Weaver, Bennett

Convocation Address
THE UNIVERSITY AND THE STATE

I

In this hour of cordiality your director has had the happiness to remind me that I stand here as a representative of your sister institution to the north. I am sensible of that honor. Yet I am more sensible of the courtesy of your director. Were the rivalry of our two universities a rivalry between his kindliness and my ability to express my appreciation of it, I fear that the University of Michigan would come off but poorly. In so far as I may, I bring you greetings from that University—warm, genuine, full of proud respect. And when I return to my northern home, I shall not forget that I have had a home among you also, a citizenship here which I shall cherish.

II

We meet today to honor you who graduate. In this hour a great university built by the people puts into your hands the tokens of its congratulations. By this act it seals its faith in you. It admits you into forward places, positions of new power, positions of more severe responsibility. It opens to you a larger liberty than men and women have elsewhere in the world. It expects from you, as it ought, an ever-living gratitude to itself and a deep loyalty to the State. You on your part have had faith in what Ohio has made possible for you. Were the years of work represented among you summed up, even among you who receive the two higher degrees, the total of them would be more than lie between us and the birth of Christ. Each of these years on your part has been touched by an abiding faith in a way a life, the way of intelligence, the way in which all freedom for the self
is tempered by the duty of service to others. Whether you have followed the pathway of letters, of science, of arts, of agriculture—made luminous upon the great seal of this University—you have all come at last to knowledge. And in these our times, when so much of the trouble in the world has arisen not out of the evil of men as out of his mental confusion and spiritual stupidity, it is an act of fine courage on your part to stand and take your places in the front lines of Democracy. You have accepted the privileges of the commonwealth; you have so far kept the faith with the State, and you will keep that faith. This is indeed no mean occasion.

It is a human tendency to lose the fresh meaning out of all things to which we can give ceremonial expression. That which our fathers saw in visions and labored to make real, we tend to formalize and then to forget. But today we must recapture, if in any way we have lost it, the living significance of what we do here. It was a fine day in America when from our first college the first man graduated. It was a fine day in Ohio when, sixty-three years ago, the first class graduated. But it is a finer day this day when we meet here in the great tradition of our culture, carrying on, going forward strongly, hundreds of us now where at first there were only seventeen. Man has not achieved such another thing in all his history, first to declare himself free, then to fight himself free, and then to give himself to wisdom that he may remain free.

I sometimes think that we who live in universities are the first to forget the vital tradition of education in America. We are like healthy men who are not aware that they are breathing, like strong men who do not count their pulses. But I purpose now that
we remember our annals and charge our minds with their beauty
and their power.- It was only one hundred sixty years ago that
Tahgahjute - John Logan- died. His immortal message to Lord
Dunmore, the Gettysburgh address of the American Indian, stands
chiseled in granite at the end of the trail of his people. Since
an end had to come, let us be grateful that it came nobly. But
where the trail ended for him and his people, it began and lead
on for George Rogers Clark and for ours. In seven years the North-
West Ordinance was passed. Ohio, which for centuries had been the
battle ground of Indian tribes, became a part of that territory
which included what are now the states of Indiana, Illinois,
Michigan, and Wisconsin. Written into that Ordinance, whether
by the hand of Thomas Jefferson or another, were words which I
wish to repeat now: "Religion, Morality, and Knowledge being
necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools
and the means of education shall forevermore be encouraged."

At Lexington men ranged themselves against their enemy and
fired the shot heard round the world. In this Ordinance men did
a more heroic, a more significant thing: they ranged themselves
against their own stupidity and spoke words that ring like trumpets
crying to battle at the last, the true Armageddon. We cannot hear
them too clearly, we cannot meditate them too deeply. Had the
wisdom these words contain not been as close as blood to the
purposes of the founding fathers, the history of this nation
would have been far different. It is doubtful that there would
have been the Morrill Act of 1862. Had there been no Morrill Act
it is doubtful that any doors would have opened upon this campus
on September 17, 1873. Harriet Townsend, John F. McFadden,
Charles Orton and the other fourteen members of their class
would have gone elsewhere and have lived other lives. Those 40,000 people, who have in the past six decades received their degrees from this University would have gone elsewhere and have lived different lives. Plainly, so also would you, how other and how different you will never know.

There is, in our American tradition, another state paper which I wish to recall. To me none seems nobler, none more profoundly wise: the Farewell Address of George Washington. Delivered only nine years after the writing of the Ordinance, it carries the same thought regarding education. Then the last of the three sentences which I shall read, no words contain a truer principle of sound government: "Religion and Morality are indispensable. Promote, then, as an object of primary importance institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge. IN PROPORTION AS THE STRUCTURE OF GOVERNMENT GIVES FORCE TO PUBLIC OPINION, IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT PUBLIC OPINION SHOULD BE ENLIGHTENED."

Here, then, is the central principle of our national life. On the one side of it lies tyranny; on the other side leaps up anarchy. In so far as the structure of our government or any government fails to give force to public opinion, that government begins either to exist tyrannously for itself or, failing, it ceases to exist at all. All that we as a nation rightly have been, all that we may hope rightly to be lies in this; namely, that the structure of our government give force to public opinion, and that the public opinion be fit to express itself. Our government must be the means—never the end—always the means through which we may establish justice among ourselves, assure our own tranquility, live at peace with all peoples if may be, or deal strongly with
them in war if needs be. But let us be severly clear: all this is bitter nonsense, it is dark danger if we do not enlighten public opinion. There is no other way! With what pathetic hopefulness, with what tragic and mortal anticipation do we here in America change from one political party to another! But however we vote, our troubles seem to be from eternity; they do not fail. The point is that when all of the Ins are out and when all of the Outs are in, we are still the same people. It may be brave pioneer Americanism to talk about lifting ourselves by our own boot straps; but I tell you that will never be done. We cannot get above our own ignorance. The ballot in the fist of a brute is a brute ballot. The ballot in the palm of an evil man is an instrument of the evil in him. We must educate. The only good ballot is that in the hand of a good man. And an ignorant man is not yet a wholly good man. We must educate, educate, educate! "IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT PUBLIC OPINION SHOULD BE ENLIGHTENED."

Let us pause now at this most proper time to understand the founding fathers more clearly. What manner of men were they? Whence did they derive their thoughts? Upon what base do these men rest their conclusions?

The answer is simple and may be given plainly: The large majority of the founding fathers of America were college men. We have commonly thought of them as backwoodsmen, Indian hunters, wild fellows dressed in deerskin, armed with long rifles and Bowie knives. We should be closer to the truth if instead of them as armed with knives we thought of them as armed with Occam’s razor. In his revised edition of Sanderson’s "Biographies of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence," Robert T. Conrad says: "It may be doubted whether any popular body has
been comprised of so large a proportion of highly educated members.
The number of those who had regularly graduated in the colleges of Europe and America was twenty seven. [There were] twenty other members whose education was either academic or superior to the ordinary course of the universities. [The nine remaining members] included men of extensive reading and enlarged sagacity."
Charles Carroll of Carrollton, after whom my own college was named, spent sixteen years of study in the schools of Europe. He was probably a more highly educated man than any now directly serving the government of the United States.

But what was taught in the colleges which trained these men? It was something rather close to what we call Reading, Writing, and 'Rithmetic, with the hickory stick hard by to toughen any softness or to transform any indulgent self-expression into creative energy. It was, in short, the old Trivium or Quadrivium of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, adapted to the energetic needs of a new civilization. It may be surprising to know that many of the founding fathers could speak Latin as well as English, and that others of them were as familiar with Hebrew and Greek as they were with Latin. It was these men who brought forth upon this continent a new nation. It was these men who knew that "the means of education must "forever be encouraged". And it was not peculiar and it was not by chance, but rather it was in the tradition of settled common sense and wisdom that Washington wrote: "IN PROPORTION AS THE STRUCTURE OF GOVERNMENT GIVES FORCE TO PUBLIC OPINION, IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT PUBLIC OPINION SHOULD BE ENLIGHTENED."

On May 10, 1775, the University of Pennsylvania celebrated its commencement with Latin syllogistic disputes. The chief guest at that commencement was the man who was on his way to take command of the Continental Army, George Washington.
III

We meet, then, upon this very pleasant academic occasion, but we do not meet alone; we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses. We have come here to take our part in a scheduled ceremony, but through the forms of this ceremony we find ourselves first the inheritors and then the guardians of a great tradition. That tradition we find doubly menaced: It is threatened as always by the greed and unwisdom of our own people; it is threatened especially by immense forces plunging at loose in the world. We realize now that America is something too beautiful, too human and too divine ever to be safe. The measure of safety which may be given to America is the measure of safety which may be given to life itself: only that measure which is indeed the last full measure of devotion. This nation was born of battle, of courage, of intelligence, and of utter sacrifice. It can never be maintained by rolling pacifism, by fearfulness, by stupidity, and by comfortable indulgence. It can only be maintained by that which went into the bone and the blood and the brain of it when it was conceived. Today you who graduate do not graduate to no purpose: you graduate into a tradition of work and of warfare for the inalienable rights of man.

In its relationship with the state what should a university be? It should be first, it seems to me, a center of faith in the state. Of all people educated people should be the first to know that when the virtues of America are being assailed, that is not the time to doubt them. That is the time of times to assert our faith in them with all our mind and heart and hand. Because force, force low and sub-basial, a kind of Oedipus evil
has broken loose in the world, that is no reason to doubt the
government of the people and by the people and for the people.
Because cold cunning swarms over the orient, abetted by oily
treachery within our own country, that is no reason that the
deaf of America shall have died in vain. Because a hairy hand
can reach from the kremlin to sink a pick-axe into the brain
of a brother monster skulking in Mexico, it does not follow that
beauty, justice, and truth are destroyed in the world. There are
some things which educated people should know. They should know
them in the dark as well as in the daylight. It is their peculiar
business and first service to their fellow citizens to know them.
And among the things they should know is this: that decency and
right do not become less decent and right when evil and wrong
attack them. It is our first duty to give faith to the people.
In these days of sweat and blood it is our plain business to
remember this: The sun will shine tomorrow, cows will give milk,
corn planted in the earth will grow, and the eternal spirit of
man will pursue liberty and justice until it find them!

Our University, then, becomes a center of stability within
the state. It is like a gyroscope working in a ship at sea. When
changes come, as they must, lurches and lists sometimes violent,
the University keeps the state safe on her keel. When the winds
are up, as they shall be this fall, the University knows that
no law of life shall be broken, that the wisdom she teaches is
just as wise as in the days of halcyon calm. In her laboratories
the laws of energy and of gravitation still  
work; in her fields
the laws of chemistry still work through the soil. One of the
best advantages of the Ohio State University is that it is set
deep in the soil of the state. Who shall shall a place like this
or pitch it off its foundations? It shall continue to give of its own deep strength to the state. And you who graduate here today, who today forever become a part of this institution, who here have come to know the best that has been thought and done in the world, will exemplify among the people that best. To become a real alumnus of the Ohio State University is to demonstrate through your living the truth you have learned here.

Among the many legal documents which have been gathered around this institution I found one phrase which filled my mind. It said that here upon this ground should be built "a university worthy of the state of Ohio". Such a university has been and is being built. It is set deep within the soil of this state, and it shall remain here a center of stability and power.

But the University has another function. It would deserve well enough to be cherished by the state and to be encouraged by the state were it to remain merely a center of stability. To be a place where truth may abide and be known by the people is to be a place worthy of the loyalty of the entire citizenship. But the University is something more than this; it is a something centrifugal. Being a center of power, it is constantly throwing off power into the state. May I illustrate in a plain way? I should like to refer to the work of the county agents. They are mainly quiet men, carrying out to the farmers what is learned here. Here at the University live stock is improved; and presently better strains appear on the farms, and the whole state benefits. Here on plats of ground, such grains as Rosen Eye and Red Rock Wheat are developed and out yonder on the farms better crops are grown. "A University worthy of the State of Ohio"— I say that wheat is bread and bread is life, and that the university which gives better wheat to the state is worthy of the state.
Of course, the final service of the University to the State is the life of those whom she educates. You, to-day, are the greatest product of this institution; and no man shall measure your value. Yet behind you there are thousands of others coming forward. There are more than we shall know. Our eyes are sometimes sealed to the immense drama that is in progress here, sealed by familiarity. Had we the magic of Orson Wells, could we come here from Mars or a better planet, our imaginations would be charged with wonder and astonishment. Here we should find 12,370 young men and women voluntarily putting themselves under the tutelage of 1635 highly trained citizens—their faculty. They would fall into ordered divisions, those divisions being determined by the need of the commonwealth. 1821 of them would study the culture of the soil from which all citizens draw their life. 233 would train themselves in the care of the live stock of the state. 1842 would prepare themselves to make the engines of industry run. That the common citizenship might have health, 514 would study dentistry and medicine; and should these fail, as they sometimes do, 96 would become nurses—to make illness itself delightful. Because the affairs of the state are complex and not all men are as honest as the heads of the divisions, 200 would elect the law. 2,336 would study commerce and trade. Knowing that life which is not both beautiful and wise is not worth living, 2,755 would give themselves to the arts, to Literature and Philosophy. And that everything might come to its right end, 2,473 would elect to study Education itself. This is the amazing thing which the man from Mars would see; and this is in most sober truth, nothing other than the Ohio State University of 1940. This is the University "worthy of the State of Ohio"—pouring her splendid strength out into the State, never asking from the State anything that she will not multiply.
like leaves and fishes end give again to the State—wanting nothing for herself, asking nothing, but deserving much because she gives all.

IV

Strangely, standing here, with my mind full of the glory of this institution and of this nation, I am reminded of another occasion. Then, and it was not long ago, I was a guest at another university, the University of Munich. My host was one of the noblest scholars in Europe. As he escorted me about, he seemed relieved to find things that he might point out, memorials of the university he loved. So we walked down the school corridors, past the empty classrooms, until we came at last to the assembly hall. He pushed open the bronze doors, and we entered. We advanced to the center of the room, and stood. I saw that the face of my friend was alive with grief. There were no words in him. There was no need of words. For we stood there fronting a large bust of Adolph Hitler, gross and white as death. We stood there not speaking, a German professor and an American, our lips closed before the bust of Adolph Hitler - and the room was empty of life.

I tell you this story with one thing in mind; namely, that those of us here may cease now from taking America for granted, that we may graduate, all of us, into that high citizenship for which we were intended. If the men of other nations stand ready to die that they may be slaves, how ready should we stand to live that we may be free! This is our choice. The easy days are over for America: our frontiers are gone, our natural wealth is immensely squandered, our markets are closing. The wild strength of our youth as a nation, seemingly inexhaustible, is already
in part wasted. We must now bethink ourselves. We must under-
stand better our crude heritage in material things and turn to
our heritage in the mind and the spirit. Said our first president,
"The propitious smiles of heaven can never be expected on the
nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right."
Washington, in the bitter years of his warfare, knew what a man
might have to fear from the knife in the back and the guns of an
enemy. He went to work and silenced the guns. But he knew there
was no way of silencing "the eternal rules of order and right".
And so he lay down before his people these stern words: "The
foundations of our national policy must be laid in the pure and
immutable principles of private morality."

I find in these words the sum of all I would say to you. It
is here in our University that we learn "the eternal rules of
order and right". That we may learn them the University exists.
To know them is our enlightenment, the first act of our rectified
citizenship. But it is not enough that we learn these rules;
we must live according to them. Anything less than this will not
do. From those of us whom the state has educated for her service,
nothing less will do. "Until wise men lead in the affairs of
the state, the human race will never cease from evil," said Plato.
"Only the good man can be the good citizen," said Aristotle. "The
foundations of our national policy must be laid in the pure and
immutable principles of private morality," said Washington.

When someone urged the Spartan Lycurgus to build a wall of
defense about his city, he replied: "The men of Sparta are the
wall of Sparta." He knew that no nation could endure beyond the
character of its people. It is that thing which we must know
in America. Let us build our navies and fill the air with our
eagles. Let us stand ready to strike, and where we strike make an end. But let us know that at last, out beyond the tumult, our safety lies in knowing and in obeying "the eternal rules of order and right". To that end our State exists. To that end our University exists. To that end we educate. To that end we graduate.

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Bennett Weaver

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August 30, 1940