



JUSTIN TRUDEAU

WE'RE ALL THE SAME

<https://youtu.be/3AloHLr8nTI>

I have to say, to be here now, speaking with all of you — in Yankee Stadium, one of the greatest places in one of the greatest cities on Earth — is more than a little humbling. My friends, you are now NYU graduates — the best and the brightest. You have great potential and possibilities. And therefore, you have enormous responsibility, too. So today, I'd like to talk about the nature of both those things, and I'd like to offer you a challenge. One that I think is essential for your future success as individuals, and as the leaders that you are becoming.

Among the many things I admire about NYU, is that about a fifth of the students are international. And a similar proportion are the very first in their families to go to college. This group is truly diverse in every possible way. And I think that is an extraordinarily valuable and important thing. When I graduated in the early 1990s, I went on a trip around the world with a few good friends — who actually remain good friends to this day, which is sort of a miracle.

We trekked and traveled, mostly over land, from Europe to Africa to Asia. And that remains one of the great formative experiences of my life. It was an amazing adventure.

It was also a really important contributor to my continued, broader education. Because it forced me, really for the first time as an adult, to meet, engage, befriend people whose views and experiences, ideas, values and language were very different from my own. When a kid from Montreal meets a Korean fisherman living in Mauritania, befriends a Russian veteran of their Afghan war, or a shopkeeper and his family living in Danang, interesting conversations always happen. Now, maybe some of you have talked about doing something like a great trip like that after graduation. But I'd be willing to bet one of the first things you heard was a warning: "You can't do that in this day and age. It's not safe!" But here's my question: Is it really just the issue of physical safety that makes our loved ones so anxious at the idea of us getting out there, or is it the threat that if we look past our frames — the frames of our own lives, of our own community's structured values and belief systems — to truly engage with people who believe fundamentally different things, we could perhaps be transformed into someone new and unfamiliar to those who know and love us?

See, there's no question that today's world is more complex than it was in the mid-1990s. There are serious and important problems that we are grappling with and will continue to grapple with.

But we are not going to arrive at mutual respect, which is where we solve common problems, if we cocoon ourselves in an ideological, social or intellectual bubble. Now, we can see it all around us — there's a peculiar fascination with dystopia in our culture today. You see it everywhere on film and TV, but the truth is that, on balance, we have the good fortune to live in a time of tremendous possibility and potential; a time when it is within our grasp to eliminate extreme poverty, to end terrible diseases like malaria and TB, and to offer a real chance at an education to everyone on this planet.

But for us to move forward, to keep moving and moving forward, we have to do it together — all together. Humanity has to fight our tribal mindset. We go to the same church? Cool, you're in my tribe. You speak my language? You're in my tribe. You're an NYU alumni? You're in my tribe. You play Pokémon Go? You're a vegetarian? You like the Yankees? You go to the gun range? You're pro-choice? Tribe, tribe, tribe. See... But of course, its not the "belonging" part that is the problem, it's the corollary: You are part of my tribe, and they are not.

Whether it's race, gender, language, sexual orientation, religious or ethnic origin, or our beliefs and values themselves — diversity doesn't have to be a weakness. It can be our greatest strength. Now often, people talk about striving for tolerance. Now, don't get me wrong: there are places in this world where a little more tolerance would go a long way, but if we're being honest right here, right now, I think we can aim a little higher than mere tolerance.

Think about it: Saying "I tolerate you" actually means something like, "Ok, I grudgingly admit that you have a right to exist, just don't get in my face about it, and oh, don't date my sister." There's not a religion in the world that asks you to "tolerate thy neighbor." So let's try for something a little more like acceptance, respect, friendship, and yes, even love. And why does this matter? Because, in our aspiration to relevance; in our love for our families; in our desire to contribute, to make this world a better place, despite our differences, we are all the same.

And when you meet and befriend someone from another country or another culture who speaks a different language or who worships differently, you quickly realize this. And here's my main point, and the challenge I'm offering you today. Our celebration of difference needs to extend to differences of values and belief, too. Diversity includes political and cultural diversity. It includes a diversity of perspectives and approaches to solving problems. See, it's far too easy, with social media shaping our interactions, to engage only with people with whom we already agree — members of our tribe. Well, this world is and must be bigger than that.

So here is my request: As you go forward from this place, I would like you to make a point of reaching out to people whose beliefs and values differ from your own. I would like you to listen to them, truly listen, and try to understand them, and find that common ground. You have a world of opportunity at your fingertips. But as you go forward from here, understand that just around the corner, a whole different order of learning awaits, in which your teachers will come from every station in life, every education level, every belief system, every lifestyle. And I hope you will embrace that. You have been students, you will continue to learn all your lives, but now it is also time for you to become leaders.

In every generation, leaders emerge because they one day awake to the realization that it's not up to someone else to fix this problem, or take up that cause. It's up to them. So now is the time for you to lead.

Leaders. Now, I'm sure that's a word that's been tossed around you and at you quite a bit over the past few hours, days, weeks and years. Leaders of tomorrow. Leaders of today. But what does it mean? What attributes does a 21st century leader need to have? What do people need most from their leaders today and tomorrow? Now, I think you need to be brave. Really brave. And I know, when you think of courageous leaders, you think of those folks who stood implacably and fearlessly, anchored in their sense of rightness, willing to pit their ideals against all comers, against the slings and arrows aimed their way. Well, I don't think that's brave enough. I don't think that's good enough for what our shared future will ask of you. I actually don't think it's ever been good enough.

Leadership has always been about getting people to act in common cause. "We're going to build a new country! We're going to war! We're going to the moon!" It usually required convincing, or coercing, a specific group to follow you. And the easiest way to do that has always been through tribal contrasts: "They believe in a different God! They speak a different language! They don't want the same things as we do." But the leadership we need most today and in the years to come is leadership that brings people together. That brings diversity to a common cause. This is the antithesis of the polarization, the aggressive nationalism, the identity politics that have grown so common of late. It's harder, of course. It's always been easier to divide than unite. But mostly, it requires true courage. Because if you want to bring people around to your way of thinking, you need to first show them that you are open to theirs. That you are willing to enter into a conversation that might change your mind. Show respect for their point of view, and you have a better chance of actually having them listen to yours. And regardless of what happens, you will have had a genuine exchange that focused on understanding, not on winning a debate or scoring points. And you will both be improved for it.

Let me be very clear: this is not an endorsement of moral relativism or a declaration that all points of view are valid. Female genital mutilation is wrong, no matter how many generations have practiced it. Anthropogenic climate change is real, no matter how much some folks want to deny it. But here's the question: do you want to win an argument and feel good about how superior you are? Or do you actually want to change behaviors and beliefs? See, it's been pointed out that one of the many differences between Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis was that Davis preferred to win a debate, while Lincoln would rather win the war. And that's the question: Do you want to win an argument or do you want to change the world?

"With malice toward none, and charity toward all." Let those words of this country's greatest president guide your ambitions, your hopes for yourselves, your families, your country, your planet. There is no shortage of cynicism and selfishness in the world. Be their answer, their antidote. I am abundantly optimistic about the future because of you. It is yours to make and mold and shape. The world eagerly awaits, indeed requires, your ideas. Your initiative. Your enterprise. Your energy. Your passion and compassion. Your idealism, and your ambition. But remember that true courage is the essential ingredient in all your efforts.

Congratulations, Class of 2018. Now go change the world.

Merci!

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