

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

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As, Elwyn Brooks White once said, “I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve the world and a desire to enjoy the world. This makes it hard to plan the day.” For anyone in our field, I think we go through a similarly difficult daily choice. We engage American Studies with this concept that life is complicated. Economic stratification, race, gender, regional affiliation, matters of personal taste, and popular culture all further complicate the narratives we write and create a myriad of paradoxes. Ultimately, most of the research we grapple with came to only the conclusion that the subject at hand was complicated. What we do have control over is how this paradox is viewed. We can choose to bite our nails and cringe at the uncertainty, at the pain and the heartache of history or we can choose to boldly move forward, to surround ourselves with knowledge, to accept uncertainly and to push forward against the grain for a better future.

While we question, we must laugh. Learn to love the past for it emboldens us, it asks us to challenge the status quo and hopefully provides us with a job someday. Admittedly, our subject matters are often morose. We study issues of oppression, the perils of neoliberalism, discrimination, deaths, the disappeared, in order to help give voice to the maligned, the silenced and the forgotten. We also discuss Disneyland, orange groves, jazz, Kool-Aid and highly muscled men of physique pictorials. American Studies sheds light on the beautifully complicated quilt of American life. It has been truly an honor to study such a broad and beautiful field at California State University, Fullerton. In closing, Muhammad Ali once said, “If they can make penicillin out of moldy bread, they can sure make something out of you” so dream big, Class of 2011! Thank you so much for the wonderful ride.