

"Challenges for the Student Scholar
Beyond 1988"

Honors Convocation
Kentucky State University
Frankford, Kentucky

Delivered by:
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Master of Ceremonies, President Burse, faculty, students
and friends of Kentucky State University.

It is an honor and a privilege to have been invited to
talk with you briefly on this occasion. I find it
particularly important because it is an Honors
Convocation - an observance of the pursuit of
excellence.

As I think back to the many motivational talks to which I
have listened, most of them seemed to have had the
same theme - "The world is out there waiting for you to
come and conquer it." I don't know whether it is due to
advancing years or the sign of the times, but I often find
myself longing for a return to a far more simple time - a
time when the basic values of life were stressed in the
home - time when education was designed not only to
enable one to make a living, but also to "live a rich and
rewarding life".

I seem to sense in many aspects of our present day
society a desire to return to basics. Our technological
advances have carried us so far and so rapidly that
some elements of our lives seemed to have been
bypassed - there seems to be something missing. There

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is a discontinuity, a disconnection, which leads to a feeling of isolation.

If this feeling of discontinuity were just confined to me, I would be tremendously worried, But I am sure that you can recognize a general trend and interest in the things and methods which have served us so well in the past. There is even a resurgence in the songs of the 50's and 60's. The sounds of the Big Bands are coming back into vogue. As mundane an article as men's suspenders to hold up one's trousers is an indication of a recognition of the usefulness of a once abandoned article.

As I pondered your theme for today, "Challenges for the Student Scholar Beyond 1988" and projected what station in life you would be in twelve (12) years at the beginning of the 21st Century, I concluded that you are in a pivotal position to span the gap between this century and the next. Most of you will be between 30 and 35 years of age -well into your career path. President Reagan will be nearly 90, Gorbachev will be close to 70 and Honda will be turning out 500,000 cars a year in Georgetown, Kentucky.

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However, Dromgoole penned these lines a few years ago which vividly describes the challenge I give you to span the tide:

An old man going a lone highway
Came at the evening, cold and gray
To a chasm, vast and wide and steep
With waters rolling cold and deep,
The old man crossed in the twilight dim,
The sullen stream had no fears for him;
But he turned when safe on the other side,
And built a bridge to span the tide,

"Old man", said a fellow pilgrim near,
"You are wasting your strength with building here,
Your journey will end with the ending day,
You never again will pass this way,
You've crossed the chasm, deep and wide,
Why build you this bridge at eventide?"

THE BUILDER lifted his old gray head,
"Good friend, in the path I have come," he said,
"There followeth after me today
A youth whose feet must pass this way."

The chasm that was as nought to me
To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be:

He, too, must cross in the twilight dim--
Good friend, I am building this bridge for him."

Today, I would like to propose that this institution is on the cutting edge of what will soon become a national academic movement to return to the basics at the college and university level. It has already been recognized that a return to a study of the classics, the Great books of the Western World, and the study of great philosophers will prepare students to exemplify the depth of thought, the mental discipline, the appreciation for diverse opinions, and the overall ability to live and operate in a new world community.

This educational generation has witnessed the pitfalls; the teacher whose instructional style cannot match the student's learning style, the teachers who have limited exposure beyond their subject field thereby totally incapable of teaching in an interdisciplinarian environment, technocrats who become devastated when their specialized skill becomes obsolete overnight or a

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public servant whose job is eliminated by budget cuts and finds it impossible to transfer old skills to new job requirements.

The school systems across America have witnessed unprecedented high school dropouts; or to make matters worse, high school students being graduated and unable to read.

Seriously, the next twelve years may determine if we are to witness the last decade of an American century or the first century of an American millennium.

Human progress is like a medley race. Empires are cultural sprints, a burst of speed of brief duration.

Civilizations are cultural distance runs, sustained activity over a long period of time. In the remaining years of the 20th century, you will be among those who will have to decide either to take the baton from one of the western empires that Paul Kennedy ably describes in his book, The Rise And Fall Of The Great Powers, like 16th-century Spain, 19th-century France and 20th-century England and run a hundred-yard dash. Or

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should we take the baton from the Roman Civilization and run the marathon.

Will America be another ethnocentric empire or one of the few long-term, durable multiracial civilizations?

Will America realize the global changes of the 60's - 70's-80's; the rise of a global economy with world-wide regional controls; and a diffusion of power independent of Moscow and Washington; the rise of nationalism and the ever-growing unity of the Third World counties?

As we move more into the realization that we Americans actually live in a world community of whites, blacks and browns, there is going to be an increased need for the study of many languages and cultures. The only way that one can communicate with another culture is to understand the "thoughts" of that culture and one expresses one's thoughts in the language used by that culture; thus it will necessary for us to be fluent in the languages of those we wish to communicate.

Today, we must clear up misunderstanding about schooling and education. Some of you are here for a degree and will probably obtain it. Schools confer

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degrees. However, education confers understanding, knowledge and competence.

It will be those who dare to be truly educated, think clearly for themselves; who gain both a cultural and historical perspective of human experience and who understand the process of science and appreciate the intellectual beauty of a scientific achievement who will ascend to the top. It is there that ideas and visions can forge movements. It is there that the future is defined. It is there that scholarship, discipline and communication skills span chasms and build bridges.

Your future will be filled with contradictions and dichotomies. There are moral, ethical, political and emotional problems that your rigorous years of education may not address. Developments in science are occurring at an ever faster rate. This is especially true with biological sciences where genetic engineering raises new ethical problems daily or in physical science where the super chip is about to make an entire generation of computers obsolete. But a good liberal education will give you the benefit of historical human dimensions to place all new challenges in contemporary context.

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I urge you to appreciate the value of a liberal arts education that will lay the foundation in you to lead America in becoming a civilization. In ancient Greece, scholars studied mathematics, physics, logic, music, astronomy, and the use of language in speech and writing.

They inquired into the proper ways to govern, the workings of the universe, the relationship between mathematics and music, and almost every other concern of the active and imaginative mind.

A scholar who studied all these things was called a Sophist, which means one who works at being wise. This then is the challenge for the student scholar beyond 1988, i.e., "working at being wise".

It will take wisdom to lead America to accept the fact that the diffusion of economic power is a reality and can be the greatest source of American opportunity.

It will take wisdom to lead America in becoming a more literate culture capable of deep analytical thinking with less knee-jerk posturing and more long-range strategic humane planning.

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It will take wisdom to maintain our high standard of living while paying off a trillion dollar budget deficit - and at the same time wrestle with the problems of the homeless, an anesthetized drug addicted population, and the resurgence of the ugly head of racism.

The old man going a lone highway lifts his old gray head once more and says to the students here today;

" Good Friends, before you cross in the twilight dim of the twentieth century where it is nearly sunset, know those bridges that have spanned the chasms of the centuries and withstood the test of the ages. Dare not cross to the 21st century without constructing your span upon their tried wisdom and experience."

- o Start with the medical skills and geometry of the Egyptians
- o Allow your fascination for space exploration go back to the astronomy of the Babylonians
- o Trace your origins of public relations back to the early written symbols of the alphabet offered by the Phoenicians
- o Dare not be a government servant without the benefit of Plato's Dialogues -" The Republic" which outlines

plans for his ideal society

- o When faced with the ethical and moral problems of surrogate mothering and euthenasia , allow Socrates to lead you into a method of inquiry where you can question everything until the right answer surfaces.

- o Can we truly raise our ecological perspective in developing and managing the world's natural resources without starting with Aristotle's approach to truth through the natural world around him. It was he who first used modern scientific methods classifying living things into groups.

- o Can the modern day calculator and computer user know real value without knowledge of Pythagorus', greatest ancient mathematician whose principles of geometry are operative today

- o Can medicine and law continue its triumphant march to better health and equal protection without that universal language - Latin -

- o How can one escape the philosophy and history revealed in Homer's - Illiad and Odyssey

- o How can any scholar appreciate the religious fervor kindled and interwoven in the lives of our modern world without some knowledge and appreciation of The Koran, The Torah, and The Holy Bible.

All these have built bridges that span the chasms of ignorance, misunderstanding, and hatred. As dawn breaks in the 21st century, you, Kentucky State University scholars, will be in the forefront because you crossed those ancient bridges and now have a foothold on the future.