

COMMENCEMENT TALK

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN, MAY 1, 1965.

By James B. Reston, Associate Editor, New York Times.

Mr. President, Members of the Class
of 1965, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Making a speech in a stadium is
a little like making love in Grand Central
Station. It can be done, but it's a little
awkward. However, Kenneth Galbraith of Harvard
has a formula that may be useful to you in the
next 15 minutes. He has observed that speakers
are usually so entranced with what they are saying
that it seems a pity to compete with ^{them} by listening.

I like this place. I am a reformed
sports writer from the University of Illinois.
I used to come here in those prehistoric days
of Bob Zuppke and Fielding Yost when the Illini
could beat Michigan occasionally at football. That,
of course, was before we hired the wrong Elliott.

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Graduation is a special moment

in life. It is the instant of maximum freedom. *at least for those few ballouts in the Class of '65 who are not yet married*

Before graduation, there is the discipline of

parents and teachers and the agony of youth: of

not knowing ~~xxxx~~ where you're going ~~xxxx~~ or whose

going with you. After graduation, there is the

discipline of life itself: of love and marriage

and children and work and bosses. But right now

there is a period when you can choose, when the

map lies before you and you face Robert Frost's

intriguing question of the road not taken, and the

road not taken, which, as he says, makes all the

difference.

All anyone can do at such a time

is express his deepest convictions about the

spirit of the age. We are in the midst of a great

transformation of the world. The old empires are

gone and the Motherlands, proud and frustrated,

are trying to adjust politically and psychologically

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to a lesser role. Decisive power has now passed out of Europe to the United States and the Soviet Union, which significantly and not only the strongest but the least experienced of the nations in the conduct of foreign affairs. The new nations are discovering, as you will soon discover, that independence and freedom are not the end of life's problems but merely the beginning, and there is now a new class war developing in the world, between the rich nations and the poor nations. Europe is prosperous but is confusing prosperity with power. What Napoleon prophesied has come to pass: the sleeping giant of China has awakened, and is indeed shaking the world.

At home, we are in the midst of a great social revolution. In your lifetime, the population of the United States has increased by 57,000,000 people, which is more than the popula-

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tion of Britain, or France. We are seeing, too,
a convulsion of the races, and the automation
of our industry, and a migration of our people
off the land and into the cities that makes the
old migrations of the ^{nineteenth century} ~~19th Century~~ seem like a
weekend outing.

The result of all this is that

~~show~~ all the relationships of life are changing:
continent to continent; nation to nation; village
to city; worker to employer; teacher to student;
parent to child; and I'm ~~even~~ told, though I
hope it's not true, ^{even} lover to lover. ~~We are living~~
~~in a strange atmosphere, where men and women need~~
~~and deny faith more than ever before.~~

^{all}
If [^]this is true, it is clear, I

think, that you are going to have to do hard

things with your minds in the next twenty years.

<sup>and piety sermonizing from party middle class
characters is probably all your favorite deal</sup>
Prophecy is a hazardous business [^]-- but we should

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at least be able to see some vague outlines of the terrain ahead, and come up with a few tips for the journey.

It will be a highly interdependent world in which the actions and philosophies of many different peoples will influence our lives: therefore we will have to learn a lot more than we now know about the languages and natures of men and women in other parts of the world.

It will be an increasingly crowded world: therefore the need for privacy, for friendship, for love of family -- for the most intimate things of the human spirit -- will have to be sought and protected even more in your generation than in mine.

It will certainly be a world of high taxation: therefore a life devoted primarily to the acquisition of material things is likely

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to make even less sense in the last quarter
of this century than it did before.

It will be a world of strenuous
intellectual competition for you and even more
for your children: therefore if you want to keep
up rather than giving up, education will have to
be a lifetime process.

Finally, it will, I believe, be
a curious twilight world of neither total war
or peace, of alarms and rebellions and threats
of violence.: therefore, you will need some
patience and perspective, some means of judging
first and last things, and if possible some
saving spirit or belief.

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I have not come here to depress or pity you. In fact, I don't pity you at all. Your freedom of choice is wider than any American generation of this century. Your parents were at your point of life around 1940, when the Second World War was already in progress. Their freedom of choice, therefore, was much more limited. Your grandparents were at your age around 1915, when the First World War was going on. That wasn't very easy either. In fact, you may be the first American generation in a hundred years with no personal memory of either a great war or a great depression, but you do face a new and highly complex set of circumstances which will require greater flexibility of mind.

This is not a theoretical but a highly practical point. You may not want to go to the moon, or even to Washington, which I



sometimes think is the same place, but even to

be a good citizen or a good parent, you will have

to grapple with the problems of your age. A ?

~~This is the time for serious discussion~~

The nature and location of war

are changing. No rational nation can now think

of total war as an instrument of foreign policy.

The destructive consequences of all all-out nuclear

war obviously exceed any rational purpose. At the

same time, there has been no change in the ob-

jectives of the major nations, and these are in

fundamental conflict in many different parts of

the world.

Therefore, the struggle will go

on, probably for the rest of the century and maybe

even for the rest of your lives. But it will go

on with different means and for limited ends --

particularly in the border lands between the

Communist and non-communist worlds along the

probably have to
get up at six
o'clock every morning
and memorize the NYT.

It's a wonder,
every thing's a little
mixed up - with the
hippies opposing the
Pres in Vietnam and
David Lawrence
supporting him - &
L. Alsop on his
way to Saigon to
straighten them all
out

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periphery of the Communist empire from Korea to Iran.

It is fairly obvious, I think, that if the United States succeeds in deterring a major nuclear war, which I am confident it will, but still does not master the art of limited war, which it has not yet done, it will face a terrible dilemma in the event of limited Communist aggression. On the one hand, that aggression, as in Vietnam, will not justify the use of nuclear weapons, but on the other, if the U.S. does not master the art of limited war, it will be faced with the unacceptable choice either of total war or ineffective ~~xxxx~~ resistance. The result of this would clearly be the piecemeal defeat of the Western powers, the paralysis of American diplomacy and a steady disaffection of the neutral powers.

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*limited war, of course, is not
what you mean. It's what gets on in every
college campus at least every 50 years. But*

Learning the conduct of calculated
in a world
limited war, ~~however~~, will not be an easy exercise
for Americans. In the first place, most of these
wars will be fought in terrain unfamiliar and
hostile to our soldiers -- often in areas where
many of our most effective conventional weapons
are not effective at all. Also, it will require
a transformation of popular American attitudes
toward war. There is a curious paradox in the
American character. On the one hand it has a strong
aversion to war, but on the other, once war
has started, it is violently pugnacious. Thus,
many Americans regard bombing for anything but
obvious self-preservation as wicked, while others
regard half-way measures of bombing as timid,
and maybe even foolish.

Accordingly, we are confused and
divided when we use limited but still effective

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power for limited ends. We prefer our more comfortable concepts of either peace or war, and this is precisely what we are not likely to get in the next generation.

The present controversy over policy in Vietnam illustrates the point. I'm glad the university students of this country are getting involved in the argument, even though I've recently been bombarded by students from here and elsewhere for suggesting that some of the recent teach-ins sounded more like demonstrations than debates.

Let me make my point clear. I'm all for demonstrations or debates or protest meetings or anything else except indifference. But what I am trying to say is that this new kind of war confronts us all with the most careful problem of analysis if we are to reach sound

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Judgments about the consequences of action or inaction. Nothing is going to be easier in judging policy in these ~~waxx~~ limited wars than finding fault. There is literally no option open to us in the present mess in Vietnam, for example, that cannot be roundly condemned. The Communists are going to see to it that we are constantly embroiled in highly ambiguous situations, where the arguments are not clear but vague, and any decision is risky.

Students who want to "get out of Vietnam" or "stop the bombing" have every right to shout their views all night orx petition the White House to follow their ideas, but the man who lives there has to take responsibility for the consequences of getting out of Vietnam or stopping the bombing.

The students may be right --

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nobody knows for sure what is the best answer x --
but I do not think it is asking too much to expect
the academic community of the nation to lead the
way toward the kind of mature democratic discussion
we are going to have to develop in order to make
our way through these highly complicated and
delicate questions. It is easy to decide policy
after a Pearl Harbor. But in this present and
coming age there will be many courses, all of them
chancy, all of them debateable, but all requiring
debate of the most serious nature.

We shall not hold Asia with the
over-simplified football stadium mentality that
war is like football -- a clear shot violent clash
ending with the victors pulling down the goal
posts. Wellington said the Battle of Waterloo
was won on the playing fields of England. We
could load the Battle of Asia with the mentality

of the football fields of America.

It is my deepest conviction that America will adapt itself to these new problems, partly because she must. She is now the only nation that has the power to defend the great central tradition of the Western World. Many other shares her "love of law and liberty, of mercy and charity, of justice among men and of love and goodwill", but only she has the power equal to the forces that are now challenging these things in the world.

It will not be prudent, I think, to believe that the United States, or the ancient allies of the Atlantic, or rising democratic nations of the Pacific will relieve us of this burden. My impression after a recent journey through these lands is that they are confusing prosperity with power and are not interested

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in reducing their prosperity to increase their power. I hope I am wrong but for the time being at least they seemed to be infected with the very materialism, nationalism and isolationism they have so long charged against us. Maybe this is merely the justice of history: in the 19th century, we developed our continent behind their power; now they are primarily interested in developing the European continent behind ours.

Nevertheless, we are entitled to believe on the basis of the record that this country can hold the defenses of Western civilization until the older allies recover a larger sense of purpose and contribute more to the order of the world. In the time when this class of 1965 was born, the communists were confident that Western Europe would not regain its economic and political equilibrium and would be infested and maybe even captured by Communism. It didn't happen. They were even more confident that they would pick up the bleeding remnants of the old empires in Africa and Asia. That hasn't happened either. In the twenty years of our nation's primary responsibility for leadership in the free world, we have created a new balance of power and retained the peace. This is more than could be said about the period after the first world war -- for

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20 years after that conflict, the world was again
riven by the most vicious war in the history
of the human race.

As a result you are now able to
plan your lives with much more assurance than your
parents' generation, and this raises the question.
What are you going to do with them? On this
Commencement Day, what are you commencing? As
you survey the map, you can take the easy way.
You can choose the broad commercial super-highways
that by-pass everything, including, I sometimes
think, life itself. Or you can take the by-ways,
where your help is needed in the public service,
in teaching, in making our cities and our country
slums a more hopeful place, in any one of the
many jobs that help create the conditions of peace
in the world.

This kind of life will not only help your country but serve yourselves. TheX happiest men and women I know are not those who are providing the material things that clutter up our lives and dull our minds, or even those who escape from the struggle., but those who are engaged in the tasks that nourish and elevate the human spirit.

The problem of many generations has been that the average man and woman felt helpless before the great questions of the day. They did not see how they could do anything practical to help. This is not true today. There is now a vast army of Americans working in the field -- not only soldiers in Vietnam, or Marines in Santo Domingo, not only diplomats and journalists and doctors out in the world, but teachers in the slums, and artisans retraining the aban-

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done generation in Appalachia or bringing clean water to the villages of Africa, x and Latin America.

It is doubt about the usefulness of one's life, and uncertainty of purpose and confusion of values that depresses man -- a feeling of meaninglessness. Seldom, if ever, ~~however,~~ has there been a time when there were so many useful things to be done and so many opportunities for young people to do them.

I wish you well. If I am right in what I see, you are entering, not a period of decline, and dereliction, but one of the great creative epochs of history. And even if I am wrong, an effort to make it so will be worth the struggle.

Finally, a closing word to your parents. These young men and women were conceived

4-6-23^o
Mr. Farrer

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and born in the war. It has been a long and
cannot have been an easy journey from then
until now. But you ~~x~~ have made it through
all those arguments and misunderstandings, all
those worries about cars and money, studies and
love affairs. ~~XXX~~ I congratulate the class of
1965, but I sometimes think it is the parents
who should really get the diplomas on Graduation
Day.