

The original documents are located in Box 133, folder “May 31, 1974 - Betty Ford Speech, Westminster Choir College Commencement, Princeton, NJ” of the Gerald R. Ford Vice Presidential Papers at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.

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Remarks By Mrs. Gerald R. Ford
WESTMINISTER CHOIR COLLEGE COMMENCEMENT
PRINCETON CHAPEL, PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY
FRIDAY, MAY 31, 1974, 10:30 A.M.

Doctor Robinson, Members of the Board of Trustees and Faculty, Graduating Seniors, Families and Guests:

I want to thank you for the opportunity to visit your school and talk to you today. The visit has been very enriching. You have a beautiful campus, ~~xxxxxx~~ with a lovely chapel, and it is hard to imagine a more attractive town than Princeton in the ^{early summer} ~~spring~~. Lastly, I will always treasure the ^{INSPIRING} beautiful music we have heard today. Although I had heard your choir sing before, I never ^{fully} appreciated its full power, ^{that} can only come in a ^{setting} church such as this.

I should start with a small confession. I am used to commencements. I do have four children, and my youngest son graduated from high school earlier this month, ^B but my husband usually makes the Commencement addresses. So when Dr. Robinson's invitation arrived I thought it must ^{my husband} be for him, and you can imagine my surprise when I realized it was for me. Of course I decided to accept right away. Now, I don't have any speechwriters so I thought I might borrow from one of my husband's speeches. Then I read the talk he gave early this month at the University of Michigan, his alma mater. ~~And~~ I knew it wasn't right for me when I came to the sentence, "And you may have heard I played a little football--and I did wear a helmet." Yes, he did wear a helmet. I know that because we still have it in the basement. But I also knew I would have to do my own speech.

A commencement is a beginning, ^{of} you are about to leave this pleasant town where most of you have spent the last four years, and you ^{MUST} ~~should~~ be asking yourselves, "What will it be like; what sort of times are these today?"

Charles Dickens answered this over a hundred years ago, in A Tale of Two Cities, when he wrote: "It was the best of ~~all~~ times; it was the worst of times." Today we might say, "There is good news



and bad news." Certainly there are problems. ^{Some} Some of them are large, and some of them are totally new, but none are insoluble. Many of them stem from our position as the richest nation in the world.

There is inflation, and especially the rise in food prices. However, the latter is partly due to the worldwide demand for our farm products, which has raised prices here at home. While we are the best fed country in the world, we expect to export twenty billion dollars of farm products during this fiscal year--almost \$100 for every American. The rest of the world depends on this country for food in emergencies, and during famines. Fortunately farm prices are dropping somewhat, and we may even see lower prices in the supermarket later this year. Energy prices are up greatly, and much of this is because of the sharp rise in ^{the price of} oil from the Mid East, ~~but~~ we still use over half of the world's energy. If our oil imports continue to be threatened by other countries, we can make ourselves virtually independent of foreign sources.

There is unemployment, in part because of the energy crisis, but the number of people working is higher than ever and climbing every year. Never have career opportunities for women been so promising. And some of the unemployment is a result of our success. Several years ago there was a surplus of engineers; today there is an oversupply of PhDs. Certainly no other country, as we know the world today, could achieve an oversupply of engineers or PhDs.

~~These are~~ ^{we have} today's problems, but not like those my generation faced, growing up in the depression of the thirties. Nor are they like those faced by 15 senior classes since 1941, who graduated with the United States at war. The riots and protests of just a few years ago have subsided; the rise in crime

rates has slowed, and in some areas been reversed. We are out of the war in Viet Nam and at peace, ~~today~~ ^{detente} is easing Cold War tensions, and we have reestablished diplomatic relations with Communist China. ~~If I had the time I would love to tell you about the trip my husband and I made to China even a in 1972~~ ^{year ago}. Finally there are ~~even~~ signs that there may be a settlement in the Middle East. ~~So~~ in spite of the problems, the future is promising. It is a time of opportunity for young people, and especially for those skilled in the arts, as you are.



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There are some beautiful words carved on the face of the Kennedy Center, in Washington, ^{a statement by} ~~taken from~~ the late President Kennedy:

"There is a connection, hard to explain logically but easy to feel, between achievement in public life and progress in the arts.

" The age of Pericles was also the age of Phidias.

" The age of Lorenzo de Medici was also the age of Leonardo da Vinci.

" The age of Elizabeth also the age of Shakespeare."

Everywhere I go today I see these words coming true. Last month we went with Nancy Hanks, of the National Endowment for the Arts, to a small place called Dalton, to inaugurate the Art Train's first tour of the South. The Art Train was originally set up in Michigan, by the Michigan State Council on the Arts, and tours that state every summer. But it also tours the rest of the country. Last summer it visited the Rocky Mountain area. The response to it is enthusiastic, everywhere it goes, as it brings art to countless small towns without museums of their own, ^{towns} ~~and~~ where the people seldom have a chance to see the best in art. The six coaches also ~~have~~ house sculptors, silver-smiths, macrame workers and potters who show their skills--last year to 72 million people.

There ^{are} ~~were~~ also bands and dance companies to entertain the crowds each time the train stopped. ³⁴ And the interest shown in the Art ^{Train} ~~Train~~ by middle America is matched by the demand for museums, live theatre, ballet and symphony orchestras that is developing throughout the

country. This is hardly surprising if you consider the growth of all forms of leisure activities; the demand for boats, for vacation homes and for recreational vehicles is enormous. We need more swimming pools, tennis courts and golf courses. Attendance at professional sports events is still rising, and we now have two professional hockey major leagues, two basketball leagues, and are promised still another football league for this fall.

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The interest ^{IN THE ARTS IS A PART OF THE ENTHUSIASM FOR LEISURE ACTIVITIES AND} isn't just limited to spectators. ^{more and more young} people want to develop their talents. The announcement, this month, that Western High School, in Washington, DC, will become the capital's first public high school for the arts is encouraging ^{Western} ~~news~~. They will start next year with the 9th. grade, but after the upper classes

graduate, the entire school population will be arts students in grades 9 through 12. There will be four teaching divisions: dance; theatre; visual arts; and music, both vocal and instrumental. I'm told that the only other high schools for the arts are in New York City, Newark, and Winston Salem, North Carolina; but we can hope for many more.



We recently attended the opening of the new Harkness Theatre ~~for the Ballet~~ in New York, and I was reminded of the many new theatres we have in Washington. For a start there are the three large theatres of the Kennedy Center, ~~then~~ ^{there} is Wolf Trap, for outdoor performances in the summer, and Catholic University's new Hartke Theatre. The Ford Theatre has reopened, carefully restored to its appearance of a century ago. ^{Even} the Elizabethan Theatre of the Folger Shakespeare Library has been remodelled to meet present fire regulations and now has a regular season, something it never had before, and quite impossible before 1970. I'm certain nearly every large city in the country has had a similar experience.

Much of the growth can be credited to the National Endowment for the Arts. When this administration took office, in 1969, the National Endowment had a budget of less than eight million dollars. Thanks to Nancy Hank's leadership, this amount has steadily increased. This year it is over sixty million dollars and will support more than ^{2,500} ~~twenty-five~~ ~~hundred~~ different projects. The budget request for next year is eighty-two million dollars, or more than ten times as much as was spent only five years ago. I should add that the National Endowment for the Humanities is funded at essentially the same level, since their interests often appear to overlap. I believe this support will continue to grow. ~~[for Members of Congress don't like to cut an appropriation that supports a museum or symphony in their district.]~~

However, this is just the tip of the iceberg. The Endowment expects matching funds, and a dollar of government money often generates five or six dollars in private matching funds. Public spirited benefactors continue to make generous contributions, such as the Harkness Theatre, or Wolf Trap, which I just mentioned. There is continued support from the large foundations, and business firms have recently made gifts, *An example is* ~~such as~~ Mobil's, of one million dollars, to underwrite ~~WNET's~~ WNET's "Masterpiece Theatre." All in all the nation's total art requirement is expected to exceed one billion dollars next year. The art revolution is with us, and this is a good time for your talents, whether you are a teacher, director or performer.

However, I hope you won't limit your talents to gainful employment, because it is important to be involved. ~~For some this has meant protests, riots and civil disorder, but I'm not speaking of that sort of involvement. To me the productive form of involvement,~~ *The* real contribution you can all make is community involvement. It can take many forms. If you like sports, you can work with youngsters, *in* Little League baseball, or the Babe Ruth League, or the Police Athletic League. Some communities have "Big Brothers", where an adult spends a day a week with a fatherless child. There are Sunday Schools, Summer Bible Schools, and Church sponsored summer camps, often with volunteer counsellors. There is the Red Cross, and the Good Will. *There* are countless fundraising organizations requiring volunteer workers. *There* are libraries, museums and hospitals which use volunteers. There is the PTA, and for those with more time there is the local school board, where a teacher is singularly effective. For the more ambitious there are VISTA programs. The list of possibilities is endless, but please do something.

At different times I've been a Cub Scout den mother, and taught Sunday School. Now that my children are nearly grown, and I have the



the time, I'm fortunate in being invited to serve on a great number of committees. There I see the good work that is being done and am thankful to be able to do my small share.

But the activity I recall with the greatest pleasure was of a different sort. After graduating from college I spent several years in New York, with the Martha Graham dance company. Then I went back home, to Grand Rapids, where there was no professional dancing. However, I was able to organize some dancing classes, for underprivileged children from the ghetto, and was thrilled with the results. Those children were so appreciative of the new dimension in their lives that I felt guilty when we moved to Washington and I had to leave them.

So this is the sort of activity I especially recommend to you-- using your talents to reach the underprivileged. There will be many ways open to you in your professional lives: Saturday morning programs in your schools, or activities of church auxiliaries or neighborhood houses are but two examples. Don't be afraid to experiment, or bring groups into your church, because a church is not intended to be used only on Sundays.

Rather, ~~they~~^{it} should be used in a variety of ways. Religious plays, staged in churches in the Middle Ages, were the origin of the secular theatre. Today we again find many different activities in our churches. For example, a group of Mexican dancers and musicians, students from Guadalajara, Mexico, recently presented a program of exotic native dances in the National Cathedral in Washington. Surely you, too, can think of ways of using your training which will help bring people back into the churches where they belong.

This ~~is a~~ humanitarian approach to music, the gift of music to the underprivileged, and perhaps bringing them into closer contact with the church and a richer life, is a splendid use of your talents, and will make your college, which helped develop ~~them~~^{your talents}, proud of you. God bless you all.



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I should start with a small confession. I am used to commencements. I do have four children, and my youngest son graduated from high school earlier this month. But my husband usually makes the Commencement addresses. So when Dr. Robinson's invitation arrived I thought it must be for my husband, and you can imagine my surprise when I realized it was for me. Of course I decided to accept right away. Now, I don't have any speechwriters so I thought I might borrow from one of my husband's speeches. Then I read the talk he gave early this month at the University of Michigan, his alma mater. I knew it wasn't right for me when I came to the sentence, "And you may have heard I played a little football -- and I did wear a helmet." Yes, he did wear a helmet. I know that because we still have it in the basement. But I also knew I would have to do my own speech.

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Charles Dickens answered this over a hundred years ago, in A Tale of Two Cities, when he wrote: "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times." Today we might say, "There is good news and bad news." Certainly there are problems. Some of them are large, and some of them are totally new, but none are insoluble.

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