

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

EAST CAROLINA COLLEGE

BY

ROBERT MORGAN

May 23, 1965

President Jenkins, Distinguished Guests, Members of the Graduating Class, and Ladies and Gentlemen:

I could ask for no greater honor than that of being a part of this wonderful event. It is a great day in the life of East Carolina College and in the life of every member of the graduating class, and I am proud to share a small part of it with you.

*out* ↓ Although, I must confess that I find myself trembling with fear when I think of the fact that there are more of you in this class, than there were in the whole student body when my wife and I entered here as freshmen just a very short time ago. But you know, I do have some rather fond and pleasant memories of that student body for in that class there were about ten girls for each boy. It was most refreshing, early in the morning, to say the least, to stroll up the campus from Ragsdale Dorm to classes in Austin and listen to the "whistles" or "cat-calls" if you will, of the girls coming from the windows of Cotten, Fleming and Jarvis Dormitories.

And the girl break dances in Wright Building will never be forgotten by those of us who were privileged to be here.

We do, however, live in a changing world and I'm afraid that those of us who were here then must, as you must, look to the future, for every day is different. And every graduating class must face that difference.

But I am proud and was very pleasantly surprised to have this rare privilege of speaking today, though I am sure that some of my former teachers who are still here are more than astonished at my presence at this rostrum.

↓ I should like to talk to you for a few minutes about your education that is now beginning. It goes without saying that the graduating class who waits here before us are to be congratulated upon the achievement which their presence here represents. You have demonstrated an endurance, an ambition, and a capability for a far more important thing, for a degree of self-discipline. So it is our privilege now to honor, salute, and to confer upon you our official recognition. X

But in so doing, it seems to us that we would be failing in our duty if we did not try to help to define what you have really achieved and what the responsibilities are that will follow.

First of all, and as disillusioning as it may sound, it would be a grave mistake for you to assume that you are educated. It would be a reflection upon the instruction which you have already received. Even in those fields in which you

think you have achieved proficiency, you have made only a beginning. Of course, we have no less an authority than Socrates for the folly of a man's pretention to learning.

It seems probable that a great many of the world's ills, perhaps some of our most alarming ones, may be attributed to ignorance, and more seriously, to the pretention of knowledge where there is none. One of your safeguards in the future will be your freedom from any form of self-deception.

Your wonder, naturally, at this point will be--if graduation, then, is such a limited thing then why have we pursued it? How are we to regard what we have done?

In answer we can explore for a moment the meaning of education itself. By what signs can it be known?

Many of you here have been trained, in one or more of a dozen arts and techniques. Preparation for the tasks of a varied and complex society must be made upon a wide range of disciplines. Music, Art, Business, Humanities, Highly Technical Scientific studies--the list that you have pursued separately and alone is endless. Your field of inquiry and the special language you have learned to use, say in science, has been foreign to the language of another field, to that of your neighbor, to the extent that the two of you seem not to have been preparing for the same world. |

The more complex the world a society becomes, the more our mastery of environment depends upon an increasingly specialized language and technique--language that is substantially private except to the technician. So, then, it appears that gaps

between fields of study are steadily becoming wider and wider. You may know something of science and nothing of art; you may know something of business and nothing of the history of man. I was told recently of a distinguished scientist who professed that he was finding greater and greater difficulty in talking to the men in his own field.

Perhaps, then, there is no escaping the highly departmentalized study; the high degree of specialization which society has forced upon us.

A hundred years ago, Emerson had much to say about the specialized society of his time, about his great fear of departmentalized man. Time and time again he plead for a vision that transcended the splintered interests and endeavors of his colleagues. He plead for the appearance, somewhere, of the whole man. What he would have said of us today we can only assume. But what we can do and what we have the highest moral obligation to do is to examine the training that we have had; to make some effort to understand what it is and what it is not. To try, in other words, to relate that training as nearly to the total view as we can command and thereby accept the knowledge of our own incompleteness.

Only this it seems will lead to a clearer view of what education really is.

The process of being educated is never-ending; it is a way of life. It can never be quantitatively measured, in terms of books, teachers, or years at school. The acquisition of data is in itself no key. No yardstick of degree or period of application can be revealing except in a limited sense. Perhaps, then,

for a better understanding of education, we must look to the will to learn, its inquiring spirit, and, finally, its undeceived self-knowledge.

Real education, then, can be measured only in the way that we live. Real education manifests itself in every department of our lives: In modifying and directing our behavior with our fellowman, in the quality of understanding and charity which we give to others, in our capability for objectivity in assessing values, in the courage with which it supplies us in distinguishing between the true and the false, the right and the wrong. The signs of his education are unmistakable upon the appearance of a mature man.

It is our right then to ask to what extent have we really been prepared? At what cost has our specialization come? Has it come at the loss of real perspective, at the loss of your desire for a fuller and fuller view? Know of what you speak, but in the same hour, know something of the vast areas where you have not trod.

The civilized forces in our society which we are here committed to perpetuate must be watched over and guarded by our total selves. Not alone by scientists, not alone by technicians, nor even alone by the poet, can a long and steady perspective be maintained.

One answer at least, if not the total answer, is to read, read, read. The respect that you will ultimately have for your own training will be determined by the awareness that you have of the knowledge and the training of others.

Read. And read without prejudice. To read only, for the purpose of confirming what you already believe to be true, to support your previously inherited convictions, is to violate the basic spirit of inquiry and to deny yourself the fruit of your own mind.

It can be said that if at the completion of your four years here you take nothing away except that which you brought, you might as well not have been here at all. If your early convictions have not to some degree been shaken, if your view has not been extended into the depth of history, you have wasted your time.

Read. But read without prejudice, having the courage to follow where instinct and insight may lead. Examine your own convictions. How many of them are prejudgments? How many have you reached through a process of discovery for yourselves?

Read. But read without prejudice to broaden your own horizons.

Of one thing in this world we believe, you may be fairly certain: Responsibility is always proportionate to understanding. You as individuals can never escape the responsibility of what perceptions you have, nor the responsibility for the recognitions which your understanding may bestow. There is a penalty for the possession of knowledge and the refusal to use it. Your possession of training is at once your privilege and your obligation. From where is authority in the affairs of men to come, except from the capabilities of our enlightened minds?

You may forget a great deal of the information which you have received here, but your memory of your one-time

possession of it will stay with you forever. And that one-time possession will remain your goal and your guide.

It will lodge there forever to remind you of what you could have been.

And so by virtue of your four years of residence here, whether you choose it or not, you are one of the numbered of the world.

To assume your responsibility is your obligation; to deny it will lodge within you an emptiness and a waste.

President Charles W. Eliot of Harvard University had this to leave with his students:

"In backward ages Universities keep alive philosophy, and in progressive ages they lead the forward movement . . . They bring a portion of each successive generation to the confines of knowledge, to the very edge of territory already conquered, and say, 'Thus far came our Fathers. Now press you on.'"

And now finally, as you press on and as you leave this college to assume your responsibilities, I trust that you find that your challenge is here in North Carolina, and particularly here in eastern North Carolina.

This State, which has afforded you many advantages also offers you many opportunities.

North Carolina is emerging from a long period of transition--economic, social and cultural. It is a great State today and can be far greater in years and decades ahead, but it needs your youth, your knowledge, your skills, and especially, your enthusiasm for the future.

And particularly important I feel, you will enjoy the privilege of living in a State and with people who know how to live, who know the joy of life, and the secret of merging that joy with progress.

You go from this campus today equipped with the basic qualities needed to provide the necessary leadership for our State and Nation. Build on these qualities. Always dream beyond your grasp.

Never be discouraged by failure, it is part of life. Only the weak succumb to it. The strong grow stronger because of it.

I can think of no more appropriate thought to leave with you than these words from a great American, Theodore Roosevelt:

"It is far better to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered with failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat."