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COMMENCEMENT REMARKS
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
June 13, 1980
JOHN E. CORBALLY

Members of the Class of 1980; friends and families of the graduates; members of the Board of Trustees; faculty and staff of The Ohio State University; and guests:

It is a distinct honor for me to return today to Ohio State to participate in these Commencement exercises. By my own careful count, I have attended thirty-eight commencements at Ohio State - thirty-six as a member of the faculty and two as a parent. In my role at the University of Illinois, I attended twenty-four graduation ceremonies, so in those two institutions I became a veteran of sixty-two commencements. From all of this experience, I have reached three conclusions.

First, it is readily apparent to me that it is impossible to give a commencement speech which is felt by the audience to be too short. You will be happy to know that in spite of the impossibility of accomplishing that deed, I keep on trying to do so and will try again today.

Second, careful analytical studies have indicated to me that only 1.3 percent of the graduates in attendance at a commencement ceremony will remember the name of the commencement speaker for longer than 3.5 days. Those graduates - the 1.3 percent - go on to become trivia experts who remember all sorts of useless information but often forget crucial items such as their Social Security numbers or their spouses' birthdays.

And third, today's graduates - just as was true of yesterday's - are here more to please their parents than because of their intense desire for one

last lecture. In many ways, then, the graduates have about exhausted their interest when they march into the Stadium and are not anxious for further education today.

With those and other understandings firmly in mind, permit me to make a few remarks which I feel are important. As you know, I spent fourteen years on the faculty and as an administrator at Ohio State. I hope that each and every one of you will receive your degree today with a deep sense of pride in and for The Ohio State University. This institution is a great academic institution, and you are fortunate to have had the opportunity to avail yourselves of it. The Big Ten universities are a unique resource of the United States - a unique and fragile resource. We know them so well that we forget about their unique quality, their unique comprehensiveness, and the magnificent contributions which their faculty and staff and their graduates have made to the world. Very few people share the experiences which you have had as students at a university of special quality, and a part of each of your future lives should be devoted to the preservation and enhancement of that special quality at Ohio State. A present or past association with The Ohio State University is a proud possession. Treasure it.

The topic which I find most significant for graduation day comments is the subject of our common tasks as human beings. We have a tendency to describe ourselves by what we do rather than in terms of what we are. You are listed in the program in terms of majors and of degrees. Perhaps it would be better or at least more honest if we were all listed occasionally by some of our more basic human qualifications. For example - "the following graduates are people who have suffered some poverty and who are inspired by the possibilities of making money." All of us who qualify for this title could then be listed under it, and we would not need to waste time with that group in talking about service or about altruism. I suppose we could have a list of those who think they look good in white, those

who wish to achieve a mystical and powerful statu^s, or even those who have an overriding desire to please their parents.

Obviously, these listings would be no fairer nor no more complete than are the ones used in the program today. While your friends and associates could provide some insight into how your complete listing should look, only you are really aware of how it really reads. Deep down inside each of you - in many of you so deep that you haven't looked for it or at it for a long time - is your understanding of you as a human being and of what it is that makes you tick. A purpose of a commencement talk is to attempt to create a setting in which you will take that deep look inside yourself - a look at yourself as a human being and a look at yourself in terms of your relationships with other human beings.

In spite of all of our talk today about this minority or that minority, the basic and hard truth is that within human society each one of us is a unique, human element, and among all those with whom we associate, we are a unique minority of one. As such we have human potential, human expectations, human failings, human strengths, and human weaknesses. We have an amazing ability to hide our individual human responsibilities behind slogans and behind noise; we have an amazing ability to blame our failures upon others and to accept full personal credit for our successes.

So regardless of what today's program or the diploma you will receive reveals about what you have done and are ready to do, they say little about what you are. And it is what you are that will really determine whether you can judge yourself to be a success or a failure - it is upon what you are that the real fate of our human society depends.

We can describe what we are in any number of ways. One of my classification systems provides for three categories of people - the unconscious, the critics, and the volunteers. The unconscious group seems happy - its members try hard not

to be distracted by problems of poverty or of war or of energy sources. Its members prefer not to take sides on any issue and they believe that the best way to avoid taking sides is to be sure that you are constantly unaware of any issues. And they act - with vigor - upon that belief.

The critics are experts on every subject. They are particular experts on why things that are being done are wrong, and they are so busy in analyzing and explaining what is wrong that they have no time to attempt to do things themselves. I have been concerned about the young people in our society who seem so eager to describe what is wrong and so reluctant to work toward whatever they think is right. Our environmentally concerned students litter our campuses, our students concerned about human rights rip off each other's bicycles and stereo sets, and our students who are so concerned about consumer rights add measurably to consumer costs through petty shoplifting. These are the critics, and we have far too many of them.

And then we have the volunteers. You have already guessed that this group will be my "good guys" and that I will urge each of you to become a member of it. The volunteers notice that some things go well and that other things go less than well. They stick their necks out - not in the easy way of the critic, but in the more difficult way of one who works to make something better. It is the critic who decries discrimination; it is the volunteer who tutors or who builds playgrounds or who helps small businesses and businessmen and women or who does any one of a number of things to act against discrimination and the results of discrimination.

As I look back over about thirty years of working with young people as a teacher and as an educational administrator, I am sorry to report that I can recall more noise being made about important issues than I can recall action being taken to resolve important issues. Unfortunately, this picture characterizes our total society today - not merely our campuses. We decry the poor quality of

governmental officials, but the very best people in our society do not wish to serve as government officials. We complain about inflation, but our solutions involve what other people should do or should have done to them, not what we must do or have done to us.

So a part of the way in which you - the members of the Class of 1980 - will have an impact upon our world and upon our society will depend upon how many of you are unconscious, how many of you are critics, and how many of you are volunteers. I hope that your class generates more members of that latter group than have the classes which have gone before you.

There is a great danger in a commencement speech that the speaker will be moved to give the graduates all of the advice he has accumulated and failed to follow over his own lifetime. It is, after all, the last time that you will all be together and what teacher can resist attempting to summarize for you today all of your formal and part of your informal education. I can resist that temptation, and I want to mention only one other point this morning - a point related again to our roles as human beings.

We are told that a major sign of maturity is the ability to be less concerned about one's self and to be more concerned about those human beings outside of one's self. In that sense, our society is not particularly mature today. We are a crybaby society; we sue each other over even the smallest real or imaginary slights; one of the reasons we have so few leaders is because so few of us are willing to follow any but our narrow self-interests. We are an aging society, but are we a mature society?

I would hope that each one of us as a human being would resolve that the key element in our life would be our interaction with our fellow men and women. We must substitute, "What's in it for us?" for "What's in it for me?" and a regular, "What's in it for them?" would not hurt a bit. For unless we live a humane and a

human life, what is the point of our being here together? As university graduates, the humanistic and humane portions of your education and of your lives should dominate you and can rebuild our society.

The time has come to attempt to live up to my promise of brevity. I am happy to be with you today to share once again in Commencement at Ohio State, and we take great pride in you who are about to graduate. As we share with you today our pride in what you are now prepared to do, let us hope that we can take even more pride in what you are prepared to be. What you can do has great potential benefit for our society; but what you are will be of even greater importance to society and will determine how you will grade yourselves in those quiet and solitary moments when each of us faces questions about where our lives have been and where our lives are going. It is that examination which is crucial, and it is for that examination that we hope your years at Ohio State have provided you with preparation.

And now, in a sort of benediction with which I concluded comments to our graduating classes at Illinois, I urge you to be joyful, to be aware, to be enthusiastic, to be of good humor, to have faith, and to become wise. Congratulations and best wishes to each of you.