

Commencement Address  
OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

by Thomas J. Dougherty, Ph.D.  
December 8, 1995

**RESPONSIBILITY**

**President Gee, Board of Trustees, Faculty, Graduates, Friends and Families:**

There is nothing quite so satisfying as to be recognized by your own, as is the case for me today in being awarded the 15th Joseph Sullivant Award. This is the highest award that this university can bestow on its faculty and graduates. I am particularly humbled because of the illustrious group who has preceded me in receiving this honor since first awarded in 1924 to Benjamin Lanne, class of 1888! Among these are a winner of the Nobel Prize and several members of the National Academy of Sciences. The award itself is named after Joseph Sullivant, a member of the first Ohio State University Board of

**Trustees and was endowed in 1920 by Thomas Mendenhall, OSU**

**Professor of Physics.**

**I attended this illustrious institution as a graduate student in the Chemistry Department, receiving my Ph.D. in 1959 under Prof. Harold Shechter who, to this day, remains as active and effective as teacher and researcher as ever. This award belongs as much to Prof. Schechter as to me, since he taught me a certain independence and persistence, which was essential in finding myself doing the cancer research for which I am being honored today. (Actually, with 15-20 graduate students in Dr. Schechter's group, these qualities were basically survival techniques.) It was a great four years!**

I stand here today in an attempt to get your attention and to implant something memorable in your minds. Who am I to do that? I feel a little like Elizabeth Taylor's husbands -- I know what's expected, I just don't know how to carry it off!

Let me start out with a clever little story, which will lead me into what I want to say. A young married couple was about to celebrate their first year of marriage. The wife decided to cook her husband's favorite meal -- escargo. Shortly before he was due home from work, she went to the market to shop. On the way home she spotted a beautiful long dress and decided to try it on. Inside was a handsome man who openly admired her. She tried on the dress and he offered to pay for it. She refused, he persisted, and ultimately they went to his

apartment and the inevitable happened. When she finally came to her senses it was 10 o'clock in the evening, and she panicked. What could she say to her husband? She rushed home, worrying all the way, and came up with an idea. As she approached their house she took the snails, spread them out all over the driveway and then went to the front door and rang the bell. When her husband answered the door, she turned to the snails and exclaimed, "Well girls, we finally made it!"

Perhaps the moral of this story is that when faced with a difficult and unpleasant reality you can either admit your mistakes or find some clever way to avoid the consequences.

Now, graduates, you too have reached a time in your lives when you will be faced with difficult choices. I am not going to stand here

and tell you how wonderful you are or I am for having achieved these goals. You are among the privileged and elite of this country who have achieved a high level of education. You, like I, achieved this at least partly financed by the by the taxpayers of this state and this country. I will confess that when I graduated I probably did not even recognize this (since I didn't think about it) much less did I feel any obligation as a result. I suppose that if I had considered this I would simply have concluded that it was "owed" to me. However, you and I both, in fact, do have an obligation to those who assisted us in obtaining our education. What is this obligation? There are many -- let me point out just one.

A few months ago, a good and great general, Colin Powell,

disappointed many people in this country when he announced that he would not become a candidate for President of the United States, nor any other elected office. General Powell indicated that he had consulted many and thought long and hard before making his decision. He said he did not feel it in his "gut" to make this run for office. Note that what he said in his statement was not that he did not have the desire, or capability to be president, but that he didn't have the overriding desire to such an extent as to make the run for president. Why is that? What has become of our system when the best and brightest among us are dissuaded from even seeking political office? One thing is clear, the media will devastate you -- no matter how clear your record. Who among us could stand up to minute scrutinizing of every

aspect of not just our public life, but also our personal life? The process has become so mean and demeaning that it's lucky if anyone can survive without damage to his or her reputation. Does it matter that Franklin Delano Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy or Bill Clinton carried on in their private lives in a less than exemplary manner? Perhaps so.

The other aspect of political office in this country which is particularly insidious is the need for enormous amounts of money. It is essential that a presidential candidate or any politician must raise tens of millions dollars to run for office. Where does the money come from? -- Wealthy individuals and political action committees, so called PACS, lobbying groups looking for special treatment -- and they get it!

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**-- to the detriment of the rest of us, generally. Those who are elected, whether they admit it or not, are beholden to these people -- they may need their money again! Surely this is not what the founding fathers intended or envisioned when they formed this government.**

**Finally, in the case of General Powell, an additional concern regards the racial issue. Here is a man who would have been the first African American ever to seek the presidency of the United States -- and a large number of Americans of all races and party affiliation were ready to vote for him -- largely because he is a good and decent man as well as highly talented and capable. Yet you will remember that his announcement deciding not to run came within a few days of the tragic assassination of Yitzak Rabin, the Prime Minister of Israel -- killed to**

stop the peace process between Arabs and Israelis. While General Powell indicated that this was not a factor in his decision, it surely was a factor for his family. As we know all too well, assassinations in this country are not unknown. How vulnerable would be the first black man to the crazies in this country? No matter how much protection is provided, no protection can be perfect.

So here we are, today in 1995 when our political process is controlled by special interests, when the most intimate and irrelevant details of one's life are laid bare for all to see and when you are at risk for your very life when you try to serve in political office.

Is there an answer to this? John F. Kennedy said it best in his inauguration speech in 1960: "Ask not what your country can do for

you, but what you can do for your country." That is your challenge and your destiny. We who have ruined this system for you and your children now ask you to fix it! How is that for chutzpah?

But, my friends, that is what you owe this country for helping you become educated. I have no solutions for you, but there are no lack of challenges.

Many of you are concerned about finding jobs when you leave here. As some of you have noted -- it is scary out there.

Where is Beth Weeks? Where is Dana Owens? Let me say to you and all your fellow graduates -- you have a right to be scared. But do not be timid! Do not settle for just anything in order to get a job. Seek until you find what is right for you. You will have to change jobs

**often, perhaps – be persistent – be independent. Do your own thing!**

**Never stop following your dreams! And when you succeed –**

**remember what you owe to those who helped you get there.**

**Thank you and good luck!**