

(As of March 15, 2002)

You may be wondering about this hat.

I am from Akron, Ohio.

Some years ago, my company bought a troubled steel mill in Gadsden, Alabama.

It was necessary to lay off many workers in order to save the business.

So to some people I was a bad man—a man wearing a black hat.

I was called a “carpetbagger,” and it went downhill from there.

After the deal was done, a local businessman sent me a letter--which said in part: “Dear Mr. Brennan--

On behalf of all the businessmen and women in Gadsden, I want you to know that we think you are the good guy —for saving the largest employer in town.

In fact, you wear the white hat. And here it is.”

He actually sent me a white hat, which I wear to this day. (doff hat)

I hope that one day each of you graduates will earn the right to wear your own white hat, literally or figuratively.

(put hat away)

President Kirwan - Most Distinguished Faculty -
Fellow members of the Board -- Distinguished Guests -
Graduating Students

And our very special guests -

The parents, friends, and loved ones of this first
graduating class of the Year 2002.

First, let me tell you how honored I am to be here as
commencement speaker at this celebrated university—
that I first entered in...Oh, my god...1949.

I owe much in my life to Ohio State-- as will you.

As a trustee these past nine years, I hope I have repaid
to some extent the gift of a fine education bestowed
upon me by my alma mater.

It is soon to be your alma mater – The Ohio State
University.

Please join me in expressing our gratitude to these exceptional men and women (turn toward faculty)—who represent the full faculty.

Theirs is the most important calling. They create an educated -- and civil -- society.

(Address faculty)

Thank you for all that you do.

(Lead applause. Return to audience.)

I am proud to be an American. I am proud to be an American at a moment in history that may define civilization for the rest of history.

2001 will be remembered forever for one date — the second “Day of Infamy.” September 11th.

September 11th 2001 took the lives of more than 3,000 innocent people.

It took the lives of at least three of our own—

Kris R. Hughes, Class of '95.

Peter E. Mardikian, Class of '95.

And Mary Alice Wahlstrom, Class of '45.

May they rest in peace.

Most of the dead and missing are Americans, but among them were citizens of 80 nations.

Many of these nations are represented in this graduating class.

I trust each of you feels about your country, the way I am going to speak about America.

For the purposes of today's remarks, we are all Americans.

September 11th was truly an act of terror against us all.

It was a day of incomparable heroism.

Of bravery beyond belief.

Who can ever forget the valiant firefighters and police who saved thousands even as the World Trade Center was collapsing upon them?

Or the shattering stories of fathers and mothers, husbands and wives saying their last good-byes on their cell phones as the buildings filled with flame?

Who can ever forget that the nerve center of our military -- the Pentagon -- was attacked? And perhaps the White House itself and Congress were targeted.

And who can ever again hear the phrase “Let’s roll” without paying homage to Todd Beamer and the remarkable men and women who confronted their moment of truth over a field in the Pennsylvania countryside?

Rather than perish as victims, they died as Americans.

On 9-11, heroes were born of ordinary men and women going about their business until called upon to perform extraordinary deeds.

And, on 9-11, out of crushed concrete and charred metal...like the fabled Phoenix...the spirit of America’s “Greatest Generation” was reborn.

The Greatest Generation, of course, is the name for the men and women who fought in World War II and

thereafter proceeded to rebuild our economy. There are not many of them left.

Even I am not old enough to be one of them.

But you...my young friends, graduates in the Class of March 2002...are old enough to become the vanguard of a reawakened America.

Sitting out there, you are ready to receive your degree. Ready to get that first great new job and follow your career path.

You may not feel like the vanguard of a reawakened America.

But you are!

I do not suggest that you will go to war as a combatant, here or in a foreign land.

But a stirring challenge and an opportunity to make a better world confront you ...the Class of March 2002.

Whatever the lull of the moment ---whatever false sense of security may wash over our citizens again -- I know you will not forget September 11th.

As required, your generation will defend this country, its values and its freedoms.

Over the last few decades --with the exception of the Gulf War -- we, as a people, began to take those values and freedoms for granted---As if they came with the territory.

Not very long ago, we even took the Stock Market for granted. It always went up. Didn't it?

After the crash of the dotcoms and the tragedy of 9-11, we now take nothing for granted.

December 7th 1941 was a watershed that changed the lives of all Americans for as long as they lived.

I assure you the same has happened to you because of September 11th 2001.

As a nation, we have been reawakened to the splendor of a culture that defends and encourages the individual expression of any religious belief. -- Or none at all.

That defends the right of people who disagree —To disagree.

The terrorists are willing to die to deny us these rights and beliefs. Since Lexington and Concord, Americans have been willing to die to protect these rights and beliefs.

The first 10 amendments of the U.S. Constitution are the most comprehensive protection of individual freedom ever written.

The first amendment may be the most powerful statement in history.

It speaks of freedom of speech.

Freedom of the press.

Freedom of peaceable assembly.

Of the separation of church and state.

And even more importantly, —“or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

Global Terrorism does not want “the free exercise thereof.”

Or freedom of speech.

Or freedom of the press.

Or the freedom of peaceable assembly.

Zealots never do.

Do not think that the Taliban and the Al Qaeda are the first murderers to justify terrorism as service to the will of their God.

Nor will they be the last.

Even if Bin Laden is dead or killed tomorrow, his network of zealots will be operating in many countries.

As ominous as this reality may be, on this past New Year’s Day, six in every ten Americans said the aftershock of 9-11 has changed our country permanently for the better.

More than half said the tragedy of 9-11 transformed their own lives for the better.

People, young and old, have assessed their priorities.
They devote more time to their loved ones.
They spend more time with their friends.
They ask themselves not simply how much money can
be made in a lifetime, but-- “How humanely and
generously will I live my life?”

And -- while they may be apprehensive -- they are
learning to live better with the unknown.

The global terrorists do not want civilization, as we
know it, to survive.

Not civilization that fosters the arts.

Or plays music.

Or questions dogma.

Or eats Big Macs

—and Kentucky Fried Chicken

—and Biggie Fries.

To the surprise of Bin Laden and the Al Qaeda—as well
as to some of our friends -- the backbone of this nation
they believed to be mush...

...hardened into titanium.

“All of this,” President Bush reminded us, and I quote, “was brought about on a single day. And night fell on a different world.”

Within days, the Stars and Stripes flew from millions of homes. It flew in profusion here in Ohio Stadium.

On 9-11, Patriotism was reborn in America.

Patriotism was something we seemed to have misplaced. We were even embarrassed by it -- as if it were not politically correct.

Patriotism has been rediscovered.

Liberty, we were reminded is not God-given.

It is earned.

Thomas Jefferson warned us....

“The tree of Liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots AND tyrants.”

This we have rediscovered, too.

**In the last months, a Superpower's strength...
Has been matched by a Superpower's will!**

As it was in World War II.

**World War II took the lives of more than 250,000
Americans -- 450,000 British -- seven and a half million
Russians. In all, some 45 million people lost their lives
in World War II.**

Think of that.

45 metropolitan Columbuses.

Four Ohios.

450 packed Ohio Stadiums.

This took place in my lifetime.

**Such is the horror the enemies of civilized society can
unleash.**

**Early in World War II -- when Nazi bombers were turning
London into one huge "Ground Zero" -- Winston
Churchill promised his people this—
"Victory at all costs. Victory in spite of terror.
Victory....however long and hard the road."**

I remember a particular long, hard road.

It was here in Ohio

--in Akron, when I was a boy of 12.

It was my paper route.

Everywhere there were gold stars on the windows, each star for a family member killed in action.

One house had three gold stars.

Three dead sons.

Or daughters.

I can never forget the sacrifices that allow you and me to be in this place...at this time

...on this March day

...in the 21st century.

We are told, Nostradamus predicted that the first war of the 21st century would last 27 years.

We certainly hope not.

It was to be followed by 1000 years of peace,

We can only hope and pray that will be true.

What we do know is if Terrorism thought it could
~~Terrorize~~^{Paralyze} America, Terrorism was wrong.

America not only will defend itself against international terrorism.

We will root it out!

On New Year's night, Bruce Anderson of the *London Independent*, explained Americans this way to his fellow Brits:

“We underestimated the moral strength of the Great Republic. We ignored the Todd Beamer factor.

“America is a nation of Todd Beamers.”

As you can surmise by now, I am a very emotional and patriotic American. I don't believe we can express Patriotism too much.

I am proud to be a graduate of The Ohio State University.
I am proud to be an American.

What makes me most proud is that we will fight to defend the rights of other people to disagree with us.

That is our greatest strength.

I believe that you young people will work to transform our world for the better as you live your lives.

Today, I am confident for you that our economy is rebounding.

I am confident for you that there will be jobs, and good ones.

I am confident for all of us that, as President Bush has urged, you will “go about your business.”

I am confident in your compassion.

I am confident your priorities are straight.

I am confident that your generation is up to the task that lies ahead.

I wish you all great success.

I invite all of you to stand and join me and The Ohio State University Symphonic Band in “God Bless America.”

(Singing of *God Bless America*)

God bless you all and God bless this university.

