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Who Are You, Class of 2013

Michelle Rahman

University of Richmond, mrahman@richmond.edu

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Class of 2013

Since I've had the pleasure of welcoming you previously, I am here today to introduce you to our University President, our Law School Dean, our faculty and most importantly, to each other. I am also here, according to our school tradition, to issue you a challenge. Each of you – the 147 who make up the Class of 2013 – has a unique story. Each of you is sitting here because of the faith of the faculty that you “measure up” to those who have gone before you. We know that each of you is fully capable of being a star in life, in your law school and in the profession. Your challenge will shortly become apparent.

***Each* of you sitting out there has won a seat despite the stiff competition of the 2105 applicants this year applying from**

41 foreign countries (compared to only 14 last year).

Graduates of 499 colleges and universities applied to the law school this year, and again this year, following a trend of the last several years, we admitted a smaller percentage of those who applied – only admitting 26% of those applicants.

Fourteen of you have earned graduate degrees. Amongst the 67 universities represented in your class three of you are from the University of Michigan, 3 from the University of Florida, 5 from Wake Forest, 2 from Arizona State, 8 from UNCCH, 11 are Hokies. Sixty-nine percent of you have been out of school for at least one year and one of you graduated in 1987. You are a singularly smart group: of the 462,671 test takers nationally, your class LSAT median is in the top 14% - 162. Your median GPA is 3.47. The top quarter of your class has a score of 163 (the top 12% of test takers nationwide) and UGPA of 3.63; the bottom quartile of your

class is in the top 22% of test takers at 159. Among your classmates are those who speak a total of 17 foreign languages: French, German, Russian, Tajek, Spanish, Hebrew, Telugu, Hindi, Italian, Portuguese, Korean, Urdu, Gujerati, German, Twi, Arabic and Somali.

Nearly half of you are from out of state with 20 states and the District of Columbia represented crossing this great land from Arizona to Massachusetts. One of you is a citizen of Colombia, another of India and I'm sure I show no bias when I enthusiastically tell you that one of you is a citizen of my own home country – Canada. You've majored in 31 different disciplines – 36 of you being political science majors – the highest number. History runs a distant second. Forty-five of you achieved Latin Honors – 21 of you graduating Magna, 2 Summa, and 21 Cum Laude. Many of

you graduated with distinction and High Honors. Sixty-five graduated with a GPA of 3.5 or above. Three of you were inducted into Phi Beta Kappa and 4 of you into ODK.

Fourteen of you are married and 5 of you have children – or did at the time of your application. A couple of you were just married this summer. One of you has earned a foreign law degree. Many, many of you have been inspired to become lawyers by family who are members of the legal profession including one of you whose mother and father are alumni of this law school and whose brother *will be* in 2012.

Seven of you have fathers, uncles, and a mother who are also alumni. You might like to meet the son of a former clerk to Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglass who's in your class. Five of you are Eagle Scouts, one a Life Scout and one has won the coveted Girl Scout Gold Award. Twelve of you are John Marshall Scholars. Entering the law school with

you today are 13 students who've transferred here from other law schools and 1 exchange student from Italy.

As *you* searched web sites, got suggestions from your pre law advisors, lawyers, friends, family, and visited law schools to determine where to go to law school, we also searched for *you* – travelling 55,633 miles by land and air to find, and recruit you, to join our law school family.

Many of you have already faced adversity – fought in wars, grew up in poverty, were homeless – fought personal demons, near fatal illnesses and other curve balls thrown at you by life. One of you suffered over 60 broken bones by his 18th birthday. While each of you is diverse in your own way, 18% of your classmates are students of color. The youngest member of this class is 21 and the eldest is 45.

As you know, we have had a long journey together, you and I. Like you, I've spent the last year thinking about who would be in the class of 2013 but *unlike* you I already know the stories that make up your class of 147 souls. As I went back and reread your files again, my initial thoughts that you, the class of 2013, are accomplished in so many ways other than your academic credentials was reaffirmed. You come from a variety of backgrounds – big cities, small towns, farming communities. Several of you are the first in your family to graduate from college. You come from privileged backgrounds and from poverty. One of you wrote, “I have been lucky in my education, leaving home at the age of 16 to attend a better school because someone recognized that my potential was greater than my resources”; another wrote “I carry the memory of what it is like to struggle simply to

survive – of how difficult it is to raise a child without daycare or health insurance and how little options are available to those with the desire to change their lives. I want to show people that a person’s station in life is not indicative of their abilities or their worth.” Yet another wrote, “I need to succeed because I have the strength and patience to sort grapes nine hours a day”. Two of you have been police officers in Florida, winning awards while in public service. You’d better be careful, class of 2013, one of these individuals has just left his job as a Police Captain for the State of Florida, Division of Alcoholic Beverages and Tobacco and spent 2 years as a detective. I am looking forward to two of you meeting each other – one of you has a Masters of Chemistry and the other a Masters in Biomedical Engineering. I may be slightly more anxious to meet the former as he has worked on a range of diseases such as

Alzheimer's, stroke, depression, obsessive compulsive disorder and obesity. We almost denied him admission to allow him to continue to work on a "diet pill" but he's already published two articles in scientific literature on his research projects, is co-inventor on two patents for his research, and the Intellectual Property faculty leaned on me. Another of you was employed until recently as a Consular Associate at the US Embassy in Romania and a translator in Tajikistan; this new student holds a degree as "jurist" and is one of 5 selectees for the Eurasian Undergraduate Exchange Program Fellowship funded by the Dept. of State. I'm looking forward to getting to know the young woman amongst you whose family fled Mogadishu as refugees when she was in kindergarten. Her mother, a single mother of 9, founded an NGO called Humanitarian and her grandfather was the former Somali Ambassador to the UN. Another of

you has coauthored a research article on Human Rights and International Law that has been accepted for publication at UC Berkeley School of Law. Several of you worked on Capitol Hill and many on political campaigns. One of you drafted a piece of legislation that passed the House by a vote of 428 to 4 which actually improves the relationship between government and private enterprise. Translating in a law firm for Chinese and French-speaking clients occupied the time of one of your classmates and one of you worked as a carpenter for 10 years. Perhaps you could find out who in your class has been employed as an electrical engineer working on an avionics design team for the first test flight for the Constellation program, a launch system for human space flight being developed to replace the aging Space Shuttle fleet. Or, look for the classmate who has sailed aboard various vessels including an oil tanker in the Gulf of

Mexico, containerships to Asia and Alaska as well as a research vessel operating off the coasts of Australia and Guam. One of your classmates, who has a US Coast Guard License for unlimited tonnage, oversaw new construction of oil rigs and conducted hull and machinery surveys on supply boats, dredges and oil rigs in Texas and Singapore.

Interesting folks in your class – how lucky you are to meet them since they are about to become your new, life-long best friends.

Along with interesting careers, you are a well travelled group dedicated to seeing the world and improving it.

You've lived and studied abroad, exploring and using your talents. One of the most committed classes in recent times, each of you has performed public service giving from the heart thousands of hours of your time to benefit others.

You've done countless mission trips and performed as good will ambassadors all over the world. Several of you are trained EMTs and give many, many hours of service. You believe in service above self and volunteer your time in soup kitchens, work in food banks, man crisis lines, tutor; raise countless dollars to go to dozens of charities and good works; run races and dance in marathons in the name of eradicating diseases. One of you collected and transported 1500 pounds of clothing and raised \$2500 for children in Nepal; another is heavily involved with a charity that empowers girls and young women in the southern Indian states. Three of you have been part of Americorps. A woman in your class cycled from New Hampshire to Vancouver, British Columbia to raise money and awareness for affordable housing efforts as well as aiding in the distribution of \$96,000 in grants to multiple affordable

housing organizations. You volunteer in neonatal intensive care wards, domestic violence shelters, coach and work with underprivileged children, teach English as a second language to immigrants and their children. You truly “give back”. The depth of your involvement, your commitment to the world around you, is inspirational. You extend a helping hand wherever you see a need and do not restrict your efforts only to your own country and its citizens. You clearly believe in the American Dream and seek to take that dream to the world at large. Our world is now, and will continue to be in the future, a better place because of your contributions.

Your interests and talents are varied and you are accomplished in so many areas. You are artists, singers, dancers and play a wide variety of musical instruments – several of you at the professional level - touring the world

and performing. You are published poets and authors; members of choirs and orchestras. A woman in your class has created and produced a number of short films some of which have been submitted to film festivals. One of you has his private pilot's license and one of you wanted to be a rock star – the SBA will be looking for *your* talents since you are also a professional DJ.

Albeit your altruistic bent, you and your classmates know how to have fun. One of you was Homecoming King and there is hardly a sport not represented in your class. Serious athletes are amongst you – even a woman who played varsity ice hockey. One of you tackled Mt. Everest and climbed to 19,000 feet; one of you has completed 7 full and 10 half marathons. Division 1 sports of all kinds, you are tennis

stars, synchronized swimmers, divers, soccer players, football – you name it, you play it.

Once more this year, I've been gratified to so often see words such as integrity, commitment, honesty, public service, ethics and loyalty permeate your narrative statements. I'm pleased to see that the reason so many of you have chosen to go to law school remains the selfless desire to contribute to making our world a better place to be...to make a difference...to contribute to mankind. One of you wrote, "I want to make the law accessible to the underprivileged and marginalized, and to be an advocate for those who would, otherwise, be without a voice".

Someone told me that life is a contact sport and so many of you are survivors of life's more difficult times yet you

endure and strive to be better. You don't give up; you are winners.

I began by issuing you a challenge. I suspect by now you've figured out the challenge: The challenge is for you to find out who is who. I challenge you to use the next three years to discover the story of that future best friend sitting beside you today – or at the end of your row – as there will be a quiz in 3 short years as you graduate and leave us to take your place in the noble legal profession. I wish you good luck and good fun as you embark on the wonderful adventure before you.