

1973 COMMENCEMENT

The University of Georgia
Sanford Stadium, Athens, Georgia

Address by
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Class of 1936, President
The University of Georgia Alumni Society

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Graduation Day at the University of Georgia is a joyful time. Thank you for the opportunity to share the occasion. I am flattered by the honor and humbled by the challenge. Congratulations to each of you. May the happiness and the gratification of accomplishment you experience today extend throughout your life.

As you leave the campus to employ the knowledge and skills you have acquired here, augmented by your natural talents, you are going out into "the best of all possible worlds." Yet, you are facing new realities and new problems that are man-made--that are, in fact, by-products of our spirited technological and scientific progress.

Witness, for example, the calamitous effects of pollution, the failure of our energy resources, the dangers of overpopulation, the specter of inflation, the increased crime in the streets, and the widespread disrespect for the law. Here is a peculiar dilemma--the dream of a viable society endlessly increasing its standard of living and exercising leadership in every field of endeavor in danger of fading away as a consequence of our own excesses.

Perhaps, as others have suggested, the modern world faces more crises of greater peril in more areas of the earth than ever before in history. Be that as it may, today's educated young people

can be equal to this awesome challenge. Today's perils can be transformed into tomorrow's progress by a generation that refuses to settle for anything less.

I am not aware of a universal law by which it is fore-ordained that any problem facing mankind shall defy solution. To the contrary, the history of the twentieth century thus far has been a spectacular record of man's ability to master those problems to which he is willing to apply his full resources.

Our artifacts are, in truth, extensions of the human body. Transportation artifacts extend our range, even to giving us wings; communication artifacts extend our voices; and data-storing artifacts extend our brains.

Developments in communication assure that a successful "mouse trap" will find world-wide application in a short period. Simultaneously, remembering the second Newtonian law of motion-- that every action has an equal and opposite reaction--we can predict that inevitably future innovations will bring more disruptions.

Previous generations, by their inspiration and effort, made this a better world, but they made mistakes, just as you will make mistakes. To them the world was huge and endlessly bountiful. They did not foresee that the technology they viewed with so much pride could bring with it so much tension, and indeed, life-endangering pitfalls, nor that programs meant to be of benefit would spawn

unexpected problems.

Yes, from time to time, today's adult generation has miscalculated; it has blundered on more occasions than one; it has erred in foresight and in judgment; it may not yet have come to grips with the great issues of our time.

There is one consolation, however: the shortcomings of my generation need not be repeated by those of you who will soon move into positions of leadership.

To retain and enjoy our advantages, we must discover ways to eliminate their threatening aspects. As a society, we must be willing to pay the price of revitalization by abandoning customs no longer applicable and accepting changes demanded by the new mobility of people and ideas.

Lamenting too fervently about faults in the play is fruitless: if the script and the acting had reached perfection there would be nothing for you to do. Great men do not denounce or deny what others bring forth as the truth--they offer their own truths.

Most of life is lived by batting averages, not by perfect scores. This dictates a premium on attributes needed to survive errors: to keep playing the game when the odds are against you, to rise above disappointment, after lying awake at night staring at broken hopes and frustrated plans and a future wholly dark, to have the will to get up in the morning and go about life's business with determination.

If we are to work toward the perfection of our spiritual and intellectual universes, we must not concentrate on one aspect of life to the exclusion of others. We must not expend all our energies on the necessities of life or on economic gains, nor can we brush these aside and spend our lives in deep philosophical thought. We must give appropriate emphasis to fairness, charity, sentiment, and spiritual values.

Curb your impatience by looking ahead. In the life of a newly planted sapling, nothing seems to happen the first year, or perhaps the second, but during all this time the tree is working hard to establish its roots. When the roots have pushed into the earth and snuggled close to their sources of nourishment, then the branches lengthen and the leaves multiply and fruit appears. The higher a tree climbs, the greater the weight it must carry, and the deeper its roots must burrow.

The analogy is clear. As you step out of our educational systems into the world and accept your basic human inheritance--the ability to build on whatever was built earlier--you must be contemplating how you will accomplish what you want to do; how you will set those things right that need setting right.

Neither I nor anyone else can tell you what or how to do. We can, however, think together about some practical ideas that may help identify more clearly where you are now. They represent

my efforts to express confidence in your ability to move to the helm of our great country.

It is reasonable to expect you to seek assurance that your lives will have meaning and purpose, that you will count as real persons. Understandably you are different from preceding generations--generations who were go-getters and push-a-headers. Understandably you take for granted many of the comforts and conveniences you enjoy.

Accomplishments that show wholesome results are the key to life's real joys. Competition with others has its place, but to excel yourself time after time offers the assurance of greatest satisfaction.

You may want to be a superior person, an aspiration not only reasonable, but possible. But if you want the glory that comes with superiority, make certain you in reality deserve the glory.

To find a purpose in life worthy of you, one that befits your intellect and skills, make an honest effort. Having a solid purpose, a sense of wanting something to show for your having been here, will unify your mind and provide the drive for accomplishment.

It is wise to have many interests, but choose one that is special. Define it. Make it your main goal. Keep it healthy and thriving by effectively organizing your efforts and using your knowledge, your skills, your talents, and other available resources to attain it.

Exposing one's mind to a great desire is contagious. It gives rise to unknown powers and energies that make even greater attainments possible. A singleness of purpose, without conflicting ambitions, is likely to yield lasting satisfaction.

Form the habit of viewing the world in its vast magnitude and true proportions. Build a mind that thinks big but takes in the small. As you look at the world and see things that need to be done, things that need to be changed, imagine that you are looking through a telescope. Change lenses, one after the other, until you see what needs to be done in your country, your state, your city, your community, your life. Get things in their true perspective, then your interest will lead to action.

Apply what you have learned. Express it in such a way that you and others reap additional benefits. Self-expression, founded upon acquired knowledge, makes the difference between the puppet and the master. Alfred North Whitehead appropriately called it "activity in the presence of knowledge."

It is of small import that you can quote so fluently from Euclid unless you can also apply his principles to build a better bridge or undertake a superior engineering project. To the knowledge you have acquired, add your own perspective, then start to work.

The secret of a person's value to the world is his desire to be productive. The enterprising person works. To him, idleness

is a ludicrous doctrine, unbecoming to men. You cannot learn to drive a car, play a guitar, or program a computer merely by watching others. However humble or however great your job, work to improve your performance steadily. You become skilled with practice and with effort.

The man of quality lifts his head above the crowd to see a horizon fitting his abilities. He encourages his imagination to envision future possibilities and bends his back to the immediate task that will contribute toward their accomplishment.

One of the earliest Greek poets said: "Before the gates of excellence the high gods have placed sweat." People are not stirred to seek excellence by ease or pleasure or any other sugarplum.

True, the computer and automation are eliminating more and more drudgery from our everyday lives. They are fantastically increasing our productive capacities, but we are still confronted with a multitude of tasks that require the priceless ingredients of human logic and sensitivity.

Mere existence has never been a satisfying way of life. Even if we could exist without working, we would not want it so. We would devise work because of its restorative and therapeutic powers.

You and your contemporaries are likely to have more freedom to choose the work you will enjoy and to pursue personal happiness

than those who have gone before you. Providing for your livelihood will require less of your time, so you will have more opportunities for special-interest pursuits.

Economically the outlook is good. The Carnegie Commission on higher education reports that the job outlook in most fields for this year's college graduates is the most encouraging in four years.

Long-range forecasts add to this bright picture. It is predicted that in less than thirty years, in the twenty-first century, the average American will be healthier and wealthier, will live in an urban area and hold a white-collar job. The emphasis will be on services and automation.

Thus, much of your attention will necessarily be centered on the aims, concerns, and ambitions of people. To a large extent, man has achieved his age-old ambition of dominating nature. He has succeeded in altering his world, both externally and internally. His power has become greater than that of any tyrant who ever lived and to an equal degree his responsibilities have grown. Moral behavior of the men who use this power must come from the highest, most ethical motivation and goals. As knowledge increases man's dominion over his environment, his collective behavior must reflect this commitment.

It is with confidence the older generation begins to move over and make room for you, realizing that in the next twenty years you

will become our religious and political leaders, judges, scientists, educators, artists, authors, and protectors of the civil rights of people.

You will set the social standards, heal the sick, care for the disabled, preserve natural resources, and promote civic welfare. Your generation will decide whether nuclear power will spell abundance or desolation.

As you seek to dispel the ignorance, dishonesty, and prejudice you deplore, and shine the light of love and knowledge and the grace of tolerance into dark places, you must do so within the law--which you too hold in your power--and without infringing human liberty--especially your own. Being true to yourself will enable you to become an unrelenting foe of all that in actuality, or in effect, seeks to restrict men's civil liberties.

Regardless of the course on which your new dreams carry us, regardless of the changes you are able to bring about, at least a few constants remain--even in this troubled world. The old virtues that have sustained mankind through centuries of adversity and peril find no less application today.

Honesty, integrity, compassion and love--these are the raw materials from which enduring dreams are made. Such virtues may be old-fashioned, possibly even quaint, but so are beards and unshorn locks, both of which appear to have survived and flourished in spite of time, technology, and stainless steel blades.

I suggest that these virtues hammered out over the centuries on the anvil of human experience are still relevant today. They are worth keeping. They are worth pursuing. They remain the essential foundations for any truly great civilization, for any inspired personal commitment, for any worthwhile dream.

We mass produce almost everything in this country today, but we cannot mass produce character because that is a matter of personal identity. It belongs to those who have found the part they ought to play, who are doing the work for which they are best endowed, who are satisfied that they are filling a vital need, and who are meeting their obligations.

To the University of Georgia Graduating Class of June 1901, the then Chancellor, Walter Barnard Hill, posed these questions-- questions just as penetrating today as they were 72 years ago:

"Will you be mere beneficiaries of this inheritance or contributors to it? Will you be spendthrift heirs of humanity's estate or will you add something worthy to be transmitted to generations to come?"

Hopefully, you will take the positive aspects of man's achievements to date and, with the basic tools you have acquired here at the University of Georgia, build upon them. Adapt, improve, reform, alter, or change their direction, but don't throw them away.

The clarion call sounds loud in the needs of our time. I have faith in you, congratulate you and pray God's rich blessings on you.