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Opening Remarks of the President

There are formally assembled here in regular session the Board of Trustees and the President and Faculty of Bennington College for the purpose of making the last official decisions leading to the award of the Bachelor of Arts degree to the members of the seventh graduating class. Less formally, we are gathered here as teachers, parents, fellow students, townsmen and friends to honor and to share a common pride in the achievements of the young women who have presented themselves for the award of the degree.

The Bachelor of Arts degree has had a variety of meanings in American education; but traditionally it signifies the completion of a period of liberal education, as against specialized professional or vocational training. The Bachelor of Arts degree from Bennington College means that those to whom it is awarded have successfully completed an extended period of study and instruction resulting in a general understanding of our cultural heritage, and some

special competence in one of the great fields of human achievement in which we offer instruction. It means that they have learned to work independently and competently in their chosen field, well versed in its special methods, accepting the disciplines it imposes; and aware of its relationship to other types of specialized knowledge and skill which together make up our complex civilization.

More important than general knowledge or special competence, however, are those immeasurable qualities of imagination, courage, sympathy, and human understanding which characterize the civilized person. These qualities cannot be directly taught, nor formally certified by the award of the degree. Yet it is the peculiar function of a liberal college to try to develop them in all its methods of instruction and in the quality of its community life. The term "liberal" implies freedom, and freedom can only reside in individuals who have learned to discipline

their own minds and their own emotions. Bennington College has taken a radical stand in insisting on self-discipline, eliminating all the trappings of external control in the form of elaborate rules, or grades and unit credits. The members of this graduating class have lived as responsible members of a self-governing community. They have learned to work directly with the materials of their respective fields, and have set themselves no limited goals to be achieved once and for all with the passing of an examination. They have been called upon instead to take their places in the continuing fellowship of intellectual workers, artists and craftsmen, who have built up our present civilization and who will carry its values into the future. The award of the degree marks no climax or terminal point in education. Work goes on, and education with it. The standards and objectives of competent performance in the world at large have been applied to work in College. The habits of self-discipline and the methods of work which these graduates

have acquired here will prove appropriate as they move on and assume the responsibilities of adult citizenship.

The training of good citizens may be designated as the most important goal of a liberal education. Citizenship cannot be taught in courses in government, nor can it be assumed to result as a by-product of specialized training. Specialists of any kind, whether in social science, natural science or in any of the arts, may inhabit an ivory tower, and feel no responsibility towards the common culture which nourishes them. Citizenship requires responsible participation and a commitment to human and humane ends. Technical proficiency, especially in the application of scientific knowledge to the control of the physical environment, is the most obvious characteristic of our age. The outstanding problem before us is to devise ways in which world society can be organized so as to use the great technical powers mankind has developed in order to achieve those human values which represent the highest aspirations of our tradition.

I need not remind the members of this graduating class that all the values we have lived by on this hilltop are at stake in the present world conflict. No generation of American college graduates has faced graver responsibilities. In the immediate future the waging of war must absorb most of our energies. But the problems of the peace will be far more complex and will call for even more imagination, courage and patience. World peace is inseparable from domestic reconstruction. There is no stable social order into which these graduates will enter. It is a world in the making, and they must bear their share of the responsibility for its quality. If the difficulties ahead are great, the possibilities are no less inspiring. The war is destroying much, but some of the destruction is a gain. Attitudes of complacency and futility, fear of change and the desire to preserve vested privileges, are being broken down with the unifying experience of a common danger.

We are learning afresh the inestimable value of our democratic heritage, now that we cannot take its continuance for granted. The immensity of the world conflict compels us to think of our individual lives, and of the national life, in a world-wide perspective. The task of reconstruction, if it is to embody democratic principles, requires that we extend to the whole of mankind the attitudes of mutual respect and tolerance which we have learned to live by in this small community.

Such large tasks may appear so formidable as to dwarf the individual, and to discourage any feeling of personal responsibility. But true responsibility is always a modest but manageable thing: to do one's best in the situation within one's reach, and to contribute what sanity, imagination and good will one can to the conduct of the personal and public relationships in which one is directly engaged.

Those of us who have taught and worked with the members of this graduating class, and shared a common life with them on this hilltop, express our confidence in them. To the communities to which they go, we recommend them. We shall continue to follow them with interest and affection.

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"Will the chairmen of the faculty major groups present their recommendations for the award of degrees?"

(First faculty chairman will rise and say: "Mr. President."
(He will wait for the President to acknowledge his salutation by touching his hat.)

After all candidates are presented by faculty chairmen, Pres. addresses whole faculty as follows:

"Members of the Faculty: you have heard the names of those students who have fulfilled all requirements for graduation and are recommended for the award of the bachelor of arts degree. Do you now nominate these candidates to the Trustees for this purpose? If so, please signify your approval by rising. (When faculty rises, Pres. says) It is a vote."

The President then addresses the Chairman of the Board as follows:

Commencement ceremony - instructions for President

When Seniors are assembled in seats, President sits

When Seniors are seated, President rises and gives opening remarks.

"Madame Chairman: (Chairman rises) I present for the consideration of the Trustees the students whom you have heard recommended by the instructors in each major field, and formally nominated by the faculty for the degree of Bachelor of Arts."

Chairman then addresses Trustees, then graduates.

National anthem

After Seniors disappear into Science Wing, Pres. retires

"Members of the Graduating Class (class rises): I am happy to inform you that the Trustees of the Corporation, in the exercise of their authority and on nomination of the faculty, have admitted you to the degree of Bachelor of Arts.

I declare you entitled to all the rights and privileges pertaining to that degree here or elsewhere.

With this formal recognition of academic accomplishment you join the company of young women from this College and the men and women in all our colleges and universities who have been admitted to the special opportunities and obligations which the Bachelor of Arts degree implies.

In the name of all here assembled - your trustees, your instructors, your fellow students, your parents, your friends, your fellow-townsmen - I congratulate you."

National Anthem. When Seniors have gone, Chairman and Pres. retire

Commencement ceremony - Instructions for Chairman of Board

When Seniors are assembled in seats, Chairman and Pres. sit
Chairman remains seated until President addresses her, when
she rises. When President finishes, Chairman addresses
Trustees as follows:

"Members of the Bennington College Corporation: By charter the
power of conferring all degrees, diplomas and honors from this
institution is placed in your hands. You have heard the
nominations of the faculty. As many as are in favor of granting
the Bachelor of Arts degree to the students named signify your
approval by rising (When Trustees rise, Chairman says) It is a vote

Chairman then addresses graduates as follows: