

ARCHIVES  
HUNTER COLLEGE

Commencement  
Jan. 1935  
Speech of Mr. Cassidy

Condensed  
Suggested that our  
economic structure  
of this type is unworkable  
and

Permit me an observation which is suggested by  
an article I read a short while ago, which <sup>in a note of</sup> by way of spreading  
the ~~propaganda~~ of discouragement, concluded that <sup>our</sup> graduates of  
today in considering their future, "did not look forward with  
a feeling of pleasure and anticipation, with a sense of coming  
into their own". I ~~do not attempt to define the terms used~~  
in ~~this statement~~, but I do take exception to the note of  
pessimism and despair.

We are living in an era where worldly success is  
more than ever measured by the <sup>tests</sup> ~~standards~~ of courage and  
confidence. On every side individuals, families and organi-  
zations have been affected by the economic scourge which has  
fallen upon us. The cause or causes of this circumstance  
may be reviewed from many angles, but in the final analysis  
<sup>they</sup> ~~it~~ can be traced to man's fallibility. The question of <sup>from</sup>  
~~pertinent consideration~~, however, is the effect these  
<sup>reflection</sup>  
circumstances have upon the individual.

To some, economic disaster has meant failure, with  
~~the~~ resultant pessimism and despair. To others, it has  
merely meant disappointment - a temporary setback, a  
retreat, if you will. To the one, it has spelled disaster,  
~~To~~ the other, it has meant reconstruction. The effect on  
the individual of the experiences of the past five years  
<sup>has been the</sup>  
~~has been a~~ test of his own stability, his courage and his  
moral worth. Whether you are a success or failure in life's  
work does not depend so much on the external forces surround-  
ing you but rather on your individual attitude and capabili-  
ties.

Rather than being disappointed at your outlook,  
there is every reason for your going forward with courage  
and confidence. Despite limited budgets, your city and

state have continued to extend the advantages of higher education, so that you have an endowment worthy of the highest standards. You go forward into a world fully appreciative of the worth of your <sup>talents.</sup> ~~tirelessness.~~ You are welcomed to a generation where youth is actively engaged in the problem of reconstruction. The clouds of depression are slowly but surely being blown away by the winds of human understanding and organized cooperation.

It is recognized, of course, that you are going to face obstacles and difficulties as you proceed toward your goal in life, but that is not unusual or unnatural. We are all engaged in competition in the conduct of life's work and all of us are subject to disappointments and heart-aches. That is not the fault of our economic structure but is the result of our <sup>own</sup> human frailties and individual culpabilities. On the other hand, neither is it ordained that we cannot or must not succeed. Too often do we hear the cry that our economic structure <sup>has</sup> failed and therefore that we must destroy the foundation built by the experiences and sacrifices of our fathers and build anew on ~~the~~ theories and hypotheses, ~~of dissatisfied minorities.~~ Our experiences of today are not unusual or novel. They differ only from similar problems of the past, in that they are personal and intimate. The test as to how much they have really affected us will be recorded by the historian of the future when he measures our position and our attitude in facing the problems. After all, our Government is but a union of individuals who, through their families and their associations go to make up a system which directs our activities. No nation is stronger than its backbone and the backbone of the nation today, consists of an infinite <sup>number of</sup> vertebrae, the thinking people of

the land. As our Government has passed through similar crises' so is it steadily emerging from the depression - thanks to the intelligent cooperation and sympathetic understanding of its citizens.

What is true with Government is likewise applicable to the citizen~~s~~. The history of our country presents many sterling examples of rugged individualism and intelligent understanding where courage and confidence were responsible for success in the face of handicaps and obstacles. There is no better example in our history than that presented in our own lifetime by the man whose 53rd birthday our nation celebrates today. Despite handicaps which would make the ordinary individual despair, this man has had the courage and the confidence necessary to succeed, and has marched on until today he holds the greatest gift at the hands of an appreciative citizenry, the Presidency of the United States. We ask you then to take inspiration from the examples and experiences of the past, and to go forward with a proper appreciation of your talents and with a determination to discharge them faithfully and well.

ADDRESS BY THE HON. MARK EISNER, CHAIRMAN  
OF THE BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION OF THE  
CITY OF NEW YORK DELIVERED AT THE HUNTER  
COLLEGE COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES JANUARY  
30, 1935, AT THE HUNTER COLLEGE AUDITORIUM.

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HUNTER COLLEGE

Once again, I stand before a graduating class of the largest women's college in the world to offer my official and personal word of encouragement to you upon your exit from the warm protecting walls of Hunter College.

Last year at the commencement exercises I addressed myself to the general subject of the state of our country. I am sure that what I said did not influence Congress or other men of affairs a great deal. I do not even know whether I seriously influenced those who were within the range of my voice to legislate their persons into a more complete and happier life of service to the community, to themselves and those immediately about them, although that is what I had set as my goal. So to you, the class of January, 1935, I will speak in a different vein, especially since in this world of rapid changes, conditions and hence our viewpoints and problems present us with a different contour from day to day.

Now I know that everyone in this room will agree with me that those young women who are graduating in this class must not be condemned to exist in the dark narrowness of a woman's life in the Middle Ages, when "Kirche, Küche, und Kinder" was the sole order of living for all but a very few women. Joan of Arc, and Isabella of Spain stand out vividly because the background of suppressed womanhood is unrelieved in its darkness.

I know that this graduating class of women will not be herded by any oppressive government or dictatorship into the kitchen, the church and child bearing, despite the vigorous physical philosophy of those who would trample underfoot liberalism and enlightenment, and despite the prophets of such doctrines whose presence is manifest and whose utterances are being heard in our own free America today. There awaits each one of you here so long as we live under a democracy a much fuller career which of course should include the three activities which I have referred to and which are of great importance in rounding out a woman's life.

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Now whether you are an economic determinist or not you will be confronted with a series of economic facts the moment you cross the threshold of this college and seek your place in the outside world, and these facts will in great measure determine your career. They cannot be ignored and they will not be downed. In a labor market that is flooded with a surplus much greater than we have ever experienced in our history, you start off handicapped, and to overcome this disadvantage you will have to summon to your aid all the energy, intelligence and stamina of which you are possessed or which you will be able to muster in the face of this first emergency of your adult career. The search for a job, even assuming that you have permitted yourself to be guided by your faculty advisors, will cause you to sense the grossness, the coldness and the indifference of a cruel world. You will be disheartened and discouraged and in your innocence you may reach out for radical panaceas. Your vision will be obstructed, your view distorted by the immediacy of your needs. Your twistings and turnings, your manouverings for a place in the economy of our society where you may anchor your lives, will enervate and exhaust you, unless you are prepared to withstand the strain- unless you are fortified by what you have been taught in these great halls of learning.

By way of helping you to fathom the depth of the problem with which you are now confronted (because realization and understanding are essential ~~to~~ aids in the solution of any difficulty), I direct your attention to some interesting figures relating to college women. In the school year 1891-1892 there were 23,385 women in all the colleges and universities and professional schools in America. Forty years later in the school year 1931-1932 the number of women attending colleges, universities and professional schools had risen to 372,919; a number which is sixteen times larger than the attendance for the year 1891-1892. In the same forty years the male registrants had increased by only 12 times. These figures should indicate clearly that the woman college graduate is no longer the rarity which she was two generations back, and that the competition for place is more keen, and requires additional qualifications from the competitors, but of this more later. I was further surprised when on examining a

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breakdown of the figures I have just quoted, I learned that in the school year 1931-1932 only 84,407 women were registered in the professional schools of our country - something under 23% of the total number attending colleges, universities and professional schools - whereas nearly 43% of the men who attended colleges and universities and professional schools were registered in the professional schools.

This inequality in the figures, in the face of nearly one hundred years of agitation for educational equality for women is really disheartening. I suppose Frederic Denison Maurice, that pioneer in the field of wider educational opportunities for women, who in 1848 founded Queen's College in England for that purpose, would be seriously disappointed were he alive today to note that the American woman with nearly all the professions open to her- is slow to take advantage of her chance to better integrate herself into the economics of our society, by pursuing studies in the professional schools, in proportion to her numbers.

In the midst of a contracting economy when a surplus of human energy and intelligence cannot be fitted into profitable occupations, you can avoid belonging to the surplus class if you will fit yourself out with a profession, if you have not already done so, which is best suited to your talents, and which is the least crowded.

When I left school, I could afford to be more carefree in my choice of a profession. I could in that time find any number of things to do, where I might earn my keep and even more. You, today, must be more careful and thorough in your choice of a profession, for the opportunities have been reduced and your choice has narrowed.

I believe that I have already dwelt here with sufficient emphasis upon this business of getting a job. Before concluding I want to speak to you about yet another business- a more important business to which you will now turn, as adults in a changing society, and that is the business of living.

Some educators have defined the objective of education as that of learning how to live. Our educational system seems to have fallen far short of this objective. I

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have heard people say that we do not know how to live, because the machine has crushed life out of modern man ceaselessly speeding him to some unknown doom. Havelock Ellis has recently said that our era is characterized "by the cult of speed", and he, at the same time, has warned us ~~that~~ against abandoning leisure. It is our peril if we seek to destroy either speed or leisure according to Mr. Ellis. Therefore I say to you - cultivate your leisure for a fuller life- learn to live in your hobbies. Learn to avail yourself of those instrumentalities which the faculty here, has endeavored to place at your disposal. Continue your studies in the fields that afford you the maximum of personal satisfaction.

There was a time in our educational and social history when girls were sent to a finishing school to teach them the manners and modes of the times, to round out their training, to fit them for daily life. The finishing school represents a finality thoroughly unsuited to our day. The education of any person in our day of movement never ends. It is a continuous process. I can think of nothing of greater importance to leave in the minds and hearts of graduates than to leave with them a thorough understanding that in our day, to live is to learn, to continue to learn even though the doors of this institution of learning now close behind them.

I would yet leave with you another thought on this auspicious occasion in your career. At the close of the Victorian Era, materialism gripped our society and warped the minds and the hearts of a generation. The war was a most natural sequel to a generation's concentration on materialism. Those who were born during and after the war have missed some of the spiritual influences which motivated and affected human relations in earlier times. These qualities of spirit could not for all time be banished from the human soul without degrading the human being. It is only today as we look about us at the ruins of the 1929 debacle, that we can in some measure appraise our mistakes. The most grievous error was this concentration on the material to the exclusion of the spiritual. When the material things gave out, there was no reserve to sustain the individual. I would therefore again urge you to fill your lives not alone with the job in hand, but I ask you to cultivate other interests to concern not only yourself, but others about you as well.

I am reminded of the story of the child who asked its widowed mother for a new and serviceable garment. The mother in her poverty could provide him with cast-off and tattered garments only. The child grew older, harboring ill will to his parent for her failure to supply his heart's desire. One day on returning from school he remarked his disappointment to his mother. She enfolded him in her arms and explained to him that she was unable to get him a new garment of cloth because she spent all she had to provide him with far more beautiful and better covering for the nakedness of his body, by affording him an education.

If you will it, you can have a fuller, more complete life because you have been privileged to study in this institution of learning. Your education cannot be counted as lost, even if you do not apply the knowledge which you have gained here to your daily job of earning a living, for you most certainly can apply your education, to know better the business of living.

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