

The original documents are located in Box D27, folder “Commencement Address, Portland, MI, June 11, 1969” of the Ford Congressional Papers: Press Secretary and Speech File at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

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COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS AT PORTLAND HIGH SCHOOL

PORTLAND, MICH., 8 P.M. JUNE 11, 1969

IT IS A PRIVILEGE AND AN HONOR
FOR ME TO BE HERE WITH YOU TONIGHT, SHARING
ONE OF THE MOST PRECIOUS MOMENTS IN YOUR
LIVES.

FOR YOU GRADUATES, TONIGHT MARKS
A BEGINNING AND AN END -- THE END OF YOUR
YEARS AT PORTLAND HIGH SCHOOL / AND THE
BEGINNING OF A WHOLE NEW LIFE FOR YOU.

BECAUSE I AM SO PLEASED AT BEING
ALLOWED TO SHARE THIS BIG MOMENT WITH YOU,
I HAVE DECIDED TO GIVE YOU ALL A GRADUATION
PRESENT. THAT GIFT -- TO YOU ALL -- IS. /
A SHORT COMMENCEMENT SPEECH.

I FIGURE THAT IS THE BEST
GRADUATION PRESENT I COULD GIVE YOU BECAUSE
YOU HAVE ALREADY ATTENDED A BACCALAUREATE



SERVICE AND BEEN PUT THROUGH REHEARSALS AND COUNTLESS OTHER PREPARATIONS.

AS YOU KNOW, JUNE IS A TRADITIONAL MONTH FOR GRADUATION CEREMONIES AND WEDDINGS. DO YOU SUPPOSE THERE'S ANY CONNECTION?

ANYWAY, I RAN ACROSS A LITTLE POEM BY A HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR THE OTHER DAY, AND IT WAS THIS BIT OF VERSE THAT GAVE ME THE IDEA FOR MY COMMENCEMENT GIFT TO YOU. THE POEM GOES LIKE THIS:

"THE MONTH OF JUNE APPROACHES
AND SOON ACROSS THE LAND
THE GRADUATION SPEAKER (Gesture to self)
WILL TELL US, WHERE WE STAND.

ARMAGEDON (Gesture to graduates)
WE STAND AT ARMAGEDDON
IN THE VANGUARD OF THE PRESS
WE'RE STANDING AT THE CROSSROADS
AT THE GATEWAY TO SUCCESS.



WE STAND UPON THE THRESHOLD
OF CAREERS ALL BRIGHTLY LIT
AND IN THE MIDST OF ALL THIS STANDING
WE SIT AND SIT AND SIT."

TONIGHT IS YOUR NIGHT, SO I WANT
YOU TO SIT ONLY FOR AS LONG AS YOU ENJOY IT.

I MENTIONED EARLIER THAT YOU ARE
REALLY JUST BEGINNING YOUR LIVES NOW THAT YOU
HAVE COMPLETED YOUR HIGH SCHOOL STUDIES AND
RECEIVED A DIPLOMA IN RECOGNITION OF YOUR
EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS.

THERE ARE (115) IN YOUR GRADUATING
CLASS. LET'S ^{imagine} ~~SAY~~ THAT 20 YEARS FROM NOW
YOU ALL COME BACK HERE FOR A CLASS REUNION
AND COMPARE NOTES. IF THE STATISTICIANS AND
THEIR PROJECTIONS ARE RIGHT, YOU WILL FIND
THAT IN THAT TWO DECADES YOU AND YOUR
SPOUSES WILL HAVE PRODUCED 345 CHILDREN.
YOU WILL HAVE EARNED \$22,300,000. AND YOU

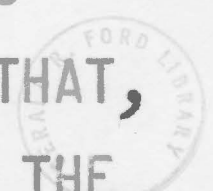
WILL HAVE GONE \$2,875,000 INTO DEBT. THAT'S PERSONAL DEBT, NOT NATIONAL DEBT, BY THE WAY. THIS BEING A NATION ON WHEELS, YOU ALSO WILL HAVE TRADED IN OR SMASHED UP 345 CARS.

// SAY, I HOPE YOU ALL GET BACK HERE FOR THAT 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PORTLAND HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATING CLASS OF 1969.

AND WHEN YOU DO, YOU WILL PROBABLY SAY -- AS YOUR PARENTS ARE SAYING NOW -- WHAT IS THIS YOUNGER GENERATION COMING TO?

I HAVE FOUR CHILDREN, RANGING IN AGE FROM 12 TO 19. ONE OF MY SONS IS IN HIGH SCHOOL AND ~~AN~~ OTHER IN COLLEGE. -- SO I HAVE A PRETTY GOOD IDEA OF WHAT YOU ARE GOING THROUGH...AND WHAT YOUR PARENTS ARE GOING THROUGH.

TRADITIONALLY, A COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER IS SUPPOSED TO OFFER ADVICE TO GRADUATES. I AM GOING TO DO SOME OF THAT, KNOWING FULL WELL THAT THOSE WHO NEED THE



ADVICE THE MOST ARE THE LEAST LIKELY TO
TAKE IT.

WHAT I REALLY HOPE TO DO / IS TO
GIVE ALL OF YOU A LITTLE INSIGHT -- INSIGHT
INTO YOURSELVES AND THIS GREAT COUNTRY WE
CALL AMERICA.

I LOOK AT YOU TONIGHT AND I DO
NOT FEAR FOR THE FUTURE OF AMERICA, DESPITE
DOMESTIC TURMOIL AND OUR INVOLVEMENT IN A
FRUSTRATING AND BLOODY WAR HALFWAY AROUND
THE WORLD.

I LOOK AT YOU AND I SEE WHAT
PERHAPS YOU YOURSELVES DO NOT SEE / THAT
YOU ARE HONEST AND COURAGEOUS AND HUNGRY TO
FIND THE MEANING IN LIFE.

THERE IS MEANING IN LIFE, / AND
YOU WILL SEARCH IT OUT BECAUSE YOU ARE SEEKING
CHALLENGE AND ADVENTURE. ABOVE ALL, YOU WANT
TO MAKE A CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY.

WHAT YOU WANT MOST IS TO FEEL THAT



YOU COUNT / THAT YOU STAND FOR SOMETHING.
YOU WILL ACHIEVE THAT FEELING OF STANDING FOR
SOMETHING ONLY IF YOU BELIEVE IN SOMETHING --
ONLY IF YOU HAVE FAITH. / IN YOURSELF, IN GOD,
IN YOUR FELLOWMEN, AND IN YOUR COUNTRY.

ONE WAY OF ACHIEVING THE FEELING
THAT YOU STAND FOR SOMETHING COMES FROM
SEEING YOURSELF AS PART OF THE GREAT HISTORY
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. YOU ARE
PART OF IT, BECAUSE YOU ARE THE PEOPLE AND THE
AMERICAN PEOPLE ARE AMERICA.

THE LATE PRESIDENT DWIGHT D.
EISENHOWER WAS A GREAT AMERICAN WHO KNEW
WHAT IT MEANT TO BE A DEDICATED CITIZEN OF
THIS WONDERFUL LAND OF OURS, / AND THIS WAS ONE
OF THE REASONS WE LOVED HIM.

HE WAS NOT A SILVER-TONGUED
ORATOR BUT HE SPOKE WORDS OF WISDOM BECAUSE
HE WAS A GOOD MAN AND HE FELT DEEPLY ABOUT
THE AMERICAN PEOPLE AND HIS COUNTRY.

DESPITE RACIAL TURMOIL AND
DISORDERS ON OUR COLLEGE CAMPUSES, PRESIDENT
EISENHOWER TO THE END OF HIS LIFE REMAINED
STEADFAST IN HIS FAITH IN YOUNG AMERICANS
AND IN THE LAND HE LOVED.

THREE YEARS BEFORE HE DIED,
PRESIDENT EISENHOWER GRANTED AN INTERVIEW
TO A WHITE HOUSE CORRESPONDENT. THE OCCASION
WAS HIS 75TH BIRTHDAY. AND HE SAID:

"I STILL HAVE TREMENDOUS CONFIDENCE
AND BELIEF IN MY COUNTRY. NO MATTER WHAT
WE TRY TO DO IN THE WORLD THERE IS ONLY ONE
PLACE FROM WHICH YOU CAN DO IT -- A FIRM,
SOUND BASE. THAT FIRM, SOUND BASE IS THE
STRENGTH OF THE UNITED STATES. AND, THE
UNITED STATES' STRENGTH IS NOT JUST ITS
MILITARY MIGHT. INDEED, IT'S NOT JUST
ITS ECONOMIC MIGHT. IT'S ALSO ITS MORAL
MIGHT."

IKE WENT ON TO SPEAK OF THE GREAT



VIRTUES -- INDIVIDUAL SELF-RELIANCE,
PATRIOTISM AND DEDICATION.

THEN HE SAID: "I'D LIKE TO THINK
WE LIVE BY SUCH WORDS AS DECENCY AND FAIRNESS,
AND THE REALIZATION THAT EACH OF US IS A
MEMBER OF THE PROUDEST NATION IN THE WORLD --
AND THEN ACT THAT WAY."

THESE ARE THE LESSONS WE FIND IN
THE LIVES OF GREAT AMERICANS -- THE LESSONS
WE FIND WOVEN THROUGHOUT THE STRONG FABRIC
OF OUR NATION. LIVE THE GOOD LIFE, THE MORAL
LIFE, THE DECENT LIFE -- AND BE PROUD OF IT.
"BE A MEMBER OF THE PROUDEST NATION IN THE
WORLD -- AND THEN ACT THAT WAY."

LOOK AT OUR HISTORY NOT AS AN
ASSIGNMENT OF SO MANY PAGES TO BE READ IN A
TEXTBOOK BUT AS A VIBRANT, LIVING STORY OF
THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO SPENT MONTHS TOSSING
ABOUT THE ATLANTIC OCEAN IN TINY SAILING
VESSELS TO REACH A STRANGE NEW WORLD, WHO

SURVIVED THREATS OF SHIPWRECK, MUTINY, INDIAN ATTACK, HUNGER AND DISEASE, AND ESTABLISHED A WAY OF LIFE THAT WAS TO CHANGE THE WORLD.

WE HAVE GREAT NEED OF HEROES TODAY TO PUT NEW INSPIRATION AND BACKBONE INTO A COUNTRY GROWN WEARY AND TIRED AND, GOD FORBID, BORED.

WHERE CAN WE FIND SUCH INSPIRATION, THE MORAL COURAGE WE SO DESPERATELY NEED TODAY?

THINK AWHILE ABOUT THE SIMPLE WORDS UTTERED BY FORMER PRESIDENT EISENHOWER JUST BEFORE HE DIED. HE SAID: "I HAVE ALWAYS LOVED MY WIFE. I HAVE ALWAYS LOVED MY FAMILY. I HAVE ALWAYS LOVED MY COUNTRY."

IKE LIVED A GOOD LIFE BECAUSE HE TREASURED MORAL VALUES. BECAUSE HE TREASURED MORAL VALUES, HE HAD MORAL COURAGE. YOU TOO CAN LIVE THE GOOD LIFE. YOU TOO CAN BE COURAGEOUS AND BOLD -- AND COUNT FOR SOMETHING.

WE ARE HISTORICAL HUMAN BEINGS,
WE AMERICANS, EACH OF US WHO IS WORTHY OF THE
NAME. WE SPRING FROM ANCESTORS WHO WERE
HEROES EVERY ONE -- MEN AND WOMEN WHOSE
SPIRITUAL COURAGE AND BACK-BREAKING TOIL
BECAME THE SOUL AND THE SINEW OF A GREAT
NATION. NO RADICAL STUDENT LEADER WHO FEELS
BORED WITH OR GUILTY ABOUT THE LIFE OF
AFFLUENCE BESTOWED UPON HIM CAN DESTROY OUR
SENSE OF PURPOSE.

WHY SHOULD WE DOUBT OURSELVES?
WHY SHOULD ANYONE IN HIS RIGHT MIND QUESTION
THE GREAT VIRTUES PRESIDENT EISENHOWER HELD
DEAR -- DECENCY AND HONOR AND THE LOVE OF A
MAN FOR HIS WIFE AND HIS FAMILY AND HIS
COUNTRY?

WE ARE STRONG HERE IN AMERICA --
STRONG AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS A NATION
BECAUSE OURS IS A GLORIOUS HERITAGE. OUR
NATION PERFORMED MIGHTY ACTS AS A YOUNG



GIANT AND INDEED RECORDED SOME OF ITS
GREATEST FEATS IN JUST THE LAST 30 YEARS.

IT WAS AMERICA THAT WAS STUNG INTO
ACTION AT PEARL HARBOR ON DEC. 7, 1941, AND
THEN FOR FOUR YEARS FOUGHT THE FIRST TRULY
GLOBAL WAR AS NO NATION HAS EVER FOUGHT
BEFORE...AND WON A TREMENDOUS VICTORY.

IT WAS AMERICA THAT WENT TO WORK
THE MINUTE THE GUNS WERE SILENT TO BUILD
PEACE AND TO REBUILD THE WORLD. WE
RESURRECTED EUROPE. WE OCCUPIED JAPAN ONLY
TO MAKE IT A DEMOCRATIC NATION AND ONE OF
THE MOST PROSPEROUS ON EARTH. WE RELUCTANTLY
ACCEPTED THE ROLE OF FREE WORLD LEADER FORCED
ON US BY THE SOVIET UNION AND THE COLD WAR.
WE DEFENDED GREECE AND TURKEY AGAINST
COMMUNIST AGGRESSION AND SUBVERSION AND
SAVED SOUTH KOREA FROM COMMUNIST TAKEOVER.
WE FORMED NATO AND FASHIONED IT INTO A GREAT
MILITARY FORCE TO KEEP THE PEACE IN EUROPE.

WE LIFTED THE BERLIN BLOCKADE AND KEPT A
FREE PEOPLE FREE. NOW WE ARE INVOLVED IN A
TRAGIC CONFLICT IN VIETNAM. ON THIS THE
AMERICAN PEOPLE ARE DIVIDED. BUT WHATEVER
THE POINTS MADE IN DEBATING THE ISSUE, LET
NO MAN DOUBT THAT OUR PURPOSE IS NOBLE. TO
TALK OF ARROGANCE OF AMERICAN POWER IS UTTER
NONSENSE.

OURS IS A GLORIOUS NATION. OURS
IS A GLORIOUS HISTORY -- AND YOU GRADUATES
ARE PART OF IT.

YOU ARE PART OF A NATION
DEDICATED TO FREEDOM AND THE HIGHEST IDEALS
OF MAN, / A NATION THAT IS DETERMINED TO
VANQUISH POVERTY AND HUNGER, / A NATION THAT
IS JUST ONE STEP AWAY FROM PUTTING AMERICAN
EXPLORERS ON THE SURFACE OF THE MOON, / A
NATION THAT HAS RESOLVED TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM
OF RACISM, / A NATION THAT IS EXALTING THE
QUEST FOR HUMAN EXCELLENCE.

LIFE IN AMERICA DOES HAVE MEANING.
IT SPEAKS OF WHAT IS BEST IN MAN.

SO LIVE A LIFE THAT IS MEANINGFUL,
A LIFE THAT IS ROOTED IN THE GREAT VIRTUES
OF FAMILY LOVE AND LOVE FOR YOUR COUNTRY.

MAN WALKS THIS EARTH BUT A BRIEF
SPAN OF YEARS. WHAT MATTERS MOST IS NOT HOW
LONG HE LIVES BUT HOW WELL.

AND HERE NOW IS MY LITTLE BIT OF
ADVICE, A CAPSULE OF WISDOM I HOPE YOU WILL
ACCEPT:

"LIVE AMONG MEN AS IF GOD BEHELD
YOU; SPEAK TO GOD AS IF MEN WERE LISTENING."

AND NOW, GOD BLESS YOU, AND GOOD
LUCK.

-- END --



Office Copy

A COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS BY REP. GERALD R. FORD, R-MICH.
MINORITY LEADER, U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
AT PORTLAND HIGH SCHOOL, PORTLAND, MICHIGAN
8 P.M. WEDNESDAY, JUNE 11, 1969

FOR RELEASE ON DELIVERY

It is a privilege and an honor for me to be here with you tonight, sharing one of the most precious moments in your lives.

For you graduates, tonight marks a beginning and an end -- the end of your years at Portland High School and the beginning of a whole new life for you.

Because I am so pleased at being allowed to share this big moment with you, I have decided to give you all a graduation present. That gift -- to you all -- is...a SHORT commencement speech.

I figure that is the best graduation present I could give you because you have already attended a baccalaureate service and been put through rehearsals and countless other preparations.

As you know, June is a traditional month for graduation ceremonies and weddings. Do you suppose there's any connection?

Anyway, I ran across a little poem by a high school senior the other day, and it was this bit of verse that gave me the idea for my commencement gift to you. The poem goes like this:

"The month of June approaches
And soon across the land
The graduation speaker
Will tell us where we stand.

We stand at Armageddon
In the vanguard of the press
We're standing at the crossroads
At the gateway to success.

We stand upon the threshold
Of careers all brightly lit
And in the midst of all this standing
We sit and sit and sit."

Tonight is your night, so I want you to sit only for as long as you enjoy it.

(more)

I mentioned earlier that you are really just beginning your lives now that you have completed your high school studies and received a diploma in recognition of your educational achievements.

There are 115 in your graduating class. Let's say that 20 years from now you all come back here for a class reunion and compare notes. If the statisticians and their projections are right, you will find that in that two decades you and your spouses will have produced 345 children. You will have earned \$22,300,000. And you will have gone \$2,875,000 into debt. That's personal debt, not national debt, by the way. This being a nation on wheels, you also will have traded in or smashed up 345 cars. Say, I hope you all get back here for that 20th anniversary of the Portland High School graduating class of 1969.

And when you do, you will probably say -- as your parents are saying now -- what is this younger generation coming to?

I have four children, ranging in age from 13 to 19. One of my sons is in high school and the other in college -- so I have a pretty good idea of what you are going through...and what your parents are going through.

Traditionally, a commencement speaker is supposed to offer advice to graduates. I am going to do some of that, knowing full well that those who need the advice the most are the least likely to take it.

What I really hope to do is to give all of you a little insight -- insight into yourselves and this great country we call America.

I look at you tonight and I do not fear for the future of America, despite domestic turmoil and our involvement in a frustrating and bloody war halfway around the world.

I look at you and I see what perhaps you yourselves do not see -- that you are honest and courageous and hungry to find the meaning in life.

There is meaning in life, and you will search it out because you are seeking challenge and adventure. Above all, you want to make a contribution to society.

What you want most is to feel that you count -- that you stand for something. You will achieve that feeling of standing for something only if you believe in something -- only if you have faith...in yourself, in God, in your fellowmen, and in your country.

One way of achieving the feeling that you stand for something comes from seeing yourself as part of the great history of the United States of America.

(more)

You are part of it, because you are the people and the American people are America.

The late President Dwight D. Eisenhower was a great American who knew what it meant to be a dedicated citizen of this wonderful land of ours, and this was one of the reasons we loved him.

He was not a silver-tongued orator but he spoke words of wisdom because he was a good man and he felt deeply about the American people and his country.

Despite racial turmoil and disorders on our college campuses, President Eisenhower to the end of his life remained steadfast in his faith in young Americans and in the land he loved.

Three years before he died, President Eisenhower granted an interview to a White House correspondent. The occasion was his 75th birthday. And he said:

"I still have tremendous confidence and belief in my country. No matter what we try to do in the world there is only one place from which you can do it -- a firm, sound base. That firm, sound base is the strength of the United States. And, the United States' strength is not just its military might. Indeed, it's not just its economic might. It's also its moral might."

Ike went on to speak of the great virtues -- individual self-reliance, patriotism and dedication.

Then he said: "I'd like to think we live by such words as decency and fairness, and the realization that each of us is a member of the proudest nation in the world -- and then act that way."

These are the lessons we find in the lives of great Americans -- the lessons we find woven throughout the strong fabric of our nation. Live the good life, the moral life, the decent life -- and be proud of it. "Be a member of the proudest nation in the world -- and then act that way."

Look at our history not as an assignment of so many pages to be read in a textbook but as a vibrant, living story of the men and women who spent months tossing about on the Atlantic Ocean in tiny sailing vessels to reach a strange New World, who survived threats of shipwreck, mutiny, Indian attack, hunger and disease, and established a way of life that was to change the world.

We have great need of heroes today to put new inspiration and backbone into a country grown weary and tired and, God forbid, bored.

Where can we find such inspiration, the moral courage we so desperately need today?

(more)

Think awhile about the simple words uttered by former President Eisenhower just before he died. He said: "I have always loved my wife. I have always loved my family. I have always loved my country."

Ike lived a good life because he treasured moral values. Because he treasured moral values, he had moral courage. You too can live the good life. You too can be courageous and bold -- and count for something.

We are historical human beings, we Americans, each of us who is worthy of the name. We spring from ancestors who were heroes every one -- men and women whose spiritual courage and back-breaking toil became the soul and the sinew of a great Nation. No radical student leader who feels bored with or guilty about the life of affluence bestowed upon him can destroy our sense of purpose.

Why should we doubt ourselves? Why should anyone in his right mind question the great virtues President Eisenhower held dear -- decency and honor and the love of a man for his wife and his family and his country?

We are strong here in America -- strong as individuals and as a Nation because ours is a glorious heritage. Our Nation performed mighty acts as a young giant and indeed recorded some of its greatest feats in just the last 30 years.

It was America that was stung into action at Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, and then for four years fought the first truly global war as no nation has ever fought before...and won a tremendous victory.

It was America that went to work the minute the guns were silent to build peace and to rebuild the world. We resurrected Europe. We occupied Japan only to make it a democratic nation and one of the most prosperous on earth. We reluctantly accepted the role of Free World leader forced on us by the Soviet Union and the Cold War. We defended Greece and Turkey against Communist aggression and subversion and saved South Korea from Communist takeover. We formed NATO and fashioned it into a great military force to keep the peace in Europe. We lifted the Berlin blockade and kept a free people free. Now we are involved in a tragic conflict in Vietnam. On this the American people are divided. But whatever the points made in debating the issue, let no man doubt that our purpose is noble. To talk of arrogance of American power is utter nonsense.

Ours is a glorious nation. Ours is a glorious history -- and you graduates are part of it.

(more)

You are part of a Nation dedicated to freedom and the highest ideals of man, a Nation that is determined to vanquish poverty and hunger, a Nation that is just one step away from putting American explorers on the surface of the moon, a Nation that has resolved to solve the problem of racism, a Nation that is exalting the quest for human excellence.

Life in America does have meaning. It speaks of what is best in man.

So live a life that is meaningful, a life that is rooted in the great virtues of family love and love for your country.

Man walks this earth but a brief span of years. What matters most is not how long he lives but how well.

And here now is my little bit of advice, a capsule of wisdom I hope you will accept:

"Live among men as if God beheld you; speak to God as if men were listening."

And now, God bless you, and good luck.

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(more)

You are part of a Nation dedicated to freedom and the highest ideals of man, a Nation that is determined to vanquish poverty and hunger, a Nation that is just one step away from putting American explorers on the surface of the moon, a Nation that has resolved to solve the problem of racism, a Nation that is exalting the quest for human excellence.

Life in America does have meaning. It speaks of what is best in man.

So live a life that is meaningful, a life that is rooted in the great virtues of family love and love for your country.

Man walks this earth but a brief span of years. What matters most is not how long he lives but how well.

And here now is my little bit of advice, a capsule of wisdom I hope you will accept:

"Live among men as if God beheld you; speak to God as if men were listening."

And now, God bless you, and good luck.

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