

# **Skidmore College's 100<sup>th</sup> Commencement**

## **May 21, 2011**

### **Address by Colin Greene**

Neal Postman once said that children are the message we will send to a time we will never see. As educators, I often wonder, what message will we send? My grandmother often told me that education is an open door to opportunity. In like manner, I have asked myself over and over again, what opportunities will we create? Engraved in a concrete block in the old primary school that I attended is the unauthorized inscription that simply says "Knowledge is power."

My many interactions have led me to a profound self-realization that since education is such an important entity, then education cannot be a privilege. Education must be a fundamental right of every child, everywhere in the world. My contribution towards making this a reality has brought me here today. My name is Colin Everton Greene, and I am a teacher.

Why teach, some may ask. Well, I teach because I agree with Shirley Hufstadler when she said, "The role of the teacher remains the highest calling of a free people. To the teacher, not just America, but the world entrusts her most precious resource, her children; and asks that they be prepared, in all their glorious diversity, to face the rigors of individual participation in a democratic society." To many of us, the greatest satisfaction derived from teaching is the sense that we are doing important work for the common good.

Today, the type of quality education that men like myself promote is based on what UNESCO's Delors Report refers to as "the four pillars of education." It talks about learning to know, and included in this idea of learning to know is the concept of learning to learn—and that, for everyone, the ability to be a life-long learner is critical. We also embrace the second pillar, which speaks about learning to do and fosters the development of skills that are useful. But even more importantly each of us as members of the human race must understand that our education must embrace the third pillar, of learning to be. It captures the idea that no two human beings are alike, but we are unique, special in our own way. Each of us has a common place and a contribution to make—we are equal in worth if not in status. And today I want to encourage you that the fourth pillar is perhaps the most important—learning to live together. That is what our education should help us to do, regardless of differences of race and language, religion or cultural practices. If we teach our children to be tolerant, to be respectful, to be courteous, and to be generous, we would be contributing to making this world a little better place.

Our education should light a fire within us. I grew up in the small twin-island state of Antigua and Barbuda. Together the two islands are just about 170 square miles, in the heart of the Caribbean. We have a population of just about 80,000 people, and oftentimes we are probably more famous for our uniqueness in that we have 365 beaches—one for every day of the year. But what was most valuable to our parents was not the uniqueness of our beaches, nor the potential value of our real estate; what was most important to them was that their children would receive a quality education. I received my early education in a small open-hall room loaned to the government by the church. I am not certain we had good desks and chairs, and I am not certain we had good books; I know that we did not have good space; but one thing we did have was good teachers, and for that I am eternally grateful. People like myself benefited from the sacrifice made by those who went before me, and I can attempt to repay that debt by ensuring that others have the same opportunity.

Stories sometimes have the strangest ways of developing a most unusual plot. A relationship with Skidmore College is such an unusual plot. How does a boy from a sunny Caribbean island come to be associated with the noted snow of Skidmore College and Saratoga Springs? It was my thirst for knowledge and my search for an education that would be tailored to the individual needs that brought me to Skidmore and to the University Without Walls. I want to thank Skidmore for that experience and for the vision that it has created. Even more so, I wish to celebrate today the opportunities that this relationship

has made into realities. I want to celebrate the notion that simple ideas can blossom into something wonderful. I remember speaking to Corky Reinhart about Skidmore College forming a relationship with teachers in my own country. And about how I would count it a success if 10 individuals would be able to access quality higher education at a reasonable cost and easily accessible. I am proud to tell you that we have not only 10, but that partnership has seen over 60 graduates of Skidmore College (UWW) in a small island that had no idea where Saratoga Springs was.

The uniqueness of my experience showed that knowledge had no boundaries. I have learned from professors that I am yet to meet—like Barbara Henriques, who taught me education. From those like Sheldon Solomon, who wasn't what I expected, but whose brilliance was remarkable. From Joyce Rubin, a simple conversation grew into a teacher-exchange program that not only exposed the different dimensions of teaching but shared the cultural experience that will long be remembered by the Antiguan teachers and the many students from Skidmore College who participated in that program. I would like to thank those who guided others in lighting that fire of a quality education. I will long remember and be grateful to individuals like Deborah Meyers from the UWW program, people like Kenn Klotz, Chris Whann, Jeff Seagrave, Mary Cogan, and Mary Moore, Phylise Banner, and all those who assisted the program in some way or the other. I wish to thank the faculty and the board of trustees of Skidmore College for the honor that they have bestowed on me.

Today I am humbled by that honor. But it is also an honor that I share with my mother, who made sacrifices for me. It is an honor that I share in the memory of my father, who understood that the simple things like fathers sharing time with their sons are important. It is an honor that I share in the memory of my grandmother, who was visionary in many ways, yet never had the opportunity to shine. It is an honor that I share with my teachers, who taught me and exercised patience with a boy whose creativity sometimes led to mischief and rebellion that they didn't always understand. It is an honor that I share with my colleagues of the Antigua and Barbuda Union of Teachers, the Caribbean Union of Teachers, and Education International, who gave me an opportunity to join the struggle for a better way of life for teachers everywhere and a quality education for children the world over. It is an honor that I share with my wife, a co-educator and a wonderful support and inspiration. It is an honor that I hope will resonate in my children—the simple understanding that “a man makes a living by what he gets but a life by what he gives.” I hope that they will understand that their father was a teacher who gave of himself so that they too could have the right to an education and to choose how they will use it.

Tomorrow brings a brand new day, but today we remain grateful for the tender mercies of life and every good thing we have received. All of us here present today have received an education from one of the finest education institutions in the world. Let us use it to contribute to the greater good, to the enrichment of life, to the appreciation of all that is wholesome. For this is what education should be about.

Thank you very much for a wonderful opportunity. Rest assured I will not close the door behind me.