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Class of 1977 Commencement

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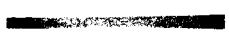
DIPLOMA CEREMONY ADDRESS

DELIVERED JUNE 10, 1977

BY JACK WATSON

This is the very first time in my life that I have been given the distinction, the privilege and the honor of addressing a law school graduating class. It is an honor which touches me profoundly and it is an honor which I am most especially pleased to have in Athens, Georgia at this University. I've not heard a lot of graduation speeches so what I'd like to do this morning, very briefly and very informally, may not conform to what commencement speeches are supposed to be; because in effect what I would like to do with this class and with the family and friends of these young men and women is to spend just a few moments reflecting about some extraordinary experiences which have given rise to what I think are some perceptions, perhaps some insights about what it is that they are about to do.

I regard this morning particularly with the weather that we have outside as a time of glorious happy celebration. I know how you must feel as parents and spouses and family and friends. I know the relief that all of them feel. I think it's also a time for them to ~~lap~~ pause just a moment before they move from one very fast moving stream into another; before they step, in effect, into one stage of their life into another stage; another phase another cycle. I think it's time for them to reflect about who they are and what they have in the way of privileges and blessings and education in the way of talents and skills and in the way of inclinations and



interests. Because if they do not, they fall subject to that force of inertia that generally inclines us towards the paths of least resistance. I would say very respectfully to this group of family and friends and honored graduates that all of us in this building sitting here together now represent privilege, opportunity, blessing in ways that are very, very hard to understand and even harder still to justify. Why are we to have so much? Why ought the opportunities for law school at a great university law school following on the heels of a college education, opening up thresholds of job opportunities in government service, in private law practice, in public law practice, in clerkships, why ought we to have all of those privileges, all of those prerequisites? Perhaps a more important question is not why because we can't answer why. But what do we do with it? Every man and woman in this class has an immense responsibility. It is a responsibility which can be characterized in a variety of ways-- I'll choose one. It is a responsibility to deliver to the fullest extent possible on their potential. It is the responsibility to return in some measure, in some form, so the rest of their lives is privilege of education of learning and of opportunity that has been delivered to them.

One of the greatest benefits of being a lawyer in my judgment and one from which I have benefitted for the 11 years since I graduated from law school is the benefit of range of choice. Think for a moment what other profession offers such a range of option into profession, into business,

into commerce, into industry, into public service, into all of the above. And so one modest quiet message that I bring respectfully to them this morning is the message of taking advantage of the range of choice--not beginning now to start closing themselves off. Those of them who are entering private law practice I exhort, I urge, to try to reach beyond the parameters of that private law practice. Do it well. Do it with the honor and nobility and the skill that it deserves. Do it in a way that honors the tradition of the practice but do more. Participate in the town in the city in the state in the county where you live. Share the benefits of your learning, share the benefits of your skills, because they are formidable. They are skills of analysis. They are skills of knowledge. They are skills of persuasion in the art of moving people towards ends--skills through motivation, through facts.

One note about our President. All of us know, all of us take pride in the fact that he is a man of the South. His election as President of the United States gives not only us but our children and our children's children and beyond an incredible legacy. Because in the latter part of the 20th Century a man of the South, born here, bred here, raised here, schooled here, working here out of a tiny town located in the ^{bowls?} of the South of this State has assumed the leadership not only of the country but of the free world--and he is a Southerner. And those images and methodologies about people of the South are disintegrating fast. And I joke lightheartedly about people's perceptions in Washington

of what Southerners are all about. But the fact of the matter and the truth of the matter is that they are seeing Southerners now in a light that they've never seen them before. And indeed all the people of this country are everyday because they are watching that man. Why do I digress to say that? I say it because in effect it means that there is another dimension to the responsibility that these young men and women have because they are entering the national scene, the state scene, the business, and commercial and profession scene of this country at a time when the opportunities for young men and women of the South and for other parts of the country are expanding.

Clay said in his opening remarks which I though were well conceived and well spoken that this is for them a beginning of learning, not an end. I underscore that. And I ask each of us to pause just for an instant and to think of those people whom we most admire and then to ask why is it that we admire them. And I respectfully suggest that in a huge number of cases that reason comes clear to our mind. It is that they are people constantly learning, educable, curious, outreaching people, dynamic in their mind, mobile in their approach to life. There again, these 200 young men and women start on a base that gives them a head start. They must now as they enter their pursuits continue to regenerate that curiosity, that interest, that educability, that quest for understanding more.

Our President, our Congress, and therefore all of us, are faced with a range of incredible choices ourselves right now. What do we do about an economy that has not recovered from the worst recession in 40 years? What do we do about an unemployment rate that still keeps about seven million people out of work? What do we do with inflation that seems to hover outrageously at 6 percent absolutely eating away at the dollars we have and the money we've saved? What do we do about energy? What do we do about the fact—the simple reality—that there is not a limitless supply of energy for this planet at least not that we know about now. The questions come fast; the challenges come fast. What remains are the answers. Are we capable of responding with vigor? With force? With knowledge and good sense? Are we capable as we have been throughout the history of this land to mobilize, to forge ourselves together around problems and to rush over them with initiative and ingenuity and confidence? And I say to you again respectfully of course we can, of course we will and there are 200 reasons on the stage why we will succeed. But lest we get carried away, let us confront the fact that the choices are tough, that the tradeoffs are endless, that nothing is free, that for everything we do here every dollar we spend here we must take it away from someplace else. Let us understand that in order to deal with the energy situation all of us will be called upon to sacrifice. And let us understand that what is needed probably as much now in this country as ever before

in its history is a citizenry filled with common sense and will and confidence. Someone said once that competence is not appreciated as it should be as a condition of freedom, as a condition of a free society. I say to you living the life of a free people is a strenuous thing. I say to you that an amiable fondness for the graces of a free society is not enough. Free men and women must be competent men and women or we shall not prevail. That is another reason for us to celebrate this morning the emergence of a new group of ^{rich} every more competent young men and women. The glue that bonds us together as a free people--the cement that holds our center as a free society--is faith. It is faith in the fundamental fairness of our institutions and our processes. It is faith in our government. It is faith in our leaders. It is faith in ourselves and in our own capacities to make a difference. But it's faith.

A poet named Robert Greenleaf said, "Nothing much happens without a dream or for something great to happen there must be a great dream." Our country is founded on a great dream. We've built on it for 200 years. It's time for us to be formulating new dreams, new goals, new directions, new purposes, new understandings because the world is changing and we must keep up in order to stay in the lead. And this closing thought which comes from a book written by a man killed in the peak of his power at the height of his will and energy--Robert Kennedy said, "It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man or a woman stands up for an ideal or acts to

improve the lost of others or strikes out against injustice
he or she sends forth a tiny ripple of hope in crossing
each other from a million different centers of energy in
daring those ripples wills the current that can sweep down
the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance. I believe
it. I believe that. And the sobering thought for us to
comprehend--you and I and they--is that the sum of our own
acts and aspirations will comprise the history of this
generation.

God bless you all.

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