and conflict.

Fifth, speak and act boldly. Culture, religion and politics never change unless someone or some group stands up to those in power. Vocally demand change while engaging in actions that support those demands. Remember your civil rights lessons. While civility is a virtue, a properly placed phrase and timely action - even though confrontational - can change the world.

Sixth, Jesus did not start changing the world until he was 30. While I hope beyond hope we come out of our current crisis well before the 2020 graduates turn 30, remember that patience can be a strength. Use your time wisely to think and prepare for the future. Jesus' time as a carpenter and rabbinical outlier prepared him for three years of ministry that changed history. Be patient. Your time is coming.

Finally, graduates - high school, college and postgrads - we are very proud of you. I know times look and feel very uncertain right now, as they truly are. Yet, you are an inspiration. You will make a difference. You will bend the arc of history toward justice. You will change the world.

So, what are you graduating into this year? A mess.

However, if there is any generation that can help us clean this mess up, it is you.

We will get through this together!