

**The original documents are located in Box D35, folder “Commencement Address, Fowler High School, Fowler, MI, June 3, 1973” of the Ford Congressional Papers: Press Secretary and Speech File at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.**

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COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS, FOWLER HIGH SCHOOL  
FOWLER, MICH., 3 P.M. JUNE 3, 1973.

*Graduates  
Parents  
Faculty  
Friends  
Teachers  
High honor & Home privilege*

THANK YOU, SUPERINTENDENT SMITH.

AFTER THAT GLOWING INTRODUCTION, I CAN HARDLY WAIT TO HEAR WHAT I AM GOING TO SAY.

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

FOR YOU, THIS CEREMONY MARKS A BEGINNING AND AN END -- THE END OF YOUR YEARS AT FOWLER HIGH SCHOOL AND THE BEGINNING OF A WHOLE NEW LIFE.

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




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.

I'LL BET ALL OF YOU ARE LOVERS  
OF POETRY, AREN'T YOU? 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 (*GESTURE TO GRADUATES*) 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."

TODAY IS YOUR DAY, 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 ARE ABOUT TO RECEIVE A DIPLOMA  
IN RECOGNITION OF YOUR EDUCATIONAL  
ACHIEVEMENTS.

THERE ARE 61 IN YOUR GRADUATING  
CLASS. LET'S IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT 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



TWO DECADES YOU AND YOUR SPOUSES WILL HAVE PRODUCED 183 CHILDREN. YOU WILL HAVE EARNED -- IN 20 YEARS -- \$12,200,000. AND YOU WILL HAVE GONE \$1,525,000 INTO DEBT. THAT'S PERSONAL DEBT, BY THE WAY -- NOT THE NATIONAL DEBT. THIS BEING A NATION ON WHEELS, YOU ALSO WILL HAVE TRADED IN OR WRECKED 183 CARS.

AND WHEN YOU COME BACK HERE FOR THAT 20<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOWLER HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATING CLASS OF 1973, YOU WILL PROBABLY SAY -- AS YOUR PARENTS ARE SAYING NOW -- WHAT IS THIS YOUNGER GENERATION COMING TO?

WHAT ARE YOU YOUNG PEOPLE COMING TO? SOME OF YOU WILL GO ON TO COLLEGE; / SOME WILL TAKE SPECIAL TRAINING FOR OCCUPATIONS REQUIRING CERTAIN SPECIAL SKILLS; /

*such as agriculture*

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AND SOME WILL GO DIRECTLY INTO JOBS. SOME OF YOU WILL GET MARRIED SOON AND BEGIN RAISING FAMILIES. SOME OF YOU YOUNG MEN WILL GO INTO MILITARY SERVICE, AND IF YOU GO IN WITH THE RIGHT ATTITUDE YOU WILL GAIN INNER STRENGTH AND SKILLS THAT WILL SERVE YOU FOR A LIFETIME.

TRADITIONALLY, A COMMENCEMENT SPEAKER IS SUPPOSED TO OFFER ADVICE TO GRADUATES. <sup>all graduates</sup> I WILL DO THAT, KNOWING FULL WELL THAT THOSE WHO NEED ADVICE THE MOST ARE THE LEAST LIKELY TO ABSORB IT.

<sup>By now,</sup> I HOPE EACH OF YOU GRADUATES HAS COME TO TERMS WITH HIMSELF. I HOPE YOU HAVE COME TO KNOW YOURSELF. I HOPE YOU HAVE FOUND WHAT I CALL THE FORMULA FOR THE GOOD LIFE.

NOW LET ME SHARE AN EXPERIENCE WITH YOU.



A LITTLE LESS THAN A YEAR AGO I SPENT A  
FABULOUS 10 DAYS IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC  
OF CHINA, TOGETHER WITH THE LATE HOUSE  
MAJORITY LEADER HALE BOGGS OF LOUISIANA  
AND MEMBERS OF OUR STAFFS. BOGGS AND I  
VISITED CHINA AFTER PREVIOUS JOURNEYS THERE  
BY THE PRESIDENT AND BY THE MAJORITY AND  
MINORITY LEADERS OF THE UNITED STATES  
SENATE. *This is a nation of 800 million / growing at rate  
of two (2) New York cities each year.*  
THE CHIEF IMPRESSION ALL OF US  
BROUGHT BACK WITH US WAS OF THE DEDICATION  
AND DISCIPLINE OF THE CHINESE PEOPLE. WE  
WERE STRUCK BY THE FACT THAT FARMER AND  
CITY DWELLER, YOUNG AND OLD, ONE AND ALL  
APPEARED TO BE MOTIVATED BY THE COMMON  
GOALS SET FOR THEM BY THEIR LEADER,  
CHAIRMAN MAO.

WHILE WE WERE IMPRESSED BY THIS

DEDICATION OF THE CHINESE TO THEIR SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT, WE ALL RETURNED TO THE UNITED STATES WITH A STRONGER FAITH IN OUR OWN SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT, WITH ITS EMPHASIS ON FREEDOM AND INDIVIDUALITY.

I MENTION THESE IMPRESSIONS OF CHINA BECAUSE I BELIEVE THAT IN EVERY SOCIETY -- EAST OR WEST, ANCIENT OR MODERN -- PEOPLE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN ENGAGED IN AN EFFORT TO FIND THE PERFECT MIX OF DISCIPLINE AND FREEDOM.

WHERE EXCESSIVE DISCIPLINE IS IMPOSED BY THOSE IN AUTHORITY, WE FIND DESPOTISM. WHERE THERE IS TOO MUCH FREEDOM, THE RESULT IS CHAOS -- A SITUATION IN WHICH NO ONE CAN LIVE IN SAFETY, LET ALONE CREATE FOR THE COMMON GOOD.





YOU HAVE SEEN THE CLASH OF THESE  
FUNDAMENTAL FORCES IN YOUR OWN LIVES.

YOUR ELDERS -- BE THEY PARENTS  
OR TEACHERS OR OTHERS IN AUTHORITY -- HAVE  
COME DOWN HARD ON THE SIDE OF DEDICATION  
AND DISCIPLINE.

WE ACCEPT DISCIPLINE IF OUR  
MOTIVATION IS STRONG ENOUGH -- AND WE HAVE  
FULL CONFIDENCE THAT AFTER OUR  
APPRENTICESHIP WE WILL ENJOY AN EXTRA  
MEASURE OF FREEDOM AND INDIVIDUAL  
EXPRESSION.

WHAT YOU HAVE PROBABLY LEARNED  
BY THIS TIME IN YOUR LIVES IS THAT THE  
BEST KIND OF DISCIPLINE IS SELF-DISCIPLINE.

YOU HAVE FOUND THAT THERE ARE  
DIVIDENDS IN KEEPING THE RULES OF LIFE,  
THOSE COMMON SENSE PRECEPTS THAT WE ALL



COME TO KNOW AS WE BECOME ACQUAINTED WITH  
RIGHT AND WRONG.

YOU KNOW THE RULES. THEY RANGE  
ALL THE WAY FROM THE TEN COMMANDMENTS TO  
THAT SIMPLE BUT MOST-DIFFICULT-TO-FOLLOW  
RULE . . . DO UNTO OTHERS AS YOU WOULD HAVE  
OTHERS DO UNTO YOU.

THESE ARE THE RULES THAT GOVERN  
EVERYTHING WE DO. MAN HAS MADE THEM -- AND  
FOR A PURPOSE.

NOBODY SHOULD DECIDE WHAT LAWS  
HE LIKES AND WILL OBEY AND WHICH LAWS HE  
DOESN'T LIKE AND WON'T OBEY -- ANY MORE  
THAN ANY PLAYER IN A FOOTBALL GAME CAN  
MAKE UP HIS OWN RULES.

OF COURSE, SOME RULES SEEM TO  
US BURDENSOME, OR SILLY, OR UNJUST. AND  
SOME OF THEM ARE. BUT UNLIKE THE SYSTEM



UNDER WHICH THE MAINLAND CHINESE LIVE, <sup>over people</sup>  
WE HAVE A SYSTEM WHERE IT IS POSSIBLE TO  
CHANGE THE RULES AS AN EXPRESSION OF A  
FREE PEOPLE. WE NEED NO "CULTURAL  
REVOLUTION" IN AMERICA TO PRODUCE CHANGE.

BUT FREEDOM IS WEAKENED WHEN IT  
FEEDS ON EXCESS. FREEDOM FLOURISHES WHEN  
TEMPERED BY THE RESTRAINTS OF  
SELF-DISCIPLINE.

THE TRUE BEGINNING OF WISDOM  
IS THE DESIRE FOR DISCIPLINE -- THE KIND  
OF DISCIPLINE WHICH SPRINGS FROM DOING  
WHAT IS RIGHT SIMPLY BECAUSE YOU KNOW IT  
TO BE RIGHT, OR, CONVERSELY, REFRAINING  
FROM WRONGDOING SIMPLY BECAUSE YOU KNOW IT  
TO BE WRONG.

EARLIER I MENTIONED THE GOOD  
LIFE. NOW, WHAT DOES ALL THIS HAVE TO DO

WITH THE GOOD LIFE? THE GOOD LIFE IS  
BUILT ON DEDICATION AND DISCIPLINE --  
SELF-DISCIPLINE -- AND HARD WORK -- AND LOVE.  
ALL OF THESE INGREDIENTS ARE IMPORTANT TO  
THE GOOD LIFE, BUT LOVE IS CHIEF AMONG  
THEM. NOT THE MINDLESS HIPPIE KIND OF  
LOVE -- IRRESPONSIBLE, FLOATING,  
UNATTACHED TO ANY SET OF VALUES. THE GOOD  
LIFE FLOWS FROM LOVE OF GOD AND LOVE OF  
FAMILY . . . OF PARENTS FOR CHILDREN,  
CHILDREN FOR PARENTS, AND PARENTS FOR EACH  
OTHER. THE GOOD LIFE FLOWS FROM LOVE FOR  
YOUR FELLOWMAN AND LOVE FOR YOUR COUNTRY.

THE LATE PRESIDENT DWIGHT D.  
EISENHOWER SAID JUST BEFORE HE DIED:  
"I HAVE ALWAYS LOVED MY WIFE. I HAVE ALWAYS  
LOVED MY FAMILY. I HAVE ALWAYS LOVED MY  
COUNTRY."



IKE KNEW WHAT THE GOOD LIFE WAS BECAUSE HE LIVED IT -- A LIFE WITH THE RIGHT MIX OF DISCIPLINE AND FREEDOM -- AND LOVE. SO, TOO, CAN YOU.

IKE LOVED PEOPLE BUT HE PARTICULARLY LOVED YOUNG PEOPLE. HE BELIEVED IN THEM. SO, TOO, DO I.

YOU NOW HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SAY HOW THINGS SHOULD BE DONE. YOU HAVE THE VOTE -- AND I HOPE TO GOODNESS YOU USE IT. *Our country will be better, stronger with your constructive participation.*

I WAS IN THE FOREFRONT OF THE EFFORT IN CONGRESS TO EXTEND THE VOTE TO 18, 19 AND 20-YEAR-OLDS -- NOT BECAUSE I FELT IT WOULD BENEFIT MY PARTY . . . MOST OF THE SURVEYS SUGGESTED THE OPPOSITE RESULT . . . BUT BECAUSE I SINCERELY BELIEVE THAT GIVING AMERICA'S YOUNG PEOPLE THE VOTE WILL BENEFIT OUR COUNTRY.



I AM CONFIDENT THAT GIVING THE THOUGHTFUL YOUNG PEOPLE OF AMERICA A VOICE AND A VOTE CAN ONLY BENEFIT ALL OF US IN THE LONG RUN.

IF YOU DO GET INVOLVED IN NEXT YEAR'S POLITICAL CAMPAIGN, REMEMBER THAT NOTHING IS MORE PRECIOUS THAN THE INTEGRITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL. THE END NEVER JUSTIFIES THE MEANS. REMEMBER, TOO, THAT THE THINGS THAT UNITE US AS AMERICANS ARE FAR MORE ENDURING THAN THE THINGS THAT DIVIDE US. AS THE CAMPAIGN GETS HOTTER, TRY TO REMEMBER TO SINGE BUT NEVER TO BURN. LET'S ALL WORK TO BANISH WAR FROM THIS SHRINKING WORLD AND HATE FROM OUR EXPANDING HEARTS -- TO MAKE THIS WHOLE PLANET AS FULL OF FRIENDSHIP AND FELICITY AS THIS SCHOOL IS TODAY.



DISCIPLINE AND DEDICATION.

INDIVIDUALITY AND FREEDOM. YOU HAVE ENCOUNTERED THESE SEEMINGLY CONTRADICTIONARY ELEMENTS IN YOUR HIGH SCHOOL YEARS AND IN YOUR OWN FAMILY LIFE. YOU HAVE ACHIEVED SOME BALANCE, SOME COMPROMISE, SOME KIND OF MIXTURE IN YOUR OWN LIFE.

PERHAPS THE AMERICAN DREAM IS TOO HIGH ON INDIVIDUALITY AND FREEDOM. PERHAPS CLOSED SOCIETIES LIKE THAT OF MAINLAND CHINA ARE TOO LONG ON DISCIPLINE AND DEDICATION. PERHAPS WE CAN TEACH EACH OTHER AND LEARN FROM EACH OTHER, AS THE DOORS OF CHINA ARE OPENED TO US AND OURS TO THEM.

CONFUCIUS, WHOSE THOUGHTS GUIDED MILLIONS UPON MILLIONS OF CHINESE BEFORE CHAIRMAN MAO, WAS VERY STRONG ON THE



IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION. ONE OF HIS SAYINGS, WHICH HAS BEEN TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH VERSE, SEEMS TO ME PARTICULARLY APPROPRIATE FOR GRADUATING SENIORS -- OR FOR THAT MATTER, FOR THEIR PROUD PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS WHO ARE HERE TODAY. THIS IS WHAT CONFUCIUS SAID:

"WISE IS THAT MAN, AND BOUND TO GROW, WHO KNOWS HE KNOWS A THING OR SO, BUT WHO IS NOT AFRAID TO SHOW, THE MANY THINGS HE DOESN'T KNOW."

THIS IS TRULY A DAY OF COMMENCEMENT, THE LAST TIME YOU WILL EVER BE ASSEMBLED ALL IN ONE PLACE, THE FIRST TIME YOU WILL EACH BE ON YOUR OWN, TAKING UP THE TASK OF MAKING A FULL LIFE FOR YOURSELVES AND, AS MUCH AS LIES WITHIN YOUR POWER, A BETTER WORLD FOR ALL MANKIND.

CHERISH FREEDOM AND INDIVIDUALITY,



DISCIPLINE AND DEDICATION; CULTIVATE  
COURTESY AND CHARITY AND COMPASSION;  
REMEMBER THAT COURAGE COMES FROM FAITH,  
AND THAT FAITH IS ONLY FEAR THAT HAS SAID  
ITS PRAYERS.

CONGRATULATIONS, CLASS OF 1973,  
AND GODSPEED TO ALL OF YOU. THE WORLD IS  
ALREADY BETTER FOR YOUR BEING HERE, AND IT  
WILL BE A FAR BETTER WORLD, I KNOW, WHEN  
YOU ARE MY AGE.

-- END --

