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UA3/3 Wanted: Uncommon Men

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WANTED: UNCOMMON MEN

Today is a "red letter" day in the history of Western Kentucky State College, in so far as I have been able to determine. It marks the first assembly ever held at this institution for the specific purpose of recognizing those who are participating in an Honors Program, those who have achieved distinction in scholarship because of achieving a ~~point~~ standing of 3.3 or higher, and those who possess the highest point standing in the Sophomore, Junior and Senior classes.

While I am delighted that ^{all of} you could be present on this important occasion, to have a share in honoring all of these fine students, I am particularly pleased that President Thompson could be here. On the one hand it enables me to commend him publicly for one of his statements at the College assembly last Friday. He said then that "The ultimate goal of this institution in every undertaking must be quality." I am confident that the President had academic excellence in mind also in that statement, and that he has made a special effort to return to the campus for this occasion.

On the other hand his presence today enables me to tell my classic story about the answer of a College President to a campus visitor's question on scholarship. A curious gentleman entered a certain college campus one day because he saw much construction going on - as in the case at Western - and decided that the institution was undergoing healthy growth and expansion. As the visitor passed from project to project, he unexpectedly met the President of the College who was making a round of inspection of the many project, much in the manner of President Thompson. After the two men had exchanged greetings, the visitor began to ask many questions about the College, its faculty, its students and its growth. He said, "Mr. President, surely such a large and beautiful institution must have a wonderful student body. How many scholars do you have here, Mr. President?"

Appropriately
said
→

The President paused while his brow furrowed in deep thought. ^{after a few seconds} He then lifted his face, looked intently at the visitor and said "About one out of every hundred."

While the President of that institution may have been right in his evaluation of that student body, I have great confidence that the percentage of scholarly young men and women at Western is much higher than one out of every 100. In fact, it was the collective judgement of the Honors Committee that there are many Western students capable of taking Honors Program courses and that our principal task is to find them, motivate and stimulate them properly, and assist them in including Honors courses in their program. Hence the reason for my decision to speak to you on the subject, "Wanted: Uncommon Men." I am confident that I speak to many in this large Freshman class who possess the potential to become unusual, uncommon men and women in the sense suggested by my remarks. I shall speak for about fifteen minutes and hope that you will not get through listening before I do speaking.

I am pleased to salute each of you, honored students, because you have shown that you have been dissatisfied with a mere "passing grade" and that you have been willing to forego some of the present pleasures of academic life in order to achieve maximum scholastic benefits from your ~~high school~~ ^{College} program. As such, you have been unwilling to accept the role of the "average" student and thus lose your identity among the teeming millions of so-called "common" men and women in the United States. You, by your excellence of scholarship, have

cast your lot with the uncommon man of society.

Webster defines "uncommon" as "unusual; extra-ordinary; rare". An "uncommon man" would, therefore, possess such qualities as just indicated, and it is my thesis, my premise, my argument before you ~~tonight~~ ^{today}, that our nation needs more men and women who dare to be different - who are the uncommon sort, rather than merely to increase the numerical strength of the so-called "common man."

In a sense of the word, the basic ills and problems of our world today are concerned with this precise issue. Communism argues that there is room and need only for the common man, for the teeming herd of enslaved peoples on earth.

Democracy, argues that most people possess the potential to become "uncommon," to rise above the so-called masses, and to make their own unique and distinct contribution to civilization, after they have had ample opportunity to achieve their maximum intellectual growth in the American system of education. And in our own nation, we all know that it has been the uncommon, the unusual, the rare type of man or woman who has helped to make the world a better place in which to live.

Let us call the roll briefly of some of these uncommon men ^{who have had a share in the discovery, founding and development of this great nation.} The first name on my roster is Christopher Columbus. The common man - the ordinary man - thought the earth was flat and square, but Columbus - the uncommon man - believed it to be round and never rested until he ~~had~~ sailed uncharted seas under tremendous

hardships and handicaps to prove it. In so doing, he discovered the brave new world which you and I are now privileged to fashion and shape.

The next name on the roll is that of Thomas Jefferson. And while Jefferson is more or less symbolic of scores of other great Americans who had grown weary of tyranny and oppression, it was the immortal Jefferson who gave to man a new dignity as he penned the lines which today undergird our great constitutional heritage: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Before this bold pronouncement of Jefferson in our Declaration of Independence, the common man - the orator and author - referred only to the "divine rights of kings", but the uncommon Jefferson championed the divine rights of all men everywhere! And as a consequence of this unusual man's contribution, mankind all over the world has begun to bask in the warm sunlight of a new-found human dignity.

Abraham Lincoln is the next name on my roster of uncommon men whose contribution has been of such great importance to society. This Kentucky rail-splitter was really troubled by the unnatural social system which permitted one person to own and to enslave his fellow man. The common man - the statesman of Europe

and America - had accepted the fact as necessary to the trade and industry of the world, but it remained for an uncommon man like Lincoln to challenge the injustice of this viscious, inhuman barter of human beings and issue the Emancipation Proclamation as a preliminary step in the abolition of slavery. It required an extraordinary man to act with such courage and boldness to insure that this government of, by, and for the people "should not perish from the earth."

I have been reluctant to name the final person on my roster of "uncommon men" because we are the beneficiaries of countless persons such as Fulton in inventing the steamboat; Bell with the telephone; Morse with telegraphy; Marconi with radio; the Wright brothers with the airplane; and Ford with the horseless carriage or the automobile. Moreover, we are enormously indebted to the Florence Nightangales, the Helen Kellers, the Jonas Salks - the Jane Addams, the Evangeline Booths and all who have labored to lighten the burden of man and to give him renewed hope and determination. To all of these great men and women, we pay our humble tribute and express our sincere thanks. However, we select for particular honor, as the final name on our list, that of Albert Einstein, one of the most uncommon men of modern times.

Einstein, a refugee from Hitler's Germany, lived and taught in the United States in the final years of his life. The common man believed that the smallest unit of matter was the molecule, after Dr. Robert A. Millikan had advanced his molecular theory, and that the ultimate about matter had been discovered. But Einstein, a truly rare and uncommon man, advanced a radical idea known as the "theory of relativity". One of the implications of this theory was that matter existed in smaller units than the molecule, that all matter, in whatever form, was in constant motion, and that matter could be converted into energy or from energy back to matter. This theory presaged the whole new concept of atomic fission and atomic power, soon to be followed by thermonuclear power. In a world population of more than two billion souls, only one man, Albert Einstein, could conceive and demonstrate the practicality of such a far-reaching idea as splitting the atom.

But while these "uncommon", "extraordinary", and "rare" men whose names I have mentioned - Columbus, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Einstein - made vast contributions to the body of human knowledge, they, at the same time, left us with a maze of perplexing problems, whose solutions still await and challenge other uncommon men - uncommon men of the present generation.

Even though Columbus could discover new worlds, it is our task to learn to live at peace among all peoples of all lands. Uncommon men are needed for this task.

Jefferson could promulgate a new philosophy of life which set forth man's inalienable rights, but our task is to see to it that our fellowman, regardless of whom, has his full measure of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. And uncommon men are certainly needed for this task, too.

Lincoln could set in motion the machinery of government which wiped out slavery as an evil social institution, but our task is to eradicate bigotry, bias and prejudice from the hearts and minds of men. Here, too, only uncommon men can qualify for this great task.

Finally, Einstein could help us discover vast new sources of energy and power, but our task is to harness these awful forces to serve, rather than to exterminate mankind. In short, each new discovery, or invention, or milestone of social progress has been accomplished by the unusual, the rare, the uncommon man, but these men have not, nor could they, complete the whole task. There remain unsolved problems of momentous proportions, waiting on you who have youth and determination, ^{and intelligence} to solve them. But you will have to be not merely good, not, ^{just} common men and women. You will have to rise to greatness because you are uncommon - because you are unique - because you are extraordinary!

I was delighted, as I prepared my address for this occasion to find that Herbert Hoover, former President of the United States has also been fascinated by the subject "The Uncommon Man". This is what President Hoover has to say on the subject:

"In my opinion, we are in danger of developing a cult of the Common Man, which means a cult of mediocrity. But there is at least one hopeful sign: I have never been able to find out just who this Common Man is.

In fact, most Americans--especially women--will get mad and fight if you try calling them common.

This is hopeful because it shows that most people are holding fast to an essential fact in American life. We believe in equal opportunity for all, but we know that this includes the opportunity to rise to leadership. In other words--to be uncommon!

Let us remember that the great human advances have not been brought about by mediocre men and women. They were brought about by distinctly uncommon people with vital sparks of leadership. Many great leaders were of humble origin, but that alone was not their greatness.

It is a curious fact that when you get sick you want an uncommon doctor; if your car breaks down you want an uncommonly good mechanic; when we get into war we want dreadfully an uncommon admiral and an uncommon general.

I have never met a father and mother who did not want their children to grow up to be uncommon men and women. May it always be so. For the future of America rests not in mediocrity, but in the constant renewal of leadership in every phase of our national life."

I am sure that most of you are familiar with the story of Alexander the Great who, after conquering the known world sat down and cried because there were no more worlds to conquer. I submit to you, my young friends, that we have not yet arrived at such a state in our society. When I was quite a small boy, I often worried about the possibility that most of my life's problems would be solved before I was grown and there

would be no place for me. However, the problems have increased a hundred-fold since those youthful days, and the need is greater now for leadership - for courage - for daring - than ever before in the history of man. From every aspect and facet of our complex lives, we hear the cry for men and more men - for real men.

There are problems which confront us at every level of government in our nation.

At the local level, we are faced with the alarming increase of juvenile delinquency and crime. J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, has warned of the grave consequences facing the nation unless we obey the laws of the land.

At the state level, we are confronted with such staggering problems as expansion and improvement of public education to insure equality of opportunity to all of our people; of expanding and improving highways; and of providing for the safety and health of our people.

At the national level, our government continues to seek solutions to bigotry, discrimination and prejudice against minority groups; to provide employment and economic security for our citizens; and to stimulate the construction of hospitals, schools, homes for the aged and to promote slum clearance in our cities for the health and safety of those who now live in sub-standard housing.

On the international scene, feeding hungry millions in underdeveloped countries; controlling of arms production; keeping the

peace around the globe, and containing Communism continue to challenge the statesmen of every nation.

In all of these problems which face mankind today, the world waits for you, invites you to rise to the challenge for the solution of these problems. The ordinary man and woman will not suffice. Perhaps that is the basic cause for many of the problems of our time: we have depended too long on mediocrity when the situation called for excellence! J. G. Holland has described the kind of men we need in his poem "Wanted":

God give us men. A time like this demands
Strong minds, great hearts, true faith and ready hands!
Men whom the lust of office does not kill,
Men who possess opinions and a will,
Men who love honor, men who cannot lie.

In conclusion, may I challenge you individually to become the best of which you are capable, that you become "uncommon men and women" as you ~~seek to find avenues of service of~~ *dedicate your lives and your talents to the* mankind.

Good luck and godspeed you to much success and happiness in life.