

YORK AND UPON THE RECOMMENDATION OF THE FAC

HUNTER COLLEGE

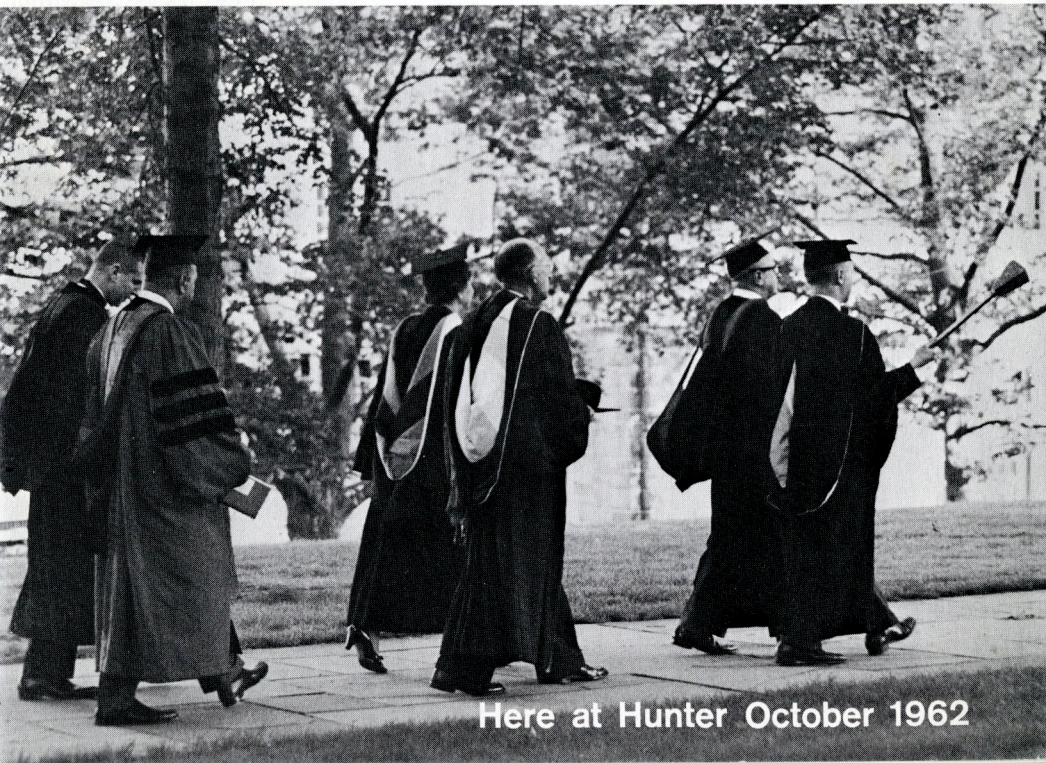
OF

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

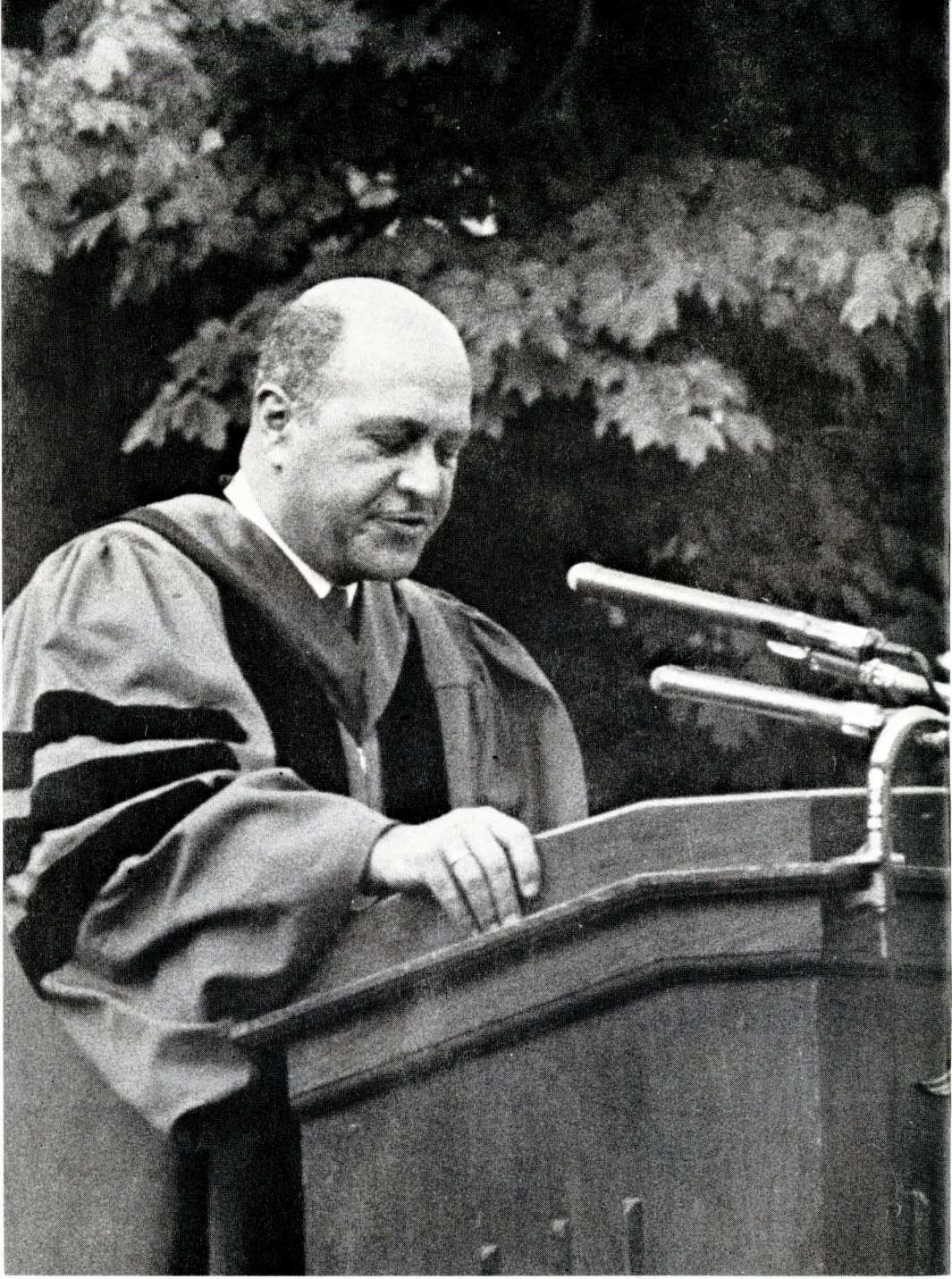
BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION OF THE CITY OF NEW
CONFERS UPON

Class of June 1962

COMPLETED THE REQUISITE COURSE OF STUDY THE
BACHELOR OF ARTS



Here at Hunter October 1962



Commencement Address

By Robert C. Weaver, Administrator
Housing and Home Finance Agency

This is an historic year to deliver the commencement address at Hunter College. For in this year there finally has been brought into being the City University of New York, uniting the seven municipal colleges.

By this step formal recognition has been given to the emergence over the past 115 years of a group of municipally-supported institutions of higher learning distinguished by their diversity and yet united by their dedication to educational opportunity for all who live here.

Taken together City College, Hunter College, Brooklyn College, Queens College, and the three community colleges, are truly a university in the same tradition as the great urban universities of medieval Europe. Their doors have been open to all who came with the desire and capacity to learn. And to them have been attracted representatives of all nations, members of all races, and believers in all faiths.

Many of the medieval universities began as schools, clustered about the cathedral which was the intellectual and cultural center

of the medieval towns. Today the university has become such a center for the modern city.

Cities have been, historically, places of refuge. They have offered both security and opportunity to those displaced by war, famine, disease, discrimination, and—in modern times—a revolution in agricultural production. Rooted in trade, nurtured by industry, cities have found their maturity as the cultural centers of nations.

As the cities gave birth to universities, so the universities have spawned the ideas and the energies which have enriched the city and brought forth nations.

New York City has always welcomed the immigrant—and the migrant. And its colleges have made it possible for these newcomers, and their children, to make their way into the mainstream of American life. They have been the catalyst bringing about the merging of many heritages in an inheritance enriching all who have come to live here.

Our nation was young—much younger than New York City—when the people of this community voted in 1847 to establish The Free Academy, forerunner of City College.

At the very beginning, however, the people of this city saw that educational opportunity for all was of benefit to all. And the memorial that was presented to the legislature at that time said:

“One of the important objects designed to be secured by the establishing of a Free Academy is to bring the advantages of the best education that any school in our country can give within the reach of all the children in the city whose genius, capacity,

and desire of the attainments are such as to render it reasonably certain that they may be made, and by such means would become, eminently useful to society."

When Hunter College began—as the Female Normal and High School—its purpose was not alone to enlarge the educational opportunities of young ladies. But also, by improving the training of teachers for the public school system, to make better education available to all in the community.

The gradual expansion of the curriculum, and the decision after the second World War to admit young men as students, have transformed Hunter into one of the foremost general colleges in the country. But the devotion to community purpose has remained at the heart of those changes.

As each immigrant group has come to New York, it has seized the opportunities to be found in the public schools and municipal colleges to move rapidly upward in social and economic status.

Sometimes this was a family endeavor, as mother and father, sisters and brothers, pooled their industry and their resources to enable one of the sons or daughters to get a higher education.

Sometimes it signified rebellion against the family, as younger persons turned their backs on their cultural heritage to struggle for a place in a world their parents found strange and unfriendly.

Often, so often—even though the tuition was free—the cost of an education in menial labor to stay alive, grinding study to maintain grades, physical and emotional exhaustion, was enormous.

The sum total of all the sacrifices made to achieve the "free" education offered by the colleges in the City University of New

York probably is far greater than that exchanged for the instruction at our most expensive institutions.

There have been many statistical studies of the extent to which students in the municipal colleges were the children of immigrants. In the class admitted in 1946 to Brooklyn College—for which I have a special affection, because my wife is an assistant professor there—it was said that 76 per cent of the students had an immigrant mother or father.

Some of the most outstanding graduates of these colleges have been the children of immigrants.

Bernard Baruch was the son of a surgeon who came to this country from Posen in the Polish corridor.

Felix Frankfurter was brought to this country by his parents in 1894 from Vienna.

Gustave Rosenberg, Chairman of the Board of Higher Education that governs these colleges, is also the son of immigrants.

In one of his recent addresses he said:

“To the immigrant child, to the child of the slums, education is at once the key to a better life and a key to service. The early recognition of public responsibility for higher education has helped to make and keep New York the great city that it is. The whole nation is now waking up to the fact that higher education must be for the many—all those who have the capacity to profit from it—not for the few.”

The students at the colleges in the City University of New York have accurately reflected over the years the shifting source from which newcomers were coming to New York.

Thus, as immigration to this country has declined in recent years we have seen a decline in the proportion of students at the municipal colleges who are the children of immigrants.

In time, we can expect to see in their places the children of those who have been swept into this city by the vast wave of migration from Puerto Rico and the South.

The children of these migrants face barriers higher than those of language and culture, however.

When the children of immigrants had broken with the customs of their past, had adopted the behavior patterns and values of middle-class America, and had achieved an education that enabled them to earn a middle-class income, they had moved into the mainstream of American life.

But the sons and daughters of Negroes will be still set apart by the barrier of color. And many of them—realizing this—have not felt the drive for a higher education that seized the children of the immigrants. Thus, our reluctance to afford the latest newcomer the true goals of middle-class status has delayed his educational, social, and economic mobility. It has also prevented him from benefiting, as did the European immigrant, from the full potential of our city colleges.

Oscar Handlin, himself a son in an immigrant family and a graduate of Brooklyn College, has written of "The Newcomers." In a recent book with that title, he delineates the special problems which face Negroes and Puerto Ricans in New York City. Noting the new ecological patterns of our city, the changing labor market, and the differences in backgrounds, he says that for them "migration was not the decisive break it had been for the European."





And he relates this to our inability to view these people in the perspective of the city's earlier experience.

For they are but the most recent in a long and uninterrupted stream of newcomers. Our reluctance to view them as such is both a cause and a consequence of their less rapid rate of assimilation into the dominant culture.

You who graduate today and those who will succeed you in the decade ahead will come from, and participate in, an urban setting which has already greatly changed. Not only does the composition of the population differ from that of a generation ago, but the physical characteristics, the governmental problems, and the spatial distribution of the population are vastly changed.

We, in America, live under the influence of our rural past in a predominantly urban setting. Our state and national legislatures reflect outmoded rural traditions, while we face problems which are inescapable for an urban society. Some of us have elected to stay in the central city; some of us are moving to the suburbs. But regardless of where we reside, we share problems which cut across geographic governmental boundaries. You, as adults, will be a part of the five boroughs of New York City and the governmental entities which constitute our metropolitan area. Your understanding of, and concern for, this region will be a vital factor.

Hunter and a score of other colleges in New York City will find that their physical and cultural development are significantly affected by the fate of this city. Urban renewal, an adequate economic base, and effective transportation are no less vital to our colleges and universities than to the metropolis itself.

Thus the urban renewal program of the Housing and Home Finance Agency has become one of the most effective instruments for facilitating expansion of the campuses of urban colleges and universities. This means that they must share with government a concern for land costs—including what has to be paid for acquisition of urban renewal land, and the price established for its reuse. It also involves educational institutions, no less than Federal, state and local governments in the difficult problems of satisfactory rehousing of the families and individuals dislocated by public improvements. How we handle this matter will be a principal determinant in the success of urban renewal at the same time that it becomes a major factor in public support or rejection of urban colleges and universities.

I do not want to present this in terms of problems but rather as challenging and interesting opportunities. Americans today are asking themselves what our urban areas are, what they have been, and where they are going. A few of the more adventurous are asking what our urban communities should and could become.

The problems of our urban areas are of increasing scope and complexity. They demand a new partnership, involving government, business, charitable foundations and institutions of higher learning. Out of this must emerge centers where there will be accumulations of the best data and analyses available, sources of information as to the status of projects, proposals and plans, current information of the nature of research completed, under way and in the planning stages. And, of course, our universities must not only be major participants in these centers but also

actively engaged in the training of men and women who will be the future practitioners in urban matters.

Finally, colleges and universities have a responsibility for exposing the maximum number of their students to the urban culture and its problems.

There are many fields where more needs to be known. Perhaps I may be pardoned if I emphasize my discipline. All areas which provide shelter and employment need an economic base, and that base is constantly changing. City-oriented colleges and universities should therefore be active participants in maintaining and providing the data required to keep abreast of the economic base of the urban community. This is, obviously, a project involving continuing research.

There are no problems of America as baffling or important as those relating to government and urban growth. By now it is a truism that the geographic boundaries of effective governmental units and those of urban problems do not coincide. A few decades ago much discussion was centered upon metropolitan government. It was a simple, logical proposal. Only one thing was wrong—the people involved did not and have not accepted it. Perhaps it was too logical to be workable.

However, in the abortive efforts to establish metropolitan government, we learned much about our urban areas. One of the things made crystal clear is that there are fears of subservience on the part of suburban areas toward central cities and vice versa. Some of these are justified; some are imaginary and others are not yet understood.

Meanwhile, we have had to move ahead. And we have done so on an ad hoc basis, improvising and experimenting with special arrangements. These may take the form of authorities dealing with one or more problems or some other special arrangements. There will be more of this, and it offers a challenging area of research and experimentation.

As we begin to come to grips with some of the problems of urban development and redevelopment, we expose many human problems which have long been with us but frequently ignored. Now we are recognizing that their solution is one of the costs of a successful effort for developing a healthy community. Here, too, there is the need for research and the preparation of men and women to deal with the application of the knowledge and understanding which should be forthcoming. The city university system is ideally equipped to make a major contribution in both of these areas.

Today a most crucial—and apparently difficult—function of the teacher in our public schools is to reach the children of the most recent newcomers. Most of us tend to project our middle-class values, hoping to shape in our own image those we encounter. Yet, there is an increasing body of knowledge which suggests that a large segment of those in our schools do not have middle-class motivations. Nothing is accomplished if we fail to understand why this is so.

The municipal colleges of New York can and should devote their efforts to understand this phenomenon. They should analyze the situation, prepare future teachers to comprehend the social, economic and cultural factors involved, and train teachers who

will be able to appreciate that people who have limited opportunities do not and will not adopt dominant values which are, unfortunately, meaningless to them.

This involves research into, and appreciation of, the values which deprived peoples develop. It requires new and more realistic teaching materials. And most important, it calls for men and women who comprehend that people—of all ages—are the product of the experiences, hopes, and aspirations which have meaning for them.

This is but one of the problems and challenges which lie before you. It is, indeed, a specialized segment of a larger sphere. Our urban communities—their economic, social, cultural, governmental, and educational problems—will require a large corps of trained people. Here is a field of employment which should and can have real attraction to you.

You are an urban group. Your roots are in the city and its environs. You know what urban life means. You have seen or experienced the process of urbanization. And for you there are less impediments to recognition and full participation in public service than perhaps any other sphere of activity. Don't neglect this field.

I invite you to become a part of the growing corps of men and women dedicated to improving the urban environment. It is a thrilling and rewarding experience, both for the articulate citizen who functions as a part of his community and for the men and women who are employed in the pursuit.

Three major needs are involved:

First, understanding and articulating the urban process.

Second, entering public service so as to be a vital part of the process of strengthening the urban environment.

Third, preserving and expanding the cultural heritage of our cities and their surrounding areas.

Those of my generation and you of the succeeding generation share a grave responsibility. It is to develop, redevelop, redesign and rehabilitate the physical environment which will house four out of five of our population by the turn of the century. To do this well—and to fulfill our obligation to posterity—we must have knowledge and understanding, evidence participation, and value highly the cultural values of the urban environment.

I am confident that these same qualities were present when the city colleges were established. I know they were manifested when the City University of New York was conceived. And I believe they will be abundantly evident as we progress in the revitalization of this great and exciting community.

Hunter College, Bronx Campus, New York City

5:00 P.M., June 14, 1962

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