

Speech by Robert Morgan
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ON THE DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE YOUNG

Looking out upon you, I know that today I am looking at a very privileged group. After all, you have had the advantage of a university education, which in this democratic nation of ours traditionally has sought to instill as a primary quality an appreciation of both the benefits and responsibilities which are ours because we are Americans and we are free.

You are privileged, and consequently, the burdens which fall upon you today are especially heavy, for I believe that we have never produced a generation of educated young people with greater awareness of the problems about them or greater concern for the welfare of mankind.

But this awareness, this concern which is so much a part of the generation we graduate today, too often is not shared by those of us who are a little older. This can be a tragic thing. Let me illustrate with a short story.

It is said that at exactly 5:13 in the morning on the 18th of April, 1906, a cow was standing somewhere between the main barn and the milking shed of the old Shafter ranch in California, minding her own business. Suddenly, the earth shook, the skies

trembled, and when it was all over, there was nothing showing of the cow but a bit of her tail.

This Shafter cow is a symbol of our times. She stood quietly enough, thinking such gentle thoughts as cows are likely to have, while huge forces beyond her knowledge built up all around her and, within a minute, discharged in a great movement that changed the configuration of the earth, destroyed a city, and swallowed her up.

Certainly if we all do not learn to understand and guide the great forces of change at work in our world today, we may find ourselves, like the Shafter cow, swallowed up by vast upheavals in our way of life. For it is clear, I think, that within a decade or two the main challenge to our society will come from a world of faster and faster change.

Of course, change has always been part of the human experience. It is the nature of a living society that it is always undergoing change and refinement for the only social and political order immune to change is a dead one.

What is different now, however, is the speed of change, and the sure knowledge that it will come faster and faster as time goes on. The result of such change will affect every part of life, including personal values, morality, and religions--all of which seem most remote from technology. So swift is the

acceleration that trying to make sense of change or acclimate ourselves to it will come to our basic industry. The question we will ask about progress will no longer be "How much" but instead, "How good?"

Those of us who are somewhat older tend to regard change with apprehension. We find that older people generally like to keep things as they are, while on the other hand adaptability to changing conditions, responsiveness to new ideas, willingness to experiment, a desire to improve the conditions of human life, are all attributes of youth.

I warn you, it is easy to lose these attributes after you leave the excitement and foment of the university campus. It has been said that "Part of the American myth is that people who are handed the dead skin of a sheep (sheep skin) at graduation think that it will keep their minds alive forever." I assure you that nothing could be further from the truth and that in the work-a-day world, you will have to make a conscious effort to keep your mind alive and vital and your interests attuned to current problems and concerns.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt said that "There is a mysterious cycle in human events, to some generations much is given. Of other generations, much is expected. This generation of Americans has a rendezvous with destiny."

The cycle has again turned about. To your generation much has been given. Through the efforts of your parents and forefathers, farsighted political leaders and brave men on the battlefield, you have enjoyed security, freedom and the opportunity of an education. But we must remember that of your generation more is expected than has ever been expected before. You also have a rendezvous with destiny.

Each generation of human beings attempts to solve the problems that confront it. Some of its solutions are successful, some are not. And each generation passes on to the next not only the results of its successes and failures, but also new problems, for each day a new sun comes over the horizon; today is never quite the same as yesterday.

Yesterday's ideas alone will never be sufficient, and neither will knowledge gathered from past experience, for the world has never known before the conditions we are experiencing.

As President John Fitzgerald Kennedy said: "We know now that freedom is more than a rejection of tyranny, that prosperity is more than an escape from want, that partnership is more than a sharing of power. These are, above all, great human adventures. We are called to a great new mission. It is not a mission of arbitrary power. The mission is to create a new social order, founded upon liberty and justice, in which men are the masters

of their fate, in which states are the servants of their citizens, and in which all men and women can share a better life."

This is the task that has been given to your generation of graduates, for you must unwind the thread of knowledge which binds the solutions to our problems. It is the fate of your generation--as with every other--to live in a world of conditions which you did not make and change them for your progeny. If you succeed, humanity will flourish; if you fail those who survive will condemn all of us for it.

In your efforts to succeed, education, of course, is the first answer and you must seek to improve it, for it is the bulwark upon which not only progress but preservation of life on this planet stands. A society in which its citizens are not true men of learning cannot succeed today, for without education we cannot solve the great problems of our times.

Let me caution you that 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 total knowledge. One of your safeguards in the future will be your freedom from this form of self-deception.

The second answer to the challenges of your generation is conservation and development. Needless to say, we must have both and we must caution ourselves to make sure they are compatible.

This section of western North Carolina, of course, is anxious to promote industrial development but no one would advocate development which would blemish these mountains and valleys; pollute these rivers, creeks and trout streams; contaminate the mountain area--in effect, lessen the quality of life for the people of this area.

North Carolina is dedicated to the total development of its resources and people but it is equally dedicated to conservation of its countrysides, streams, rivers and air. I share that dedication as I am sure you do.

The decade of the 70's in every sense of the word, is a decade of the environment. At long last, we have become concerned about the quality of our total environment and ask whether we can continue to deplete our natural resources without concern for

those who must come after us. Largely through the influence of your generation--your very young generation--all of us have become convinced that the quality of our environment must be improved and that we must hand down unblemished, to those who come after us, the natural wealth and beauty that is so much a part of our heritage. We have recognized the truth in Adlai Stevenson's words, "This world exists for people before it exists for anything else."

Therefore, this world must be made safe for people and must be made fit for people.

Unless we do so, our civilization will perish like the Shafter cow, and leave but a trace of its tail for future archaeologists.

The ways in which this can be done have not yet been fully learned. The spool of knowledge is still too tightly wound; you must unwind the thread from that spool.

"Throughout our history our soil and water, our forests and minerals, have provided the resources upon which this country grew; and our power ascended. Today, this great gift of material wealth provides the foundation upon which the defense of freedom rests, here and around the world. And our future greatness and our strength depend upon the continued abundant use of our natural resources.

"Thus, it is our task in our time and in our generation, to hand down undiminished to those who come after us, as was handed down to us by those who went before, the natural wealth and beauty which is ours." (John F. Kennedy)

The third answer is human concern. The purposes of government are many, but to sum up, its primary purpose is to do for the people what the people cannot do for themselves. As a moral nation and a moral people, we must continue to be concerned about more medical facilities and health care personnel. We must make sure that the mentally ill are treated with compassion and that every effort is made to restore the mentally ill to productive rolls in their communities.

We must not be complacent when we have conquered one disease or one illness or one injustice. Each generation brings new challenges--cystic fibrosis and muscular dystrophy replace polio and smallpox as an enemy of our young. One form of injustice replaces another and our struggle to right them must be constant throughout the decades.

The fourth answer is liberty and justice for all. Human rights must be protected, so must the rights of property. Just as the accused must be protected and insured of a fair trial, the people must be protected and assured security in their homes and on their streets. And just as the rights of free enterprise must

be guaranteed, so must the consumers' right to a fair sale. As Woodrow Wilson said,

"No amount of dwelling upon the idea of liberty and justice will accomplish the object we have in view unless we ourselves illustrate the idea of liberty and justice."

The fifth answer lies in the improvement of the quality of American government, for government must be made responsive to the needs demanded by changing conditions. You, as the most knowing persons in our society, must make government responsive, and the most effective way of doing that is not by violence but by becoming active citizens. For though we must adopt a new way of life, we must not abandon the great and good ideals of human rights, liberty, and justice upon which our nation has been founded. We must conserve and restore the good in our intellectual heritage and no one is better qualified than you to perform that task of conservation and restoration.

"What you have inherited from your father, earn over again for yourself or it will not be yours." (Goethe) The efforts which were first necessary to create freedom are just as necessary to sustain it in your day.

As Benjamin Franklin so aptly put it to a lady who queried him on walking out of the Constitution Convention

after the Constitution was written, "Doctor Franklin, what have you gentlemen produced?" And he said, "Lady, we have produced a republic, and we hope you can keep it."

Each of you is a privileged person, for you have obtained a university education. But I beg you not to allow yourselves to leave this campus and become defenders of privilege or proponents of interests which are shortsighted and selfish. I urge you instead to "fight for a free America—for a country in which all men and women have equal rights to liberty and justice." I urge you to fight, as I hope it will someday be said I have done, "for the rights of the little man as well as the big man--for the weak as well as the strong, for those who are helpless as well as those who can help themselves." (Franklin D. Roosevelt)

Democracies, of all forms of government, are most in need of great men. They are in need of able, devoted men, and never more than now. Thus each of you, as the most able of our society, should think of being political, of running for local, State, and perhaps national offices.

In addition, each of you should require the candidates for whom you cast your votes to be responsive to the need for change. Each of you should require your candidates to run on issues rather than slogans and deny them your votes if they do not.

For although democracy is the best form of government yet devised by man, it is best only when the best is demanded of its elected officials.

Before closing, I would like to challenge you with the words of Sir Winston Churchill, who challenged the youth of his day by saying: "Come on now, all you young men, all over the world...You have not an hour to lose. You must take your places in life's battle lines..."

"Don't be content with things as they are. 'The earth is yours and the fullness thereof.' Enter upon your inheritance, accept your responsibilities.

"Raise the glorious flags again , advance them upon the new enemies, who constantly gather upon the front of the human army, and have only to be assaulted to be overthrown.

"Don't take No for an answer, never submit to failure. Do not be fobbed off with mere personal success or acceptance. You will make all kinds of mistakes; but as long as you are generous and true, and also fierce, you cannot hurt the world or even seriously distress her. She was made to be wooed and won by youth."

I believe also that the world was made to be wooed and won by youth, so when you go forth from Western Carolina University,

apply what you have learned in order to create a cleaner world, a concern for human beings, a better government, and a happier life for all mankind. Be resolute and fearless and your reward will be your own and mankind's preservation.

This is a big order, I know, but I share the faith of North Carolina's Thomas Wolfe who 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."

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