

Talking on the World's Inequities

I've been waiting more than 30 years to say this: "Dad, I always told you I'd come back and get my degree." I want to thank Harvard for this timely honor. I'll be changing my job next year, and it will be nice to finally have a college degree on my resume.

What I remember above all about Harvard was being in the midst of so much energy and intelligence. It was an amazing privilege. But taking a serious look back, I do have on big regret. I left Harvard with no real awareness of the awful inequities in the world-the appalling disparities of health, and wealth and opportunity that condemn millions of people to lives of despair.

All of us here in this Yard, at one time or another, have seen human tragedies that broke our hearts, and yet we did nothing-not because we didn't care, but because we didn't know what to do. If we had known how to help, we would have acted. The barrier to change is not too little caring; it is too much complexity.

And how you do that is a complex question still, I'm optimistic. Yes, inequity has been with us forever, but the new tools we have to cut through complexity have not been with us forever. The defining and ongoing innovations of this age-biotechnology, the computer, the Internet-give us a chance we've never had before to end extreme poverty and end death from preventable disease.