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Sent: Sun, 17 May 2015 23:08:14 -0400
From: "Power, Samantha" <powers@state.gov>
To: [redacted]
Subject: Commencement

Hi Mr. President -- I gave this speech on equality today at Barnard. I think it has a few fresh and important parts. Good luck on your essential mission tomorrow. Hope to see you in person soon. Samantha

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From: Gleischman, Max
Sent: Sunday, May 17, 2015 10:01 PM
To: Power, Samantha
Cc: USUN-SP-Specials-DL; Aguirre, Sergio
Subject: Barnard Commencement

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AS DELIVERED

Remarks by Ambassador Samantha Power, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at the Barnard College Commencement, May 17, 2015

Good afternoon, President Spar, faculty, trustees, alumni, families and friends of the strong and beautiful Barnard graduates! Congratulations, class of 2015!

Columbia grad Madeleine Albright has said, "It used to be that the only way a woman could truly make her foreign policy views felt was by marrying a diplomat, and then pouring tea on an offending ambassador's lap." I'm here to tell you that in 2015, we have other options! [Applause].

I'm truly honored to be here, and to be among the amazing women, and men, on this stage, and to be with the amazing class of 2015 – I'm so honored that I invited *my* parents to *your* graduation. [Applause] And while we're at it, let's give a huge round of applause to all the parents and loved ones in the audience.

Your great school came into existence largely due to the vision of a remarkable woman, Annie Nathan Meyer. Meyer didn't get the kind of schooling you got, or I got. Her mother kept her home as a small child because she wanted company. Meyer read voraciously, finishing all of Dickens' books by the age of seven. [Laughter]. Yeah, seriously. When she was eleven, her mother died, and while her father agreed to let her go to school, he was so overprotective that he kept her home whenever there was bad weather.

When Meyer learned about a special college course for women at Columbia University, she set about secretly studying for examinations, which she passed on her first try. When she finally told her father, she later wrote, "He drew me gently and lovingly to him and announced, 'You will never be married…Men hate intelligent wives.'" Meyer decided to go to Columbia anyway.

It was not what she had hoped. Women were not allowed into lectures; instead, they were given a reading list, a short meeting or two with the professor, and then an exam. When Meyer sat for her first exam, she found the questions were based entirely on the lectures that she had been barred from attending. Feeling what she called a "devastating sense of desolation," she answered as best she could. And though she passed, she eventually dropped out, and, soon after, started her full-court press to secure the education for women that she had been denied. Four years later, in 1889, as we know, Barnard College – your college – was founded.

As Barnard finishes its 125th school year, it is safe to say that the cause of equality has come a very, very, very long way. But what I want to talk to you about today is how some of the remaining barriers to true equality can, and must, be overcome.

First, true equality will mean not letting our doubts silence our voices.

We live in a time where women have made tremendous strides, particularly here in the United States. And you all know the statistics. Women earn 60 percent of all undergraduate and graduate degrees; hold more than half of all professional-level jobs; and study after study shows that companies employing greater numbers of women outperform their competitors. And you know that, at the end of your four years, you are as well-equipped as any Barnard graduating class to make your mark. So why do you still feel that persistent self-doubt? That fear of making mistakes? And why do those doubts sometimes get in the way of your voices being heard?

I wish I had the answer. Instead, all I can tell you is that we all experience that feeling – even if it's not obvious on the outside. I have even adopted a name for it – the Bat Cave; it's that dark place in your head where all the voices tell you every reason you can't do something.

Let me give you an example. Rewind to August 2008. I am working as a senior advisor on the campaign for then-Senator Barack Obama – who has just earned the Democratic nomination for President. And I find out that I'm pregnant with my first child. Now, I have an amazing husband, and this news – it's seismic. I am over the moon.

And I tell no one at work.

Lots of nods, I bet, back here and up there [Laughter].

I have never gone through this before, and I am worried that if I advertise my blissful state, it will affect how seriously I will be taken by the campaign, and potentially even shut me out of the kind of job that could make an impact. Everything I know of then-Senator Obama and the people around him tells me at the time that this makes zero sense. After all, this is a man who was raised by a single, working mother. A man whose brilliant wife worked while raising two daughters. A man who would go on to demonstrate daily as President his commitment to supporting working moms and dads. But at the time, I am way too deep in the Bat Cave to see any of that.

Eventually, it is my body that tells people the news – not me.

And I acquired quite a collection of scarves.

I ended up having two babies while spending four years at the White House, and thereafter still managed to get to serve in my dream job, representing the United States at the United Nations [Applause]. But if I felt the way I did with a boss like mine, I can only imagine how other women feel – the ecstasy of a pregnancy clouded by the fear it could cause severe professional damage.

Last year, when the Ukraine crisis began, I momentarily experienced another version of this anxiety. Russia, a permanent member of the UN Security Council, is trying to lop off part of its neighbor, Ukraine – a clear violation of the rules that the United Nations was created to defend. An urgent UN Security Council session is called on Russia's attempted takeover of Crimea. I take my seat, and my mind recalls Prague 1968, Budapest 1956, and some epic occasions in the twentieth century when Ambassadors Adlai Stevenson, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Madeleine Albright, and other legends made memorable, forceful interventions at the United Nations on behalf of the United States.

Then it dawns on me: that's me now! I'm the United States!

Deep in the Bat Cave, I think of the consequences if my response – the United States' response – is too forceful, or not forceful enough. I think of the overwhelming responsibility that comes with speaking on behalf of America and the ideals we stand for. And I think of the people of Ukraine who are counting on me. And I speak.

The fact is that doubt – and his more lovable big sister, self-awareness – both are more pronounced among women. Turns out Batwoman's cave often has more square footage than Batman's.

True equality will not mean shedding our doubts or our self-awareness – but rather not letting them quiet us when we should be speaking up. There are more than enough forces out there doing that without needing our help. And it will mean that, while everyone will have moments of uncertainty – and humility is an especially prized quality – women should not have to worry that if we stumble, it will be more noticed than when men do the same [Applause].

But it is not enough to find our own voices. True equality also requires that we learn to hear, and lift up, the voices of those whom others choose not to hear. This is my second point: You have to teach yourself to see the people and communities who live in society's blind spots. Of course, everyone should strive to do this. But as women who, even to this day, know what it feels like to be unheard or unseen, we have an additional responsibility. I think the burden of being treated differently is also our strength – because it gives us the capacity to notice when others are treated differently. To see the blind spots.

That includes the discussion of gender identity on campus, which the Barnard community – and particularly your class – has embraced [Applause]. We must see that seemingly simple actions that most of us don't have to think twice about – the bathroom we walk into; the

gender listed on our driver's licenses; the name people use to address us; the boxes "male" and "female" on a college application – can be a source of profound anguish for others. We must recognize the cruel and hostile treatment that transgender people experience in so many communities, which, according to one study, has contributed to 40 percent of transgender people in the United States attempting suicide during the course of their lives.

We must all work toward the goal of ensuring equal rights for all people – lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. And while we have a very long way to go, I'm extremely proud to work for an administration that has lifted Medicare's ban on covering gender reassignment surgery, and whose Justice Department has decided to take on cases of discrimination based on an individual's gender identity, including transgender status, under the Civil Rights Act.

Now again, it is no coincidence that women's colleges have been among the first to embrace this discussion. Women know what it feels like to have to fight to be part of institutions whose doors should never have been closed to them.

You often hear people say that past generations struggled so that you would not have to. But I say, past generations struggled so you would be free to fight on behalf of someone else.

The idea of seeing the struggles of others around you – whether the other is a gender or an ethnic or religious group, or even an entire nation that usually does not have a voice – is one of the principles that has defined President Obama's foreign policy. We know that America is stronger, that our policies are more effective, and that the world is better off when America is listening. And that includes listening to countries and communities that often feel invisible to the world's superpowers.

That is why, when I started as the United States Ambassador to the UN a year and a half ago, I decided to visit as many of the other 192 UN ambassadors as I could, regardless of the size or the geopolitical heft of the country that they represent. By visiting their missions, rather than having them travel to ours, as was common practice, I would be able to see the national art they wanted to showcase, the family photos on their desks, the books that they had carried with them long distances to America. And I could show them America's respect and our curiosity. So far, I've visited 119 countries' missions. And when I visit, I try [Applause], when I visit I try to put my long list of policy asks aside. Instead, I ask the ambassadors about their upbringings, about how they became diplomats, what they are most proud of about their countries.

True equality will mean not just seeing the unseen, but also finding a way to make invisible problems visible – and this is my third point. I think the contemporary conversation about the challenge that women face in balancing a demanding job with raising a family is important. Women are opening up about how overwhelmed they feel trying to "have it all." Back in 2013, when I arrived in my job, I was still nursing my one-year-old daughter as I tried to move my family to New York, and find schools for my two kids – and no, I did not enroll my then-four-year-old in a Kaplan course so he could get into a New York pre-school. I had to do all this at the same time, roughly, that the Syrian regime decided to stage massive chemical weapons attacks against its people, horrific atrocities were being committed in the Central

African Republic, and a new government was cracking down on the opposition in Egypt. When asked by friends whether I subscribed to "lean in," I would instead describe my philosophy then as "hang on." Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has put it even better – "lean on."

While Ambassador, I have spoken in public a fair amount about the ways my six-year-old, my now six-year-old son Declan, interacts with my new life – making visible a version of what goes on behind the scenes in many homes. Like most young kids with their parents, he seems to delight in interrupting me when I'm on the phone. "Mommy," he says, "Can I ask you something?" I shake my head and I whisper, "I'm on the phone." He says, "Mommy it's important." "I'll be off in a minute." "But Mommy, what's the score of the Nationals game?" he says. I beg him to let me finish the call. But he is insistent. "Mommy, I said it's important." And I hold my hand over the phone and say – "Mine too, this is important too" – I may well be talking to the UN Secretary-General, a UN envoy on a crackling phone line from a war zone, or a fellow diplomat that I'm trying to put the squeeze on. But nothing persuades Declan. And when this little showdown has abated, and he gives up – which after nine or ten exchanges he does, usually – he invariably storms off in a huff, usually grumbling some version of, "Ukraine, Ukraine, Ukraine!" He's had it up to here with Ukraine.

Now, the juggling act that I am attempting pales compared to that faced by moms who are raising kids alone; or who struggle to provide for families on a minimum wage that is not a livable wage [Applause]; or who risk losing their jobs if they have to stay home to care for a sick child. But I share these stories because – even with all the support that I am lucky enough to have – the balancing is hard and making that visible might be useful to somebody somewhere.

Of course, it is not just our personal challenges that we must make visible. There are far bigger and more important problems that we have to shine a bright light on – like the dark chapters of our own nation's history.

Let me give you one of the most chilling examples. Between 1877 and 1950, nearly 4,000 African Americans were lynched in 12 Southern states, according to a remarkable report released this year by the Equal Justice Initiative. In 1916, a man named Jeff Brown was lynched in Mississippi for accidentally bumping into a white girl while running to catch a train. In 1940, Jessie Thorton was lynched in Alabama for failing to address a white police officer as "Mister." Many of the lynchings were public spectacles, advertised in advance in newspapers. Vendors hawked popcorn and lemonade. Families had photos taken by the bodies of the victims as souvenirs. In 1893, 10,000 people came to watch the lynching of Henry Smith in Paris, Texas.

One of the most alarming findings of the Equal Justice Initiative report is that there are virtually no public memorials to these killings. South Carolina, which witnessed 164 lynchings during this period, has only a few public markers of where they occurred. But the state has at least 170 memorials to Confederate soldiers of the Civil War.

Fifty years after Selma, and 150 after the end of the Civil War – at a time where there remains

such enduring racial inequalities – these sites should not be invisible. We have to stop looking past them. Which is why finding ways to mark more of these sites – as the Equal Justice Initiative plans to do – is such an essential step [Applause].

To memorialize the Holocaust – the most unspeakable atrocity of the 20th century – a German artist named Gunther Denmig began installing what he called stolperstein, or stumbling stones. He placed the tiny, four-inch cubes – which simply note the name, date of birth and, when known, the death of an individual victim – in the ground outside the Holocaust victim's former home. He started in Cologne, Germany, in 1992, with 250 little stones. Since then, Denmig has laid some 48,000 stolperstein in 18 countries. Any of you who have stumbled upon one knows the impact. The stone telescopes history. In humanizing a single victim – you feel it, if only for a minute, the incomprehensible loss of six million people.

Of course, we cannot limit ourselves to surfacing the dark parts of our past; we must do the same right here in the present. Consider the enduring problem of sexual violence on college campuses [Applause], only a tiny fraction of which is reported by victims. In spite of this problem, we have too often seen colleges and universities falling short of adequately investigating and disciplining perpetrators, and of protecting victims.

And yet – even as we are aware of the seriousness of this problem, it takes a woman picking up a mattress and carrying it around her campus to make people really see it [Applause]. A mattress that a good number of the women in this graduating class have helped carry. And men from Columbia, too.

This challenge of rendering the invisible visible is one I face every day at the United Nations, where the people most directly affected by the policies discussed are often far removed from sight and mind. We talk so often in terms of thousands or even millions of people that it's easy to lose a sense of what one person is – and why even a single human being's dignity is so important. So, wherever possible, the United States tries to bring those voices into the debate as a way of sharpening understanding of the human consequences of what can otherwise feel like abstract challenges.

Last September, as the Ebola outbreak was spreading exponentially in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, the most dire evidence-based projections suggested more than a million people would be infected if the international community failed to mount a swift and massive response. Yet most countries were doing far too little to stop the outbreak. Worse, several countries in the region were sealing their borders out of fear, preventing crucial aid from reaching those in need.

So the United States convened the first-ever emergency meeting of the UN Security Council on a public health crisis – and instead of simply having UN officials present statistics and charts, we arranged for a video link from the Security Council to the capital of Liberia, where a 38-year-old healthcare worker named Jackson Naimah was asked to describe what was happening in his country. Jackson, who was working at Médecins Sans Frontières Ebola clinic, described people dying outside the gates because the clinic was overflowing and had run out of beds to take more patients. He described having to turn away a boy with all the

symptoms of the virus, whose father had died a week earlier, and he recalled thinking, "This boy is going to take a taxi, and he is going to go home to his family, and he will infect them." He told the diplomats crammed into the UN chamber: "I feel that the future of my country is hanging in the balance. If the international community does not stand up, we will all be wiped out."

As Jackson spoke, you could hear a pin drop in the Security Council. People who had not really seen Ebola up to that time were forced to grapple with its monstrous efficiency. And you could feel the momentum in the room shift as, one by one, countries spoke with a greater sense of urgency about the need to stand up rather than stand by.

Today, we haven't just bent the curve of the epidemic, we are closing in on ending it [Applause]. And we try, we try, to seize every chance we have to bring voices like Jackson's into discussions at the United Nations. And, when a conflict or a prison cell or some other barrier prevents these individuals from speaking for themselves, we try to describe their experiences in a way that others will hear.

Now, I have talked about what it will mean to secure lasting equality – slaying the bats in our bat caves; taking on the struggles of others seeking dignity; and using a range of means – from mattresses to human contact – to make the invisible visible.

This brings me to my last point, and arguably the simplest. True equality is going to require showing – not telling, but showing – people that change is possible.

Let me tell you what other countries see today when they look at the United States delegation to the UN. They see a woman Permanent Representative – one of only 37 women permanent representatives out of 193 ambassadors to the UN – they also see two other women Ambassadors for the United States, Michele Sison and Isobel Coleman, all three of us working mothers. And when the General Assembly is held each September, the world sees the U.S. delegation led by an African-American man – our President. What we look like to the world matters. Because we know, empirically, that people's belief systems and biases can be shifted dramatically by what they see.

In West Bengal, India, for example, a political affirmative action program reserved spots for women in village governments. Within seven years, a study found, men's individual biases against the capacity of women leaders almost fully disappeared; and women have become more likely to run for – and win – local seats. Parents have developed higher aspirations for their daughters, and girls' expectations have increased for themselves.

I can tell you it's true personally, as well. As a girl growing up in Ireland – where my family lived until I was nine – I watched my mother attend medical school while playing world-class squash and caring for me and my kid brother. I also learned from the stories my mother and father, Dr. Vera Delaney and Edmund Bourke – both kidney doctors – brought home about their patients. I loved the way they saw their patients not as a spreadsheet of symptoms and diseases, but as individuals. And I learned from the way they knew how to listen to them, and glean the details that others may have missed.

There is no question in my mind that growing up with my mother as my model gave me the confidence – or the hubris – to think that covering the women's volleyball team for my college newspaper was experience enough to send me to the Balkans to become a war correspondent. Thanks, Mom [Laughter]. And there's no question that I took from both my parents that – in work, in friendship, in love – we must understand where people around us are coming from, what motivates them, what saddens them, what inspires them, and how they got where they are.

And it's worth remembering to the extent to which we – any of us here – see the world the way we do; make it to the heights we reach; and experience days of such great pride like this one – it's worth remembering that all of that starts with the people we saw first. When you hug them after this, thank them for that. And you can give them a round of applause now, too [Applause].

As I'm wrapping up, I want to leave you with one last image. As you know, there are few places where women and girls have endured greater hardship – or been less visible – than in Afghanistan. Under Taliban rule, women couldn't even walk outside without a male relative and a burqa. No girls were allowed to go to school, and no women served in positions of authority. Today, notwithstanding the persistence of the Taliban and its monstrous attacks against civilians, more than three million Afghan girls are in school. Women hold 28 percent of seats in Afghanistan's Parliament – a higher proportion, I would note, than in the United States Congress [Applause].

And today, women can not only walk outside without a man or a burqa, but members of Afghanistan's Women's National Cycling Team are racing down the country's roads on their bikes. Team members are pinched for resources, but big on courage. Some drivers yell at them and threaten them, but they ride on. One day, a man on a motorcycle reached out and tried to grab at the captain, causing her to crash and hurt her back. But today she is back on her bike, leading more than 40 other women training with the team.

One of the team members, Malika Yousufi, not only wants to become the first Afghan woman – but the first woman, period – to compete in the Tour de France. She told a reporter, "Nothing will stop us."

Now, imagine just for a minute, what it must feel like to be a little girl from a rural town in Afghanistan – and to suddenly see those 40 women, in a single file, flying down the road. To see something for the first time that you couldn't have believed possible. Think about where your mind would go – about the shockwave that image would send through your system. Think what it would allow you to believe possible. You would never be able to think the same way again.

That impact – that is what equality is all about. It is a memorial that forces us to see a dark part of our history. A woman who picks up a mattress to show us a problem we are overlooking. A woman or girl in a classroom, or on a bike, or in the water* – clearing a path that otherwise would have seemed closed or unimaginable.

Now it's your turn to climb on the bike. As Malika said, nothing can stop you. What will you make people see?

Thank you, and congratulations again, Barnard Class of 2015!

* Ambassador Power gestured to renowned long distance swimmer Diana Nyad, who was in the audience as a 2015 recipient of the Barnard Medal of Distinction.

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