

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS, EDWARD R. MURROW
The University of Michigan
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WHO SPEAKS FOR AMERICA?

Mr. President, Members of the Academic Community of
The University of Michigan

You have done me great honor by asking me here to-
day and, beggar that I am, I am poor in thanks. However
I shall be brief because brevity is good both when we are
and are not understood. I find myself today a smatterer
surrounded by scholars.

Mr. President, if should there be difficulty hearing
on the fringes, you may have an experience something like
that of a toastmaster in London. The speaker was droning
on to no purpose having lost his audience completely, when
a man in a far corner of the room rose up and said, "Mr.
Toastmaster, I cannot understand a single word the speaker
is saying." At which point the Toastmaster rose with his
usual courtesy and said, "I shall be delighted to change
places with you."

I take pleasure in coming to Michigan today, for
though your state borders no oceans, your university has
sent its influence over many oceans to many foreign lands.
Michigan in the past has had a long list of graduates
and faculty members who have left their imprint, for
example, on the Philippine Islands, of which Jospeh Hay-
den and Frank Murphy were Governors General. Your band
has carried the word of Michigan throughout the Soviet
Union. One of your former governors now carries the bur-
den of United States policy in Africa.

No student of international affairs should be permitted to raise his voice in the state of Michigan without recalling the name of the late Senator Arthur H. Vandenberg; for when the course of our ship of state was altered and we decided to discharge the responsibilities that history and heritage had placed upon us, Senator Vandenberg, though not at the helm of the ship, was in fact in control of the engine room, so to speak; he produced the thrust, the driving power, which moved our nation in a totally different direction.

The face of Michigan is today still turned to the world at large. Michigan was third among United States institutions last year in the number of faculty members abroad, fifth in the ratio of foreign students to total enrollment, and as a state Michigan was third in the number of foreign students which its several institutions of learning enrolled.

This leads me to suggest that you and I are both in the same business. We both concern ourselves with the state of the world; we are both involved in interpreting the United States abroad--you through the exchange of students and professors, we through the work of our agency; we are both engaged upon the task of educating in the great virtues of man, of imparting information and ideas to minds that are eager for stimulation.

I have come today to tell you about the United States Information Agency. But just as in the sector of communication in which I formerly worked, the time

for commercials was strictly limited, so I shall limit my remarks concerning the Agency. We also, in a sense, are educational. We are also cultural. Our very name, the United States Information Agency, involves information about politics and policy, yes, but also information about books, science, music, the arts, the professions. Whatever there is to be known about this country is part of our business.

One of the most popular programs our radio service has broadcast was a lecture by a research chemist. Our library in Burma has become the focal point of research for members of the Legislature, justices of the Supreme Court, officers in the Cabinet; and the reason is that it offers information and precedents to guide them in attempting to solve their own problems. The teaching of the English language has burgeoned in recent years. Lectures and seminars draw surprising crowds abroad. And it is here that we have gained so much help from the American academic community and its representatives abroad, including those from The University of Michigan.

We operate, of course, in a difficult and not too well-defined area. We embrace a multitude of disciplines and professions. Whereas individual persons usually pursue careers in a single medium of communication, as I did for twenty-five years, the United States Information Agency employs not one but seven: radio, television, movies, the press, book publishing, exhibits, and the

fine arts. We are involved in activities ranging from a press run in Beirut to an exhibition in Turin, a stage performance in Munich, a radio relay in Colombo, and a telecast in Bogota.

But even more important, we must deal with the intangibles: the difficult, delicate human art of persuasion. For by word of mouth, by carefully cultivated personal contact abroad, we seek to persuade others of the rightness of our view and that our actions and our goals are in harmony with theirs.

We cannot, of course, dictate their choices. We can help them to develop not only their natural resources but their human resources as well. We can provide them with food enough to sustain their physical well-being, and we can offer them the information upon which informed opinion may be based. The choice as to the nature and structure of their political and economic society must be theirs.

Our Agency by Congressional Mandate operates overseas. There is much misunderstanding about what the Agency does. We receive letters with rather ominous overtones, such as a request to "send me all your information on counterfeiting" and "please rush me all the facts on bullet wounds, fast." Letter writers have asked us, "What percentage of young people are juveniles?" "How can I figure out which TV newscasters are Republicans?" and "Why are most auctioneers called 'colonel'?"

Information is our job, but information of rather more

serious import. Our Agency attempts to make United States policy as designed by the President everywhere intelligible and, wherever possible, palatable.

We endeavor to reflect with fidelity to our allies, to the uncommitted nations, as well as to those who are hostile to us, not only our policies but our ideals. Yet in our day-to-day efforts directed to this end, we do not stand alone. For much that is known and believed about this country is beyond the purview of any government agency.

Just as the work of the United States Information Agency is far more than just Voice of America broadcasts, so is the real voice of the United States much more than the voice of our Agency. It is a composite of the Americans who travel abroad, it is the thirty thousand missionaries who reside abroad, it is the one million military men and their dependents who live abroad, it is the businessmen, it is the export of American films and of American television. A single Senator making a speech in his home town may well exert more influence abroad than many weeks output by the United States Information Agency. The sum total of our image abroad is made up of scholars who travel, of the work of foundations, and of foreign students.

This means, I suggest, that there are no more domestic issues, purely domestic issues, confronting this country. To some of us in this country the picture of a

burning bus in Alabama may merely represent alert action by a good photographer. To those of us who work in the Agency, it means that picture will be front-paged in tomorrow's papers all the way from Manila to Manchester.

I recognize, as I know you will too, that the role of our Agency has limits. We are but one arm of the United States government. We operate abroad; our audience is foreign. All of what we do is for export, much of it is invisible, the results are intangible, and frequently we receive publicity in this country only when we make a mistake. We have difficulty in some areas because what is truth is not what is believed.

Candor and openness have their merits...as the successful Alan Shepard demonstrated. They also have their demerits...as the abortive Cuban episode demonstrated.

But if truth must be our guide, then dreams must be our goal. To the hunger of those masses yearning to learn in freedom--that is so much of the world--we shall say: "We share your dreams." As a nation, we have never been allergic to change. Ours was the first of the great revolutions. It is a birthright we do not intend to let go by default. Our responsibilities of nationhood are predicated on a helping hand to others who would elevate their crushing way of existence by a change into a more bountiful and equal society. We offer no panaceas, no final solutions. We offer to

join in the search for betterment. And in this partnership, we not only indorse, we sponsor, we promote, and we provoke. A tradition of government by the governed, of revolution by consent--all of these are among the greater virtues that we have to demonstrate to a world sorely in need of great virtues.

We shall concentrate our attention on the fields where the ideological competition is being waged. This means expansion of our activities in Africa--where new nations have arisen--and in Latin America--where new difficulties have been born--and in Southeast Asia--where new pressures are upon us. We will not do this, however, at the expense of thinning the lines of communication with our traditional friends and allies. We shall be more alert in exposing Communist techniques and tactics. Distortion and duplicity about this land and its people will not go unanswered.

But now let me turn from the Information Agency to your graduating class because I would not do violence to tradition by failing to offer you certain middle-aged, but perhaps not too well-aged, advice. I am sure that such failure on my part would disappoint you deeply.

For generations each graduating class has been told that it is emerging from the cloistered academic halls into a world beset with doubt, uncertainty, and perplexing problems. This is true today, and probably always will be.

It is always a mistake to give advice, and obviously a major error to give good advice. But it has always seemed to me that Commencement speakers ought to be a little more specific and practical in the advice that they utter. They can afford to be so, because it will be promptly forgotten in any case. To the trim, hard muscled athlete who is going to sit in an office for the next twenty or twenty-five years, he might recall the words of Margaret Halsey (for they will be applicable in due course): "He must have had a magnificent build before his stomach went in for a career of its own."

To those who long for the good old days of Mr. Dooley, they might remember that the "past always looks better than it was; it's only more pleasant because it isn't here."

For those graduates inclined to be argumentative, a word from William Hazlitt: "We are not satisfied to be right unless we can prove others to be quite wrong."

To the graduate who barely squeaked by in Latin, some consolation from Heinrich Heine: "If the Romans had been obliged to learn Latin, they would never have found time to conquer the world."

A bit of counsel from Don Herold to the graduate who is inclined to overwork (if there be any such present): "Work is a form of nervousness." Someone once

said: "My father taught me to work, but not to love it."

To the holder of the sheepskin whose manners have not been polished as well as they might have been: "Be kind and considerate to others, depending somewhat upon whom they are."

To the graduate (again if there be any such present) who may regret youthful indiscretions, Katherine Mansfield said: "Regret is an appalling waste of energy; you can't build on it; it's only good for wallowing in."

Advice from Don Marquis for the student who wants to be a writer: "If you want to get rich from writing, write the sort of thing that's read by persons who move their lips when they're reading to themselves."

Somerset Maugham had wise words for the coed looking for a husband: "American women expect to find in their husbands a perfection that Englishwomen only hope to find in their butlers."

And for those who just want to be gentlemen, Billy Phelps said, and he said it in all seriousness, as do I: "For the man who wants to be a gentleman, the final test is his respect for those who can be of no possible service to him."

Samuel Butler maintained that: "Life is the art of drawing sufficient conclusions from insufficient premises." Sydney Smith, on the other hand, took what

might be called the clinical approach to this question when he said: "The great secret in life is digestion." The philosophical approach was perhaps best expressed by Susan Ertz, who remarked: "Millions who long for immortality do not know what to do with themselves on a rainy Sunday afternoon."

All of these words of wisdom will of course be forgotten, that is the deserved fate of Commencement speeches, so let's return to the traditional theme. This year's graduates throughout this generous and capacious land are being told to have courage. Channing Pollock once said: "No man in the world has more courage than the man who can stop after eating one peanut."

I have an idea that a wholly serious Commencement speech could be done in a single paragraph, and you may well ask, if that be true, why havent I got at it earlier. I shall now attempt it. The paragraph would go something like this:

Graduates who have achieved this distinction by hard work, cheating, or the indifference of your professors--you have had a good break; no one of you paid your own freight. No matter how wealthy your parents, how exclusive your school, society has paid some part of the cost of your education; you are in its debt; you are beholden. That sheepskin won't get or hold a job for you; it does not guarantee you personal profit

at the expense of the society which made possible your superior intellectual training. And if personal profit be your sole motive, then history will be the collector. Maybe you have been taught to think (we will know more about that in twenty years), but somewhere along the way you must at least have picked up some ideas about the dignity and the freedom of the individual, about his right to be wrong, about his freedom under the law, and, above everything else, about the difference between dissent and disloyalty. You have finished your education at a time of uncertainty, unrest, and unprecedented change. Don't conclude prematurely that the individual is of little importance. If you don't like the books you read, go and write one. You are the, at least partially, educated brood of the most luxurious, powerful nation in the world. You are coming out of college into all kinds of alarms and excursions, constant tension and uncertainty. But look around the world and compare your lot with that of your contemporaries elsewhere. And compare please, not only your opportunity but your obligations.

The following words were written by the great German poet and philosopher, Goethe, and these too you will probably forget. But just for the beauty of the language, and the clarity of the thought, I should like to read you the "complete" Commencement speech in a half-dozen lines:

"There are nine requisites for contented living: Health enough to make work a pleasure; wealth enough to support your needs; strength enough to do battle with difficulties and overcome them; grace enough to confess your sins and forsake them; patience enough to toil until some good is accomplished, charity enough to see some good in your neighbor; love enough to move you to be useful and helpful to others; faith enough to make real the things of God; hope enough to remove all anxious fears concerning the future."

It is given to no man, not even the head of the United States Information Agency, to know the future, but it seems to me that at all times and in all circumstances it is useful to have the youth of the nation greet the unknown with a cheer. I hope you will do that.

Good luck!