

"Let's Wave the Flag a Little"

Address Delivered by

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at the

Ninety-Seventh Annual Commencement

of

BRYANT COLLEGE
of Business Administration
Providence, Rhode Island



Founded 1863

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A native of Kentucky, Commissioner Derthick was born in a dormitory of the Hazel Green Academy. His father, 86-year-old Henry J. Derthick, has been an educator for more than sixty years. He is presently President-emeritus of Milligan College in Johnston City, Tennessee. His mother, the late Pearl S. Derthick, was Dean of Women at Milligan. One of his brothers is a teacher and another is a former teacher. The penchant for pedagogy in the Derthick family continues unto his sons, two of whom are teachers and the third, an architect teaches evening classes in his chosen field.

Commissioner Derthick earned his Bachelor's Degree at Milligan College and his Master's Degree at the University of Tennessee. He also did graduate work at George Peabody College for Teachers and Columbia University. He holds honorary degrees from several famous universities and is a member of four honorary fraternities.

He embarked in education as teacher-principal of the consolidated elementary and high schools of Clarksville, Tennessee, becoming in turn, professor of education at East Tennessee State College, assistant superintendent in charge of instruction in Nashville, and then Superintendent in Chattanooga.

In 1948-49, he took a leave of absence for fifteen months to head the Education Branch office of Military Government for Bavaria. He is on the U. S. National Commission for UNESCO, the Interdepartmental Committee on Education Activities in International Organizations, and a member of the Fulbright Board of Foreign Scholarships. Under the Cultural Exchange Agreement, he directed a United States mission of ten educational leaders on a 7,000 mile tour of the Soviet Union in 1958.

His professional affiliations include the American Association of School Administrators, of which he was president in 1953; the National Education Association, of which he is a Life Member. He is also a Life Member of Parent Teacher Associations. He serves on the boards of both the Boy Scout and Girl Scout movements and many other state, national, and international organizations.

LET'S WAVE THE FLAG A LITTLE*

Graduation from college is always a significant event. It is an occasion for rejoicing, but also for serious thought and reflection.

But surely this commencement of 1960 is even more important than in any other year of our history, for you who graduate today are going forth into a world of worry, frustration and misunderstanding; a world of plenty where suffering and hunger still exist despite the greatest scientific and technological advances in the history of civilization; a world of anger and cold war and naked hate—where the age-old values are being questioned and the moral and ethical ideals on which democracy exists are held up in wide areas to scorn and disbelief.

But paradoxically you are going forth in a world where the yearning for peace and progress was never deeper in the hearts of men, where the arts and sciences have reached new heights, where living standards have increased a hundredfold, where opportunities for happiness were never so near and never so far away. It is this strange paradox which presents the ideals to which we are committed with their greatest challenge.

It is an age of frustration and contradiction, for the world is divided into two great ideological camps. The emerging nations are clamoring for freedom, not always realizing that freedom is a concept which calls for preparation and discipline, not always understanding that liberty is an ideal which requires sacrifice and everlasting vigilance. It is a time when your responsibility involves much more than your individual welfare and that of your immediate neighbors, but is vitally concerned with the preservation and extension of the ideals which have made America great.

Have too many of us forgotten from whence this greatness came and the price our forebears paid? Have we become soft and lethargic?

* Delivered at 1960 Commencement, Bryant College, Providence, Rhode Island, July 29, 1960, 10:00 a.m. EDT.

Have our ideals been dimmed, and has our faith flickered? Do we talk of business as usual and take casually atheistic philosophies? Do we fail to remember that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty, and that the loss of liberty is a harder fate than death? Only if we forget and fail to act in the highest traditions of our heritage will the dangers and threats of these critical times overcome us. The crying need of this hour is not so much for a great leader as for individual citizens to rise as a great people dedicated and deeply committed to the righteousness of our cause in the spirit of the old hymn, "Oh, Lord, send a revival and let it begin in me."

This is some of the thinking behind the subject I have chosen today, "Let's Wave the Flag a Little." But I do not mean the kind of flag waving that reflects a boastful gesture done in a carnival spirit and for the purpose of mere pageantry. Nor am I referring to worthy kinds of flag waving at political conventions or patriotic rallies. I am reaching for something deeper. For example, what was Francis Scott Key really thinking about when he wrote our beautiful National Anthem as he glimpsed the flag at each bomb's bursting in air until finally, by the dawn's early light, he anxiously strained to see if our flag was still there? How did his spirit escape the bars that held him prisoner? Does anyone doubt that he was prepared for any sacrifice, even life itself, to keep our flag flying on high? I believe that he was remembering things like his old home, the orchard, the meadows, the front veranda, the fireplace, the scene of evening family prayers; that he was thinking of his neighbors and loved ones and their freedoms, to come and go and think and speak, to engage in work and worship. For I believe that our flag symbolized for him all of these sacred values more precious than life.

It is such motivations in the hearts of free men that have kept our flag flying. To wave, then, this flag of inspiring symbolism means not to hesitate or be ashamed to put first things first when we meet the test of civic duty or public obligation. For Americans to respond and serve in things both great and small in keeping with our highest heritage of honor and unselfishness is to ignite a spark in the hearts

of people everywhere who yearn for freedom. This is our task today, and to perform it nobly we must hold ever before us the reasons for our past accomplishments and the sources of our past strength. This is the ideal which our forebears visioned and this is what helped them through every crisis and test. Such are my meditations now as I speak to the subject, "Let's Wave the Flag a Little."

We do not have to look far to see the good citizen who is the answer to the crisis of these times. Repeatedly, as a teacher, I have seen a student take a stand to his temporary disadvantage because it was the right thing to do. As we see juries hand down unpopular decisions in the honest discharge of their responsibility, we see good citizenship in action. Our history is filled with examples of men and women who waved the flag with loyal hearts and noble deeds.

There was Daniel Webster who sacrificed himself when he spoke "not as a Massachusetts man . . . but as an American . . . for the preservation of the Union."

There was John Paul Jones, after the enemy had downed his mainmast and his flag and called on him to surrender, with his "I have not yet begun to fight" as he went on to victory.

There was Nathan Hale and those thrilling words, "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."

There was the flag planted by the Marines on the peak of Suri-bachi at Iwo Jima. And there are the stories of war's quiet heroism that have never been published.

One could take a thousand such illustrations and not discover any finer expression of the citizen who makes democracy work than is to be found in the daily acts of men and women who do justly, who love mercy and who walk humbly before their God.

Recently I read from the *Letters of Theodore Roosevelt* a statement that ought to be imprinted in the mind of every American today. He said:

"The things that will destroy America are prosperity at any price, peace at any price, safety first instead of duty first, and love of soft living and the get rich quick theory of life."

Theodore Roosevelt never knew about the horrors of a thermo-nuclear war but he knew that sacrifice, faith, courage and hard work, along with good will, would see us through any crisis.

Does anyone doubt that Theodore Roosevelt would be the first to support our leaders when they make unmistakably clear there is a line beyond which oppressors must not pass? It behooves you and me, too, to support this kind of unflinching determination, at the same time presenting the true image of America as the good neighbor with a friendly and helping hand.

That the true image of America is being grossly distorted in critical areas around the world is not only unfortunate in these crucial times, it is a serious threat. We have seen the resulting damage in the neutral countries, even in friendly nations, and certainly among the undeclared peoples, when our motives are twisted by vicious propaganda and we are made to appear as a rich and grasping nation, concerned only with our own selfish advantage. And now we see the evil effects even in the shadow of our own coastline. It would indeed be a cruel turn of events if a generous people should lose because of failures adequately to communicate good will. And it would be a dangerous turn if we should fail to interpret the blessings of democracy and thus lose potential friends to a contrary way of life and find ourselves exposed and alone in a world that is strange.

We now have more than three and a half million Americans living and working in countries around the world. What an opportunity for them among the peoples where they live to wave our flag a little by creating a truer image of America. As I have visited in foreign lands I have often thought what a wonderful thing it would be if all Americans represented us as well as the best of Americans. There would be bonds and ties and admiration and respect that would be undimmed and unbreakable no matter what the circumstances beyond our shores.

On one occasion shortly after World War II, when I was Chief of the Education Branch for Military Government in Bavaria, a speech of mine was reported in a German paper which fell into the hands of a certain refugee. This article identified me with the school system in Chattanooga. How touched I was when this refugee journeyed a distance to my office in Munich just to send a special thank you for the folks back home. He said that the bundle of clothing given by our schools had come to his family in the very dead of winter and at a desperate time. But, said he, (and this is what touched me so much. I shall never forget it). "While the clothes were a godsend, what meant even more was a friendly note pinned to one of the garments, conveying the feeling that there were people so far away who cared." The school child in Chattanooga who wrote that note is only an example of the power of one little American to project a true image across the sea.

Bryant College is an institution distinguished for her unique programs and superior training for men and women who are destined to become leaders in business having connections in every nook and corner of our world. Many of you who graduate today will have marvelous opportunities in business for building the spirit of brotherhood and the sense of interdependence and partnership. Let us resolve in all of our international lines of commerce to reflect the highest ethics of American business, that our Nation in the world of business may have a name as honored as the most trusted firm in this community.

We are sincere in our peaceful purposes and in our good will toward all mankind, but it is now critically important that we do a much better job of communicating this spirit to others and that each of us in the American way accept personal responsibility for this task. It is astonishing in this kind of world how often one citizen has the opportunity to reflect the best in his flag.

The struggle with which we are confronted is a deadly one. And it is shocking to hear some Americans say that we have already lost first place to the Soviet Union. This I do not believe, and I base my belief not only on what I know and feel about America, but also on

what I saw in the U.S.S.R. over a seven thousand mile tour which took me from Moscow into Siberia and down along the borders of China in Kazakstan and Uzbekistan and around by the Black Sea, Minsk and Leningrad. There was poor and inadequate housing, a dearth of modern conditions in goods, services, facilities and transportation; the best of their schools by no means compared with the best of ours; and, of course, in our view, individual initiative, responsibility and enterprise were missing to a frustrating degree.

Nevertheless, we saw processes and developments under way that could one day pass America by if we do fail to remember the sources of our strength and make the most of the blessings of freedom. Should we fail to rededicate ourselves and recommit ourselves to the old values that are responsible for our greatness, and should we be unable to reflect the proper image of American friendliness and good will to other people, it is conceivable that we might on a tragic future date lose our great heritage.

I say this because in the Soviet Union we saw people with a passion for education, completely convinced that the race to supremacy is the race for knowledge. We saw people committed to communism with a religious fervor. We saw people deliberately making great sacrifices of material comforts in the complete conviction that they would develop the abundant resources of their vast land and one day achieve the supremacy that would bring them the creature comforts which they forego at this time. We saw people working madly for the goals to which they are committed.

We also saw a hospitable people presenting the best possible front to the countless visitors that they bring in from every land, particularly the underdeveloped countries, in effect saying to them, "This is what we have done with communism in 40 years. You can, too." And they have made their own kind of progress. Any people will produce results of varying kinds under any system if they work hard enough and sacrifice sufficiently. But their kind of progress is always limited by a blueprint and does not fit our democratic pattern which has no limit except that imposed by the restrictions we put upon ourselves.

This is what the Soviet Minister of Education told me: "We believe in a planned society, you believe in individual initiative. Let time tell which is best."

Let time tell, for example, whether the individual is to be submerged or magnified.

Let time tell whether the end justifies the means, or whether the means is to be as honorable as the end.

Shall we have freedom of speech only to voice the party line, or shall we defend to the death the right of a man to say what he thinks?

To preserve the freedoms and the blessings of democracy we dare not be less committed to our ways than the communists are to theirs. Nor can we perform our kind of duties with less zeal and determination, or make sacrifices less willingly. Truly we shall stand forth to wave our flag, for the waving surely means the giving of the best that we have for freedom, under God.

"And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave
o'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!"