In 1919, the editor of the Kansas City Star told a young writer by the name of Walt Disney that he "lacked imagination and had no good ideas."

His namesake company that he would later launch is now one of the largest multi-media conglomerates in the world. For many across the globe, Disney defines creativity and good ideas.

Bernie Marcus and Arthur Blank were fired from "Handy Dan" home-improvement store during a corporate takeover.

They decided to start their own chain of similar stores called Home Depot.

Today there are over 100 stores with more than $2.7 billion in annual sales.

As for Handy Dan? It shut its doors in 1989.

J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* was turned down by a dozen publishers. When it was finally published, she was advised to keep her day job because there, "was no money in children's books."

These are popular and time-tested stories about triumph over challenge. It is one that exists all around us. And I suspect it is one that many of you know all too well.

Today we will award one of the University’s Honorary Doctorates to Dr. Harrison Wilson. It is a degree delayed by injustice. He knows intimately what it means to overcome barriers.

In 1946 as a 21 year-old WWII veteran he applied for admission to the University at a time in our history of too much ignorance and scorn he was denied admittance because of the color of his skin.

But refusing to settle for a place in society defined by the ignorance of others, Dr. Wilson forged his own path. He graduated from Kentucky State University with honors and went on to complete graduate work.

We recognize him today for his resilience and distinguished career, including 22 years as president of Norfolk State University.

Following a path that was not afforded to Dr. Wilson, his grandson will graduate this morning from UK with a Master's degree in History.

These are not stories of failure.

These heroes did not give in to resentment and bitterness. Nor pass it on to another generation.

They refused to be defined by these challenges. They are defined by how they rose to meet them.
Their stories are of opportunity ... Stories of strength and about the desire to learn ... stories about blazing your own path to progress even while those around you throw down the obstacles of cynicism and doubt.

As graduates, perhaps you know this story well.

[Graduate Ceremony: As graduate students you have a deep understanding. Especially the doctoral recipients who endured many drafts of your dissertation, ran -- and reran -- countless experiments, honed clinical skills and practiced your artistic craft to satisfy the high expectations of your doctoral committees.]

[Undergraduate ceremonies: You tackled trials over the last several years. You may have fallen short on a test, lost a friend, missed an assignment, lost an opportunity to lead an organization.]

But you are here because you learned from those challenges. You persisted in your pursuit of excellence with a greater knowledge of what is ahead.

Winston Churchill said, "Success is not final. Failure is not final. It is the courage to continue that counts."

The success you find today is laudable. In many ways, it is extraordinary ... but it is not final.

Challenges await you beyond these doors. Professional, personal and societal, that you will have to overcome.

The courage championed by Winston Churchill is found in your strength of character, your self-awareness and a commitment to life-long learning. We know and we know you.

With your character, you will overcome.

With your awareness, you will forge your unique path.

With your thirst for learning, you will improve upon your mistakes.

Your degree provides the practical talents you will need. Your experiences while in college - both academic and social - have prepared you for what is ahead.

However, at the University of Kentucky, we strived to prepare you for more than a career – our goal was to prepare you for life.

No one in this arena expects you to sell millions of books or transform a humble mouse named Mikey or Minnie into a global icon ... You may expect it of yourself. And we are here to encourage you to dream bigger dreams.

But what we do expect is that you seek a life of meaning and purpose.

We ask – as Theodore Roosevelt said -- that you stay in the arena. We ask that you do something with your degree worthy of the respect of others.
And we know you will.

On behalf of the University of Kentucky, our Board of Trustees, faculty, staff and the students that will soon follow you ... 

I'm deeply honored to congratulate you as the class of 2014; and as the next generation in which we share an enduring faith and immense pride.

Thank you.