

GRADUATION ADDRESS. OUTLINE.

SELF-RELIANCE

1. Opening remarks on significance of graduation.
2. Romanticizing the past and living in the present. Important to understand past, but important to live in present.
3. Intro. Ralph Waldo Emerson--literary figure of 19th century.
4. Biographical sketch. b. in Massachusetts, descended from Puritans, part of Transcendentalist movement. Entered Harvard at age 14.
5. Spotlight on his search for self-reliance.
6. Trip to Europe to search for Culture. Met leading intellectuals, but found himself, self-reliance.
7. Trip to Europe was Damascus experience. Saw through the veneer of European Civilization. The beauty and grandeur hid poverty.
8. Came to formula of self-reliance: "Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string."
9. Students should look inward. Foundation is built in school, but construction of life is ahead.
10. Emerson saw life as puzzle. Self-reliance put the center together. But still he saw problems and continually tried to put puzzle together.
11. Diversity of gifts to different people. "Each is incomparably superior to his companion in some faculty. His want of skill in other directions had added to his fitness for his own work. Each seems to have some compensation yielded to him by his infirmity, and every hindrance operates as a concentration of his force."
12. Thoughts on conformity: "If I know your sect I anticipate your argument."
13. Test your talents; don't hide them under a bushel.
14. Warnings against increasing specialization and compartmentalization in work. Try to be broad in interests.

15. Warnings against being caught up in the commercial world.
16. Change in structure of business world. Factory system replaced the craft system. "A man should not be a silk worm, nor a nation a tent of caterpillars."
17. Positive challenges ahead.
18. Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Depression. Your experiences with that, in war and with friends.
19. Experience with Magna Carta and U.S. democracy. Still room for anyone to excel to limit of talent.
20. Pride in U. S. agriculture, production, tobacco.
21. Pride in technology, most sophisticated in the world.
22. Communications. Satellites, computers, solar panels.
23. Astronauts and the frontier spirit. Part of our heritage.
24. New Challenges for your age.
25. Challenge of energy. Must have self-reliance in that area.
26. New mission. Not so glamorous, but crucial.
27. Still have freedom of expression, which is crucial.
28. Challenge. Forebears conquered continent.
29. This generation has challenge to carry our greatness.
30. Be mindful of the tradition, and reach deep inside for self reliance.

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Tarboro, North Carolina
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SELF-RELIANCE

As you prepare to receive recognition for completing your studies, you are poised at a momentous juncture in your lives. From this point on you will more and more be leaving behind your family, old friends, and familiar things-- you will be confronting new challenges.

Sometimes I hear young people express a feeling that they wish that they had lived at a different time--during the Revolution, the Civil War, or even the Great Depression. They have read books and seen photographs of other times when things seemed more calm, and often movies, TV, and books romanticize the past out of all proportion. Yet studying the past is essential, for if we fail to understand the past we can not understand the present nor are we able to dream of the future.. Since we are here, born into these times, I think that we must build on the lessons of the past to understand our times. We can study past in order to escape into the present.

In that sense, I want to discuss one man's pilgrimage into self discovery, into self-reliance. The man, of course, is Ralph Waldo Emerson, a great American literary figure of the 19th century who found in himself, in his community, in his state, and in his nation all the ingredients for a wholesome life.

Most of you are familiar with the basic facts of Emerson's life. He was born in Massachusetts, descended from Puritans, and part of the Transcendentalist Movement. He entered Harvard University at age 14, young even for that day. Yet, he was not an excellent student. After graduating, he taught school to keep the family financially solvent.

I will not go into detail about Emerson's marriage, his struggle to reconcile his religious beliefs, or other aspects of his career. Rather, I want to spotlight one turning point of his life. After his first wife died and after his break with the church, Emerson was distraught. He was searching for meaning in life, and as an intellectual of his day, he realized that Europe was the origin of his culture. He was in awe of European civilization and decided that he should make a pilgrimage there in search of culture and meaning.

His mission failed; he was not intimidated by European culture. What he did find in Europe was self-reliance. He also realized that while American culture was different from European culture, as an American he did not need to bow before the cultural gods of Europe. He met many of the leading European intellectuals, and he managed to talk with them as equals.

I think that Emerson's pilgrimage to Europe was a Damascus experience. Like Saul on his way to Damascus, Emerson had been blinded by the reputation of Europe. Only by confronting that culture directly would the scales fall from his eyes. Much of what he had admired from afar was, after all, veneer, facade. Behind the wealth and splendor, the beauty and the grandeur, were the realities. The manners and the style of the few--the royalty--often hid the poverty of the many. Perceiving this, he was never so proud of being an American as when visiting Europe. When he wrote his essay, "Self-Reliance," he noted that it was insecure "superstition" that sent Americans off to Europe to bow before that culture.

Once Emerson discovered that much of what he had thought about Europe was inflated and that American culture was in itself mature and innovative, he then turned inward personally

to find individual self-reliance. In the end it came down to a very simple formula:

"Trust theyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string."

I would suggest to you who are now launching your lives on your own that you should look inward for strength. Your teachers have given you the foundation upon which to build successful lives. It is up to you to construct a life that will be pleasing--not just to you but to the community and the larger world in which you live.

Emerson, when he returned from Europe, compared his life to a puzzle. Until he achieved self-reliance, all the pieces were jumbled, or in today's parlance you might say he did not have it together. After realizing his own inner strength, he put together the core of the puzzle. He realized that the entire puzzle was not completed, for only a foolish person would think that they had solved all the problems of life. There is a term I hear that implies a person has the entire puzzle completed; the term is "laid back." It is a delusion. If you get complacent, if you think that you have learned everything, solved everything, then you have committed spiritual suicide. Nothing is more exciting than the pursuit of life, and there are always new pieces of the puzzle to place.

As with any class, there are diverse interests among you. Some of you have intellectual interests, others prefer practical matters, and still others have varied interests. Emerson had a very perceptive thing to say about different gifts. He did not believe that people differed very much. "Each is incomparably superior to his companion in some faculty," he wrote. "His want of skill in other directions has added to his fitness for his own work. Each seems to have some compensation yielded to him by his infirmity, and every hindrance operates as a concentration of his force."

The problem is, in our society, that there is so much pressure for everyone to turn out alike. Emerson recognized this in his day. "A man must consider what a blind-man's bluff is this game of conformity," he explained. "If I know your sect I anticipate your argument." There must be room for opinions and there must be room for different interests. If everyone wanted to be doctors and lawyers and teachers, who would build the houses or plow the fields? Don't be forced into a life that satisfied others but denies yourself. Again, look inside for self-reliance.

And don't be afraid to dare your talents. Without testing yourself, you will never know the limits of your talent.

Fifteen years ago I gave the commencement address at East Carolina University, and in that speech I observed that Emerson had warned against the increasing specialization of his day, the compartmentalization of work. I mentioned that, of course, because it was so obvious that our modern world with assembly lines, computers, and specialists of every sort leaves little room for development of the whole self. It has been observed that Thomas Jefferson had read all of the important books of his day, knew all of the issues, and was a universal man. Today it is impossible to stay abreast of everything. Yet, unless we try, unless we explore beyond the limits of our present world, we will always lack fulfillment.

Let me also caution you against getting completely wound up in the commercial world. Emerson warned that the commercial mentality of his day was distorting people's moral nature. He could see the demise of Puritanism, or morality, in the rush for personal gain.

At the same time, as people grew more wealthy and built larger factories, the structure of business changed. The crafts that had dominated American business for so long were giving way to the factory system. No longer did the boss work beside you; he was a manager. Workers came to resemble machines, and their lives were routinized--they worked

by the clock. The machines ran them. Work became impersonal and drab. Young men and women from rural Massachusetts moved to the mill towns where they were imprisoned within walls with few windows. They would bring in roses and plants to give some semblance of nature to the drab buildings. Emerson, commenting on this, said, "A man should not be a silk worm, nor a nation a tent of caterpillars."

At this point I want to suggest some positive things that self-reliance can bring to your lives. Even though there are prophets of gloom, and even though we are now in a recession, I want to assure you that I have confidence that our country will endure, that it will survive the present crisis and emerge greater than ever. Americans respond to challenge, to crisis, and I have every confidence that we can stand any test, indeed, that we will steel ourselves in crisis and strengthen our moral fiber by adversity.

This is not the first crisis that I and your parents have witnessed. I saw the country emerge from the Depression in the 1930s and under Franklin D. Roosevelt overcome hunger and low prices, implement innovative policies that aided farmers, workers, and those who were dispossessed by economic forces. I watched the country enter war, and was myself drawn

into that war from college and made friends from all over the country. It gave me a sense of pride and nationalism to travel and witness the spirit that young men and women shared during that emergency. I again witnessed this fighting spirit in the Korean War.

Nor should you think that this land lacks opportunity for all, no matter what your background. Several years ago I went to England to arrange for shipping the Magna Carta to the United States for exhibition. This is the document in English history that gave the first real thrust toward democracy in England, a tradition that later the United States affirmed in our revolution. An English member of Parliament asked me where I was from, what my background was. I told him that I grew up on a farm in North Carolina, that I came from a rural family of hard working people, that I worked my way through college, that even as I was finishing my law degree that I went into politics, that I served in the North Carolina Senate and later was Attorney General before becoming a United States Senator. He observed that such a thing could have never happened in England. The class lines are still too rigid in England to allow such mobility. So, as Americans you have a greater chance to develop your potential, your self reliance. Only your talent is the determination of your station in life.

There is a great deal to be proud of as Americans. People from all over the world look to us for our accomplishments.

For example, we feed much of the world with our productive agriculture. When I grew up, farmers were faced with terrible problems--low prices, overproduction, and inadequate housing. Today our farmers are able to grow three or four times more on an acre of land than in 1930, and machinery has rescued workers from the backbreaking labor of earlier days. Anyone who has primed tobacco, or handed, or strung, or hung it in the barn and known the weariness of exhaustion knows that machines really can make life easier.

We have the most sophisticated technology in the world. We have always been a nation of tinkerers. Frontier men and women had to invent ways to survive. Most of you accept the fact that you can make a telephone call across the country, but when I grew up my family did not have a telephone.

Today's communications are like magic. A child of my generation read about such things in science fiction books. We read the outrageous idea that a space ship might one day allow a person to go to the moon, that there might be communications systems that could use satellites in space

to transmit messages, and that space ships might approach distant planets and send back images to the earth. To your generation, these things are daily events.

We are still reaping the benefits of the space race, from NASA. These inventions vary from tiny computers to solar panels for energy. As every astronaut has acknowledged, he was part of a team, a band of scientists, test pilots, astronomers, plant workers, and recovery teams that made it possible for three men to leave the cape and go into space.

Two of my colleagues in the Senate were part of that team--John Glen and Jack Schmitt. These men and their colleagues have, as Tom Wolfe recently wrote, the "right stuff." Emerson would have said they had "self-reliance." They are the lonely warriors of space; they were chosen for their special skills and went into space to do battle with the challenge of the Russians. In many ways there are part of the frontier spirit, for they faced the unknown of space much as the early explorers faced the unknown of the New World. I think that each of us has a bit of that spirit, a bit of the frontier heritage, a spirit of adventure, a daring, all of which make up the American spirit.

Your age will also have its challenges. These will be quite different from the ones that my generation faced. I can see that we are now entering an age that will again test the ingenuity of the American people. In the past months the Senate has been debating how to face the energy crisis. It seemed almost impossible that the United States would ever face such a challenge.

It would be easy to point fingers and assign blame to one thing or another; there are easy targets. Yet I think that what will happen will surprise many people. I say this because I think that I know the spirit of the American people, and we will not accept the present dependence on foreign sources of energy. In the past months, we have seen what price such dependence can exact from us. We must seek national as well as personal self-reliance.

So your generation will have to give us some of the answers that we need to achieve this great mission. This battle will not be won by an army, will not be as glamorous as going to the moon, but it can be achieved by teamwork and an awareness that only if each of us does his part can we win.

SELF RELIANCE

Although we do have many problems, there is one more thing that has survived untarnished--that is the freedom to think and express ourselves. In my job I have found that there are many people who disagree with me, many people who have some harsh things to say about my thinking and voting. I welcome such criticism, and I am always ready to listen to opposing thoughts. It is only in disagreement that our ideas are tested, only in a dialogue that we move beyond our present boundaries of thinking.

So I leave you with a challenge. Our forebears conquered a continent, they erected a government, they fought battles and invented ways of making life easier. Your generation will be asked to carry on with less resources the traditions that have led to greatness. This will perhaps be the central challenge for the remainder of the century.

As you enter your careers in the world, prepare yourselves to be innovative, pay attention to the values that your churches and your community institutions pass along to you, and as you face the inevitable problems that will come along to challenge you, think about the American tradition that you are heir to. And when times get especially difficult and there is the temptation to despair, reach deep within yourselves and discover even greater self-reliance.