

“Youth Opportunities Unlimited”

BY EDWIN P. NEILAN

President, Chamber of Commerce of the United States

MR. President, Ladies and Gentlemen of Bryant College:

This day is no less proud for me than it is for you. I am deeply gratified by the honor which Bryant College has conferred on me this morning. I shall treasure it always. But I am honored equally in being permitted to take part in this Centennial Commencement and to share with you men and women of the 1963 Graduating Class the very real sense of achievement you feel today. I shall try to demonstrate my gratitude in a practical way by being brief, so that you can move on to the happy task of celebrating this occasion with your families and friends.

Let me speak about YOU. Y.O.U. meaning both you as individuals and Youth Opportunities Unlimited. They go hand in hand: Your opportunities and what you make of them. The fact that you are here today to receive your degrees demonstrates that you know basic facts about opportunities and how to make the most of them. You have worked and sacrificed for an education which will influence deeply the entire course of your lives. You have demonstrated wisdom, too, in your selection of Bryant College, although perhaps that credit should properly be shared with your parents. Some schools, like some people, merely grow old with the years. That cannot be said of Bryant. When your Alma Mater was founded in 1863, in the darkest days of the Civil War, its stated purpose was to train young men and women for positions of responsibility in the world of commerce. Some of the courses offered the freshmen students in that year were “The Science of Accounts,” “Spencerian Penmanship” and “Commercial Arithmetic,” along with something called “Amanuensis.” I looked that up and found I was correct in assuming it meant a secretarial course. I also discovered that the tuition in those wonderful days was \$3.00 a week.

Bryant has remained steadfast to the purpose of its founders over the past century, yet with an awareness that education is not static, that it is training its men and women for living as well as livelihood in a world of change. Over the years, this institution has

added a business teaching program to its original course of instruction and has broadened its curriculum beyond the purely scientific bounds of business administration to include many of the liberal arts. There has been a recognition that much more is demanded of today's business leader than of his predecessor, that he must more closely approach the well-rounded man of the Renaissance if he is to cope successfully with these turbulent times, and the topsy-turvy philosophies too frequently advanced as sound.

Because of these qualities, this steadfastness of purpose, this awareness of the true meaning of education, the influence of this institution has spread far and wide during the past 100 years. Bryant has graduated more than 30,000 men and women in that century and they have left their mark on the nation. Bryant graduates today dominate the teaching of business administration in the high schools of New England and they exert a strong and constructive leadership in the highest councils of American business. Your confident faces this morning assure me that the Class of 1963 will add luster to that reputation.

How will you go about it? What worlds are left to conquer? I said at the outset that the opportunities for youth are unlimited, and indeed they are. There are no bounds to the field of opportunity in business education or business administration for young men and women trained as you are in the workings of the American economic system and grounded as you are in the fundamental principles of freedom which have made that system uniquely successful. Where are the opportunities? We might catalogue the tens of thousands of individual firms, large and small, that make up this complex American enterprise system, but that would breach my promise of brevity. Each of them is looking to the future and each recognizes that there can be no future without the fresh wind of new ideas, new vitality, new confidence that you can bring to them.

But you are entitled to ask: How does this confident promise of opportunity unlimited stack up against the fact that right now more than four million Americans are unemployed? What about those few factories that are running at half their capacity, the fearful managers who shrink openly from foreign competition, the quitters who say America already has passed her peak?

There are too many unemployed in this country today, a large part of them unskilled; some of our productive capacity is at half-throttle, our rate of growth is too slow; and there are frightened men among us who would gladly turn all our problems over to the welfare state. But the problems are not insuperable, and the counsel of the welfare staters is surrender, not a solution.

The answer, of course, is to be found on the reverse side of the coin of opportunity: in accepting the responsibilities and meeting the challenges of our times. There is one certain means of opening up opportunities unlimited for yourselves and for the half-million other young Americans graduating from our colleges and universities this year: unshackle the American economy, turn loose the enormous forces of production and growth that are being held down by the pressures of big government and all that big government connotes.

The American enterprise system can provide the productive growth, the employment, the ever-rising standard of prosperity that all of us expect and demand of it; it can compete successfully in world markets; it can support the legitimate security commitments which this nation must undertake to meet the challenge of communism and preserve the Free World.

But we will accomplish none of those things, indeed we may well wind up on the ash-heap of history, unless you take an active part in an aroused and informed citizenry standing up on its hind legs and demanding back its heritage.

First of all, we must cut down the overgrown Federal Bureaucracy which is reaching into every area of our lives and drawing us inexorably toward the welfare state with all that term implies: cradle to the grave security in return for the surrender of the liberties we have fought a dozen wars to preserve.

We must call a halt to reckless government spending by separating the essential needs from the non-essential, the urgent from the postponable. We will, because we must, spend billions for the bona fide defense of this nation; we will not, because we must not allow the continued dissipation of billions on farm subsidies, urban renewal, area adjustment assistance and other Federal give-aways which, if needed at all, are rightfully the responsibilities of the States and localities.

We must reform our archaic tax laws and reduce the repressive income tax rates which throttle business expansion and drain our economic system of its priceless vitality.

We must remind ourselves of a cherished American belief: that in a democracy, the true source of power is in the people, not in their elected representatives. In the voter, not the appointed bureaucrat, we get the kind of government we want, the kind of government we deserve. By action not inaction.

You may well ask: "What in the world does he want me to do about it? Isn't it up to the older people who allowed us to get into this mess?"

Like it or not, we're all in the same boat and I, for one, am very happy to see more strong young hands at the oars. You're in it because you have a mighty big stake in where we're going; a stake three or four times as great as mine because it involves your future. I hesitate to mention this on so happy an occasion, but right now each member of the Class of 1963 is in debt to the tune of \$1,700, exclusive of what you may owe your parents or the alumni association. That's your per capita share of the national debt, and the way things are going in Washington it may be considerably higher by the time you cash your first pay check.

What can you do about it? Believe me, you can do plenty. The future leadership of the United States inevitably must come from men and women such as yourselves, trained, educated citizens with a sense of individual responsibility who will interest themselves in good government. It is not too early for each of you to take a hand in the business of the United States, to begin exercising your citizenship. Effective citizenship does not consist merely of showing up at the polls once a year or every four years to vote against someone. It involves accepting and asserting your individual responsibility for what goes on in your community, your state and your country. It involves giving thought to the local, national and international issues of our times and making our opinions heard. It involves constant vigilance over the actions of our elected representatives at every level, whether in City Hall, the State Capitol, or in Washington.

That sounds like a tall order, and it is. But I think you can fill it. One of the most stimulating happenings of recent years, to

me at least, has been the stirring of political activity on the campuses of America. Young people all over the country are beginning to ask the all-important questions: "Why?" "Why Big Government?"; "Why Big Spending?"; "Why High Taxes?"; "Why A Welfare State?"

I suggest that the biggest opportunity awaiting you members of the Class of 1963 lies in that one word "Why?" Ask that question of yourselves, of your business and professional colleagues, of your elected representatives, about the conduct of government in the United States.

How earnestly you ask that question, how intelligently you examine it and how effectively you act upon the answers you receive will determine your readiness and your worthiness to grasp the opportunities unlimited that the future holds in store.

Bryant College has done well by you. She has provided the counsel and training to bring forth and give initial guidance to the God-given talents within you. Youth Opportunities Unlimited are yours for the taking. The responsibility and the decision are in your hands.

God Bless you.

