

In Praise of Clip-on Ties – Jon Murad, HKS 13

The Graduate English Address

By Jon Murad '95, M.P.A.'13

Good morning. My name is Jon Murad, and this is a clip-on tie. Not the height of fashion, perhaps, but when you're a cop—as I am—there's a definite value in breakaway neckwear, especially if someone's trying to choke you. On Monday, when I report back to the New York City Police Department after this academic sojourn, I'll most likely be assigned to a precinct in the Bronx or Manhattan North. And I'll put this on and go forth to try to make my corner of the city a safer, fairer place.

Now, I'd venture that few of us in this theater are embarking on or returning to careers where clip-on ties—much less prospects of getting choked—are the norm. After all, we're Harvard graduates! We're joining a distinguished fellowship of eight U.S. presidents, Nobel Prize winners, Fields Medal winners, Pulitzer winners, Oscar winners! That's a lot of winners! It's a community of accomplishment unlike any other, and I am proud to belong to it.

Actually, I joined it first 18 years ago, when I sat out there as a member of the College Class of 1995, and pondered my place in the distinguished fellowship. Back then, greatness was the only option, and if you'd told me then that I'd end up a cop in the Bronx, I'd have slooowly backed away. Harvard graduates don't take jobs like that; they become bankers and start-up entrepreneurs. There are *expectations*. The first of Harvard's eight U.S. presidents, writing to the second, his son, drove this home: “You come into life with advantages which will disgrace you if your success is mediocre. And if you do not rise to the head not only of your profession, but of your country, it will be owing to your own laziness, slovenliness, and obstinacy.” I know, right?

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I imagine John Adams would have had been unenthused if John Quincy had come home with a clip-on tie.

But somewhere inside, that sentiment is not alien to any of us. The distinguished fellowship, with its scientists and statesmen, sets a high bar. But let us remember: it is incomplete without those among us whose paths will not be written in history books nor on Wikipedia pages. For many of you, perhaps most of you, the lives you've envisioned aren't necessarily the ones you'll lead. Sorry if I'm the first one to tell you. My hope today, in this time before the diplomas and the family photos and the deserved revels, is to remind us all—to assure us all—that there is as much stature in our being social workers and teachers, soldiers and preachers, nurses and, yes, even cops, as in being presidents and poets laureate.

A lot of you know this already, but I did not, when first I sat out there. And now? I'm probably not the *only* municipal cop in the country with two Harvard degrees, but I'm surely in a tiny cohort, and that's not a boast, it's a lament. If there is something special about this place and the lessons we've learned here, and I think there is, then America—the world—needs people like you in these roles. Because John Adams was dead wrong. Success doesn't mean rising to the top, it means changing the world. And here's the secret: Everyone changes the world. Everything ripples. It's *how* we do it that counts.

So how is it done? Do you choose a job that serves others, as many of you have already done? Or do you sign up to be a [Big Sister](#)? Do you check out Citizen Schools? Do you volunteer for hospice? Yes. The answer is yes. These things are the tab for your coming here, when others could not. These things matter. They may even be better than making piles of money, although, as a civil servant, I wouldn't really know. But I do know that the crimson H you've earned today

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marks you, like a Cantab Hester Prynne. Sometimes you'll shy from it, as when you disingenuously say you went to school "in Boston." Other times you'll drop the H-bomb with aplomb. Regardless, the crimson letter and the expectations that come with it are *yours*. And so is the way you choose to change the world. For the time being, I'll be doing it one radio run at a time, while wearing a clip-on tie. You can pick whatever neckwear you want, or none at all, but let us go forth, and serve as we can.