

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS
AURELIAN SPRINGS HIGH SCHOOL
LITTLETON, NORTH CAROLINA
THURSDAY, May 28, 1970

There is, in the book of Common Prayer, a thanksgiving to God for having "brought us safely to the beginning of this day." Now, I don't know how many of you had doubts about this day arriving, but I am confident that at least some of you, as you faced the examination period, had at least some serious reservations that you would make it. But you did!

You have every reason to be happy tonight, for one of your goals in life has been fulfilled. Today your parents are proud that you have reached this point with honor. And I assure you that your teachers, knowing as they do some of the faults which you have managed to conceal from your parents, are nevertheless glad - maybe because they won't have to put up with you again - but most likely because they have had a part in helping you become what you are this day.

Your parents, your family, your teachers and your friends gathered here tonight have had faith through the years in your ability to reach this milestone and, likewise, "faith in education as the foundation of [our society and] of American Government."

They share the belief of President Franklin Roosevelt who said, "What our schools do may prove in the long run to be more decisive than any other factor in preserving the form of government we cherish." It is for the reason, I think, that our people view with so much concern the turmoil which has engulfed our school systems at all levels from time to time.

As I look at you tonight, I am reminded of the sculptor who takes a piece of marble or a block of wood and starts to carve an object. The sculptor sees in the grain of the wood or the veins of the marble the possibilities which exist. He chips and cuts and hammers away. Finally, if his strength is equal to his task, he forms an image so perfect, so fitting, that we can conceive of no other coming from it.

You and our Nation are like this. You are the raw material. But, unfortunately, you didn't have a single artist to work upon you but a multitude of hammerers and chislers and cutters. Thus you and the Nation may not be so perfect or so fitting that there can be no other.

When our founding fathers created this Union of States, they had a vision of what it should be. If we do not live up to this vision it is because we realize that different individuals had different visions. Each sought to carve the Nation into the image he perceived. Each sought to hammer indelible principles into the very structure of the Nation. From the first then, we have been changing, we have been modifying the image that might have been.

Such has also been the process of your own development also. As a child born into warmth and love of a family, your future was dreamed before you were yet released from the cradle. Are you that dream today? I think not; you, like our Nation, have been cut and hammered and chisled into forms which could not have been perceived only a short time ago.

Today many of you are concerned with the many problems of our society. You are concerned about the war in Indochina. You are concerned with law and order. You are concerned with brotherhood. You are concerned about the hypocrisy about you.

I say to you that these are not new concerns of our Nation for these concerns have ever been with us.

In a prayer immediately following his inauguration as the first President of the United States, George Washington said:

Almighty God, we make our earnest prayer that Thou wilt keep the United States in Thy Holy protection; that Thou wilt incline the hearts of the citizens to cultivate a spirit of subordination and obedience to government; to entertain a brotherly affection and love for one another and for their fellow citizens of the United States at large.

Washington well knew the troubles this new country faced. There were people still living here, even in North Carolina, who, if not active supporters of the British crown, had not given their wholehearted allegiance to the cause of independence. There were those who were determined that the federal government should have no powers stronger than those allowed by the Articles of Confederation. There were those who distrusted the Federal Government because there was, at this time, no Bill of Rights.

Under Washington's leadership we learned many things. The country developed. The stability of the government grew. Yet, there were continuing problems then, even as today. Taxes, foreign relations, censorship, were but a few of the problems our early presidents had to face.

Thomas Jefferson had doubts about whether he could constitutionally make the Louisiana purchase. Jackson, the general and not yet President, invaded Spanish Florida to quell the Indians. Monroe proclaimed a dubious doctrine that we would protect the Western Hemisphere. New England States threatened to withdraw from the Union.

Helter skelter through all the early days of our union run threads of uncertainty and doubt. Yet on the centennial of Washington's birthday, Daniel Webster could speak of these difficulties with great hope. He said:

"... the spirit of human liberty and free government, nurtured and grown into strength and beauty in America, has stretched its course into the midst of the nations. It must change, it is fast changing, the face of the earth ... The world, at this moment, is regarding us with a willing, but something of a fearful, admiration. Its deep and awful anxiety is to learn whether free states may be stable as well as free; whether popular power may be trusted as well as feared; in short, whether wise,

regular, and virtuous self-government is a vision for the contemplation of theorists, or a truth established, illustrated, and brought into practice in the country of Washington."

These remarks are still timely for almost daily a new crisis arises in our State or Nation. But this great Nation has weathered the storms of the past and I believe with all my heart that it will survive those of the present and future.

As young men and women you have a right to ask why is this so? How have we done this?

I can give you no concrete answers for my knowledge is limited, my vision short. But I can give you my feelings, feelings that I trust are as deep as those you will ever hold for this your graduation today.

If I had to put it into a word, I would say that we are what we are today because we have somehow, somewhere learned to live with that which is possible. It IS possible to look at our faults and hope for better in our future. It IS possible to disagree and to argue about what the future should and can be.

But essentially, we have learned to have a respect for the other point of view. Yes, the majority rules, but the majority continues to respect the rights of the minority. Correspondingly, the minority has accepted its role in the continuing dialogue which has made flexibility and progress possible in our society.

In the words of one American statesman, "Our way of living together in America is a strong but delicate fabric. It is made up of many threads. It has been woven over many centuries by the patience and sacrifice of countless liberty-loving men and women. It serves as a cloak for the protection of rich and poor, of black and white, of Jew and Gentiles of foreign and native born. Let us not tear it asunder. For no man knows, once it is destroyed, where or when man will find its protective warmth again."

Our Nation is not without fault. But nevertheless, we enjoy the benefits of a rich heritage. We are still reaping the harvest made possible by dreams of our forefathers. You, too, must dream if you are to pass something of value to those who come after you.

North Carolina's own Thomas Wolf expressed it in words I can never hope to excell. Let me share with you on your commencement his dream. He said:

I think the true discovery of America is before us. I think the true fulfillment of our spirit, of our people, of our mighty and immortal land, is yet to come. I think the true discovery of our own democracy is still before us. And I think that all these things are certain as the morning, as inevitable as noon. I think I speak for most men living when I say that our America is Here, is Now, and beckons on before us, and

that this glorious assurance is not only our
living hope, but our dream to be accomplished.