Robert L.

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS

affe ’68

President Goheen,

Members of the Class of 1968,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

T

hree years ago, when our class had just finished its freshman year, another valedictorian stood here and spoke of a rising social and political awareness among students. He praised students for their role in the movement for civil rights and for their participation in political debate, but he warned of the extremism into which this activism might develop. Protests at Berkeley and marches in Mississippi formed the context for his remarks. That commencement had hardly passed when eruption in Watts and rapid escalation of the war in Vietnam shattered that context and established new directions for student involvement.

In the years since then we have witnessed the continued growth of activism among students, becoming ever more militant and self-aware. Its effects are being felt more and more widely in American life. Each of us shall have to decide upon the significance and necessity of student activism: many of us while continuing our studies at graduate and professional schools; some of us as we fight the wars, at home and in Asia, which are a focus of student agitation; and all of us as alumni and friends of Princeton.

Our four years here nearly span the era of student activism at Princeton, and we have seen the character of that activism change drastically. When we arrived, we found Princeton just beginning to throw off the lethargy of the 1950’s. Undergraduates had begun to march for civil rights, to tutor in the black ghettos of Trenton, to call for a dialogue on our government’s foreign policy. These were small-scale commitments. More often than not, they were personal activities—individuals working with and trying to aid individuals.

More recently some of us have turned our attention toward improvement of the environment here at Princeton. Students have helped to obtain repeal of an antiquated car restriction and a similarly outdated residency requirement. Perhaps the high point of our personal involvement with Princeton’s problems was this year’s controversy over the Prospect Street Clubs, the result of which has been the introduction of a new vitality into Princeton’s social structure. Parenthetically, it even seems possible that, partially as a result of student agitation, there will soon be women taking part in a ceremony such as this.

This year a more militant and frustrated form of protest came to Princeton. The school year began with an unexpectedly well supported effort to sever the university’s ties with the Institute for Defense Analysis. It ended anxiously with a march on Nassau Hall supported by many elements of the university community, at which further reforms in university policies and structure were demanded.

Although we have seen the intensity of student activity at Princeton increase in four years, its growth has been far outstripped by the spread of turmoil in the world. Over all our years here has hung the spectre of an unpopular and seemingly endless war, one which many of us also feel to be unjust. Alongside this conflict has arisen another, sprung from the struggle of the blacks of our country to obtain equality and to find dignity. We have watched and found that we cannot wait for others to confront these issues. The normal channels of communication between the powerful institutions of the country and the people seem to be blocked. The call for even more student involvement in these struggles has been heard throughout the country. It is heard with increasing urgency here at Princeton. I think students must continue to respond to this call, making what we have seen at Princeton in the past four years but a foundation for even more student involvement, until these problems are resolved.

Does this then mean that the frustration, disruption and destruction which we witnessed at Columbia are to become the instruments for greater student involvement? It need not be so: not because the problems will solve themselves, or because students have no place in the reformation of our society, but because confrontations such as that at Columbia display a fundamental misdirection of efforts in the present student activism.

The keynote of student agitation now is not personal action and reform as it was four years ago. It is power. The attitude is that an unrepresentative group of people control our lives because they control the institutions of our country. The solution to our problems is, they say, to gain control of these institutions and to reshape them so that the power resides with those it affects.
Superficially most of our problems appear to be amenable to this sort of solution. In some cases, such as the Vietnamese War, an institutional approach to the problem is really quite justified. America would not be aggressively pursuing this war in Asia if the country's political structure were sensitive to the desires of the large segment of the population which opposes the war.

However, under close inspection most of the conflicts in the society cannot be viewed wholly as misuses of institutional powers. Many problems are institutional only to the extent that institutions reflect the general malaise. The issues of violence and racism are such questions. The acquisition of power over institutions and their subsequent reform will not bring the resolution of such conflicts. Institutions are not entities unto themselves. They are complex, cumbersome structures which have grown from a conglomerate of ideals and desires. Their characters change slowly, not only shaping, but also shaped by the underlying currents of public morality. Underneath the conflict between black and white and underneath the violence which riddles our country lies a deep personal failing of the American people. If many of the institutions of the country encourage the mania for violence, the effects of which we have felt so recently—if many institutions are subtly or overtly racist, then these are reflections of the moral failure of a great number of Americans. The artificial restructuring of institutions alone cannot create a new morality. The country cannot be stable until the minds of Americans are similarly restructured.

I am not asking that we abandon attempts for institutional reform and return to the small scale, essentially personal involvement which characterized Princeton when we entered. The seriousness of our country's dilemma requires far more effective action than personal involvement alone has proved to be. What I would ask for is a realization that for a solution to America's problems we must go beyond institutional rearrangement and reform, we must in addition effect profound changes inside the hearts and minds of the American people. We cannot alienate ourselves in our frustration and our discontent from the majority of Americans with whom we must communicate if we are to improve the country.

The riots at Columbia have probably resulted in the alienation of a great number of Americans who must be reached by the ideas which students are trying to put forth. This loss may dwarf the gains of institutional concessions. The upsetting of the balance between the personal and the institutional makes Columbia a very poor model for student activism.

In four years at Princeton we have learned a great deal about human nature and human problems. Our education carries with it several obligations to society, one of which is that we apply our knowledge to renew its institutions. An equally important one is the obligation to communicate what we have learned and what we feel to other people; to help reshape the outlook of other Americans and thereby to build a stable foundation for a new society.

---

Departmental Notes

ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

On March 15 the Department, Art Museum, and the University Library held a symposium in memory of Erwin Panofsky *47. The event was very well attended by APCA members who were former students of Pan and many others from near and far. A witty lecture on the curriculum vitae of Panofsky was given by William Hecksher, while Jacob Rosenberg spoke on Lucas Cranach the Elder, the topic occasioned by a loan exhibition in the Museum of a small group of paintings by Cranach to accompany our recent acquisition of a spectacular painting by the master, "Venus and Cupid." The major exhibition in the Museum was a loan show of eighty-five sixteenth century master prints Entitled Symbols in Transformation: Iconographic Themes at the Time of the Reformation, Craig Harbison *69 organized the exhibition and wrote both the catalogue and a fine introductory essay. He, with his wife Sherrill, were also key participants in the loan exhibition of rare books and photographic materials in Firestone Library: Meaning in the Visual Arts: An Exhibition Suggested by the Writings of Erwin Panofsky. Concurrently on display in the Art Museum was a selective exhibition of its large collection of drawings by Guercino. Under the supervision of Felton Gibbons, the show was organized by a first year graduate student, Diane DeGrazia, who also wrote the catalogue entries.

Under the sponsorship of the Friends of the Art Museum, Tom Hoving '59, '66 spoke on October 7 on "Museums and the Quality of Life." Alfred Barr '22, '23, h. 40 spoke on March 18 (to a full house in McCosh 10, as had Hoving) on "Picasso: Pillar of Tradition," a lecture in the Spencer Trask series.

Hitherto unreported changes of position include Jim Turnure '50, *63, now Chairman of the Art Department at Bucknell University. Tsuji Shigeumi *68 is an assistant professor at Seisen Women's College, Tokyo. Bob Deshman *65 has taken a teaching position at the University of Toronto, while Hal Kalman '64, '67 is an instructor at the University of British Columbia. Finally, to complete the picture of Princeton in the service of Canada, Gary Walters '64, '67 is now at McGill