

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

1966 GRADUATING CLASS OF LA FAYETTE HIGH SCHOOL

May 31, 1966

Years ago, before any of you were born, a wise Frenchman said, "If (only) youth knew; if (only) age could." If I may paraphrase his statement, I would say that if the young people of our nation had the knowledge and wisdom that is gained from experience and if the adults of our nation were endowed with the enthusiasm and capacity of our youth, many of the world's ills would be solved. We all know that this Frenchman meant that when one is young, he has the power to do just about anything, but he doesn't always know what to do. Then, when one is old and observation and experience have taught him the answers, he is tired and frightened; he doesn't care; he wants to be left alone as long as he is safe; he doesn't have the capacity or the will to grieve over wrongs or troubles that are not his own.

So you young men and women in this auditorium tonight, and in thousands of other rooms like this about the earth today, have the power to change the world, to rid it forever of war and injustice and suffering, provided you know what to do and how to go about it. And so according to the old Frenchman, since you can't know what to do because you are young, then perhaps some of us here on the platform should be able to help you.

But maybe I am not as wise as I think, or as I should

be, because I can't give you a glib answer or pattern for your future. But I can make some observations about your education. Your education that is only now beginning.

I speak of your education which is now beginning, for as disillusioning as it may sound, it would be a grave mistake for you to assume that you are now 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.

It seems probable that a great many of the world's problems, perhaps some of our most alarming ones, may be attributed to ignorance, and more seriously, to pretense of knowledge where there is none. One of your safeguards in the future will be your freedom from any form of self-deception. There will be problems and ills and you will not know the answers.

You young men and women, in the life ahead of you, will see a population explosion that will create problems for which there are no immediate answers. New knowledge in the sciences, in medicine, and in every other field will present problems for which there are no immediate answers. So then, the best that I can do tonight is to challenge you to discover for yourselves the answers to the problems which these changes will cause. Finding these answers will be a part of your education which is now beginning.

How do we prepare then for a world not yet fully developed or clearly defined? Perhaps the best advice is to rely on past history. Determine and discover some of the causes and attributes that have made for success in the lives of others. Test them to see if they still apply today and hope that they will make for success in the future.

As you look around and study the lives of the most successful people you know, I believe you will find that they share two traits of character. First, they possess a desire to succeed; and here let me say that I'm not speaking of succeeding by possessing the material things of life, but of succeeding in day to day living and in every facet of their lives. Second, you will find that they possess a faith in a living God and a desire to help their fellowmen.

I should like to dwell on just one of these for a moment. The desire to succeed—for in its broadest sense it encompasses and includes the other.

You may recall that on one occasion when Jesus saw the multitude, he went upon the mountain and the people followed him and he told his disciples, in the greatest sermon of all times:

Matthew 5:46 "If you love men which love you,  
what reward have ye?  
Do not even the publicans do  
the same"?

Matthew 5:47 "If you salute your brethern only,"  
he asked, "What do ye more than  
others, do not even the publicans  
(do) the same"?

Then he asked a very significant question of all of those present. A question that we ought to ask ourselves throughout our lives because it reveals one of the qualities of a truly successful man or woman—(What will you do more than others?) That will be the distinguishing mark of a successful man or woman in your future.

James Corbett, long before your time, was a world heavyweight boxing champion. Someone asked him to what he attributed his great success. He told them this, that early in his career, he made up his mind that no matter how tough the fight, he would try to "go one more round." The determination of this great fighter to "go one more round" and do a little more than others became an obsession with him, and because of it he became a World Champion.

WHAT A MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION! An obsession to go one more round—an obsession to do more than others.

America is filled with illustrations of people and communities that were possessed with the idea of doing more than others, or of going another round. You should know some of them.

Zane Grey, the writer of great western stories. All of you know him. Yet, he was told time and time again that "People do not like western stories." And his books were rejected by the publishers. But he was obsessed with that determination to try again. Finally he wrote The Riders of the Purple Sage. It became a best seller immediately and is now perhaps one of the

greatest western novels of all times. Today every television viewer and every movie goer thrills at the privilege of seeing a movie based on a story by Zane Grey.

Walt Disney, as a young man, was told that he had no talent. The editor of the Kansas Star literally vanquished him from his office. Yet, his determination to succeed did not allow him to quit. He was determined to do a little more than others—to go another round. And finally he came up with the idea for the cartoon strip of "Oswald the Rabbit." It was accepted and then came "Mickey Mouse" and others. Today, because of his will to succeed, he is an American Institution.

Oh yes, you say, you are speaking of great men, but I'm an ordinary person. That is my handicap. A handicap will not keep a determined person from succeeding. The world is filled with the records of men who overcame greater handicaps.

IMPRISON THEM. While in prison, Paul Bunyan wrote the Pilgrim's Progress. One of the greatest literary masterpieces of all time.

BLIND THEM. John Milton, though afflicted with complete blindness, wrote the immortal Paradise Lost, Another of the world's great literary masterpieces.

CRIPPLE THEM. President Franklin Roosevelt, crippled with polio in the prime of his life, endured the most exhausting political campaigns and, then as president, led this nation to some

of its most glorious victories.

No one to this day has been able to understand how the great musician, Beethoven, could compose some of the world's most beautiful music, music which he could never hear because he was deaf.

One of the greatest movies of all time was "A Rhapsody in Blue." Yet, few people know that George Gershwin, the composer of that musical masterpiece, was laughed right off the stage. He wrote more than 100 songs before he sold the first one for \$5.00. He went one more round, and then came PORGY AND BESS, AN AMERICAN IN PARIS, and many others.

AMERICA WAS BUILT BY PEOPLE WHO DID MORE THAN OTHERS—WHO WENT ANOTHER ROUND, where success appeared impossible. So if you remember nothing more of what I have said tonight—remember that failure and handicaps are a part of life. Never be discouraged by them.

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."