

## COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

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June 13, 1979

And now with the hour late and the time short, I rise to a point of personal privilege. It is customary at Commencement that you have a Commencement speaker and that the president end the program with the charge to the graduates. In this, my last day as your formal president, at least in a public gathering, I took this point of personal privilege to combine a very, very brief address with the charge, because Hunter is very dear to me, you are very dear to me, and the faculty behind me is very dear to me. I believe we have shared much together.

There is an old saying which, like many old sayings, can be trite and true, and very informing. We often say -- sometimes with love -- "We live and learn." But we can also say with eyes wide open and hearts full that we do live. And I believe that you and I, those behind me and before me and around me have lived and learned together. We have lived and learned in a world which, through the last decade, has had so many vested interest agendas that the fabric of the crazy quilt often seemed to have no wholeness at all. Yet, that decade was opened by one great American who tried to put together a thing he called "Common Cause." John Gardner, the founder, was seeking an instrument that might be able to be the voice of each of those vested interests, but might also hold those vested interests together in some kind of interdependence. I think you and I have to admit that, at least up

until today, in the larger community around us in the city, the state, the nation, and even the world, we are still in an era of special interest politics. We are so dominated by special interest politics that it is hard for us to grasp out and recognize that each of those vested interests has to be invested in one another. I think we must be searching as we move away -- some of us from this College out into another world -- we must continue to search for the kind of interdependence without which independence is an antiseptic and a sterile kind of reality. We have often been told that this generation of students in the 70's was narcissistic, that indeed much of our world was narcissistic. And yet I believe we have already begun the first steps in living and learning to understand mutuality, to recognize in some of our movements -- the movements so necessary and so far from over -- the movements toward integration of races and sexes. Those movements are critical to the fullness of American life and a world community.

Let's look for just a moment at our time together at Hunter. Our time at Hunter in our "little" world, though it in itself is a big bureaucracy, was indeed a time of financial depression, and we had to learn to be thrifty. It was a time of political instability, and we had to find somehow in our canoe in a typhoon some kind of solidarity and some kind of holding on to our own set of values. Families who have braved depressions together come out either better or worse. All too many, I think, come out worse. If a family comes out as good or better, I think it has developed a kind of scar tissue and a series of antibodies that will keep the



members healthy all the rest of their lives. I hope that I am not indulging in wishful thinking, though I may be investing a bit in a self-fulfilling prophecy, when I say that I believe our Hunter College has been a family that has weathered storms; has built up some antibodies, and has learned by living together that interdependence and mutuality pay off a lot more than tearing the fabric apart with cynicism and mistrust and final misunderstanding.

Skepticism is critical to the life of the academic world. Criticism is indispensable to the life of the academic world and to the life of mind. Unless you are capable of questioning anything that is ever said to you by whatever authority at whatever time in history, you are not a critical thinker. But unless you have a residue of trust and openness to the authority around you and with whom you will interact all of your lives, unless you look for the best in people and in institutions as well as for the worst, you are doomed, I believe, to a life that is sterile and antiseptic, a life of studied cynicism.

In an earlier incarnation, in an earlier decade I came to a conclusion about my own life. I made a decision and a vow that I have never revoked and that I trust I shall never revoke. I made a decision that I would never sell my soul to cynicism. I ask you to think about it; to think about it out of your own selfish interest; to recognize that if you sell you soul to cynicism, there is nothing left of value and elegance. You can be skeptical; you can be doubting, but you must learn to love and you must live to love and you must love to live.



And in my final words, in my "hasta la vista," I would like to thank, with all the unction in my heart, a faculty and administration who sit behind me, who often disagreed with me, who gave me many times a hard time as I gave them a hard time. I trust them enough to tell them the truth as I saw the truth. And if we weathered the storm at Hunter College, it was not only because your presidents had the courage to tell the truth, but because the faculty had the openness to hear the truth.

I thank an Alumni Association represented by two key persons on either side of this stage, an Alumni Association that was devoted to Hunter College; that believed in the standards of Hunter College and in the openness of Hunter College to any student able to do this curriculum regardless of his or her financial situation. The Alumni Association met the challenge -- the inevitable curse of tuition -- with a Hunter Tuition Fund which has provided for middle-income students up to 40% of the analyzed need, the only alumni association in CUNY which responded in this way.

Most of all, I salute you and your parents. You and your parents worked harder and took out loans to try to finish, many of you, what simply could not be finished without that kind of investment in your own education. I understand that. I identify with that. I gave to God last fall my beautiful 87 year-old father who pailed gas and ran milking machines to send me, the last of his four children, to college while I ran a riveter in a factory when I was 19 years old because there wasn't quite enough money to go around.



And so I identify with those kinds of backgrounds and I salute them. And I say that the kind of investment by all of us together to meet the opportunities and the exigencies of our time is indeed the only agenda that each of us can work on and the kind of agenda to which John Pineiro addressed his remarks so brilliantly a few minutes ago. I salute you; I salute your parents. I pray, I hope, I trust, and I challenge you, that the lessons we have learned by living at Hunter together in one of the toughest times that Hunter has ever lived through, will serve us well as we move out into our families, into our intimate relationships and to our professional lives, into our communications with the larger community, and as we recognize that all of life is creative compromise. All of life is taking the opportunity and meeting the exigency. All of life is trade-offs with one another and with the world community. If husbands and wives; if children and parents; if colleges and students; if governors and governed can begin to understand that vested interests must be invested in one another; that mutuality is the only independence worth having because it leads to interdependence, then life with all its troubles and all its elegances is worth living. Mine has been extremely worth living in our Hunter College. I thank you all for the opportunity.

And now, in a symbolic act, I take the President's Medal and I entrust it to Mr. Piore for the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York, and I pledge with all my heart and I ask you, the graduates, to pledge with me to love this college as long as we live.