

DREW COMM.

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MADISON, NEW JERSEY  
MAY 18, 1996

Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you so much President Kean, distinguished members of the Board of Trustees, administrators, faculty, students, parents, friends and most of all, I want to thank the honored graduates of the Class of 1996 for welcoming me to this home of free expression, the first amendment, and the values we all share.

It is a great pleasure for me to be here.

I want to thank President Kean for his hospitality and his kind introduction. But more than that, I want to thank him for his leadership and friendship over the years. My husband and I have known Tom and Debbie for a number of years when he was the Governor of this great state and my husband was a Governor. We've spent many hours talking about the issues we care about, particularly education and children. I was very pleased when he accepted the invitation to become the President of this university. I also was grateful when he joined the delegation to Beijing as vice-chairman of our representation that went to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women to stand up for the rights and choices of girls and women throughout the entire world. I also appreciate greatly, the title and substance of his book, The Politics of Inclusion, because part of our challenge in America today is to seek ways to overcome differences and disagreements, to make it possible for people of different backgrounds and ideologies to work together and to live together because we value the inclusion of all.

This is my second visit to Drew, but I feel at home on this campus. Partly because I see a very familiar face, that of Professor Don Jones, an old and dear friend who graduated from the theological school here in 1960 and went immediately to the church in Park Ridge, Illinois where I was a member of the Methodist Youth Group. I want to thank him for the many life lessons he taught me when I was younger, and for the insights and ideas he continues to share with me today. He brought with him much of what he learned here at Drew.

But I particularly want to thank the faculty and students of Drew. I appreciate being invited to this celebration. I loved the Carols rendition of Hallelujah. It made I think the right beginning to this day. And I also know that as Margaret Meade, the famous anthropologist said shortly before her death, "Our futures depend upon whether we are able to build and sustain learning serving communities". And that's what Drew is. As the President said, "You have learned here and you have served here". You have had examples from faculty members, you have been guided by your family and your friends. The lessons of learning and serving are among the most important you will take from here.

The first time I visited Drew was in April of 1987. I had been invited by Professor Jones to speak to a class that he was then teaching on business ethics which, as I remember, was offered through the Department of Religious Studies. We had a long and spirited discussion of corporate responsibility in modern society -- about the role of business in our own lives and the life of our nation. And we talked as well about the loss of meaning in our public lives, and the alienation that many people feel from their government and the American political system.

I was thinking about that class as I came here because just on Thursday, my husband met with American business leaders whose companies exemplify what he calls Corporate Citizenship. Companies that provide child care, or flexible work hours, that pay for maternity leave or tuition subsidies. Companies that have not in their 30 or 40 year history ever laid off a single employee, but instead have cut the salaries of everyone from the Chief Executive down in order to keep people working and families intact. Companies that understand- communities are built when people share the burdens and the benefits.

That lesson that my husband was attempting to convey through the words of those on the front lines of business that we discussed here at Drew those many years ago, I think illustrate the sense of responsibility that we are attempting to bring forth in both our private and our public lives.

You who are graduating will face many questions in the years to come as your parents and friends and faculty members who have preceded you have faced--as to who is responsible for what? How do we discharge our responsibilities to those closest to us? Our children our parents. How do we extend that responsibility beyond our family to our neighbors our community?

What does it mean to be responsible in education or business or religion? How do we make our government as responsible as it needs to be?

Those questions will be debated in the halls of academia but they will be answered every single day by the millions and millions of decisions that all of us make.

And I want just briefly to talk about three of the ways I think we should consider responsibility today. We live in a time of great possibility. You are entering into a world that even a decade ago was not at all shaped as it is today by forces of history and technology. The global economy gives us the possibility of greater prosperity, but also of stiffer competition. New technology may bring us closer together through our computers, but virtual reality will never substitute for human connections and relationships. Family dynamics are under pressure and are changing the nature of our intimate relationships, as mothers, and fathers, and daughters, and sons struggle to make both a living and a life.

The world itself has undergone dramatic changes. Around the globe, communism has given way to capitalism, tyranny to democracy, closed markets to open ones, all of which is forcing us to redefine how we define our selves and the human experience.

Now every generation faces challenges. We are on the brink of not only a new century but a new millennium. A thousand years ago there were many who thought the world was coming to an end. We had hit rock bottom in the human experiment with little hope for our future. But look at what happened in the last thousand years, not only medicine, science, industry and technology advanced, but we saw human civilization attempting step by step to overcome our own flaws.

One hundred years ago we had another great debate. There was tremendous anxiety and uncertainty as we moved from an agricultural to an industrial society. President Theodore Roosevelt fought a great battle to try to make a balance between public and private power. He stood up for the environment at a time when we thought we had more land than we knew what to do with it but he could see that we were in danger of squandering our resources. There was great progressive movement lead by people who were concerned about child labor or the conditions of immigrants in our great cities.

So there was a debate about what kind of people we should be and how our institutions should respond. And we made progress because of that debate and that sorting out.

Today we find ourselves once again, debating the role of every one of our institutions and that is healthy. The debate though should be carried out in reasoned tones. Not give way to extremism and shouting because we don't solve problems that way. But if we do engage in what this university stands for; learning, serving, connecting with one another, we can begin to sort out what our next 100 years will look like.

One of the great dangers at a time like this is to seize upon easy answers, to use generalizations and stereotypes to describe the world and to describe people who are unlike ourselves.

You know the kinds of stereotypes I'm talking about. You see or read them in the media every day:

For example, if you're under 25, you're an apathetic Generation X'er.

If you're over 40, you're a self-indulgent Baby Boomer.

If you're a liberal, you're a bleeding heart.

If you're a conservative, you have no heart.

If you're the current serving President, you're accused of being all of the above, depending on what day it is.

And if you're the wife of the current serving President, you have to worry about your hair a lot.

You know the truth is, there is no single label or definition that applies or captures any of us, or any of the issues we face. Our world and ourselves are too complex for that. Many of us carry competing thoughts and values in our hearts, and souls all the time. So we have to be able to look to values and ideals and traditions that have gotten us this far and develop a shared coherent idea of what our common destiny requires from all of us. And then we develop that sense of responsibility that we carry with us into whatever endeavor we undertake.

One of those values, which has been nurtured here at Drew, is the spiritual and moral dimension of our lives.

One doesn't have to be of a particular religion. I happen to be a Methodist, so being here in the attic of Methodism with the archives is a great treat for me. But one does not have to have a particular denominational background to know that without some sense of morality and spirituality the search for individual responsibility and the greater task of moving that into the broader world is not very likely.

Those of you who participated in Volunteer Week, who actually gave of ourselves in the number of projects that were mentioned in the invocation, should know that you are acting out the values of learning and serving and developing a greater sense of responsibility for your own lives, the meaning of your lives, and your connection with others.

Another of the values that leads to responsibility is education. And here I congratulate Drew for bringing to this campus young people of all different kinds of backgrounds. Of using this campus as a gateway to learning for young men and women, because our democracy depends upon our capacity to reach and educate as many of our citizens as possible.

More than half of the students at this university receive some federal assistance to cover tuition. And the President told me on our walk, that 70% of you receive some form of scholarship or monetary aid. We know that is a good investment. We are grateful that this university understands that investment.

Your education is not just about you. It is not only about acquiring skills and knowledge. It's about meeting the challenges of your time and learning to solve problems and adapting to new circumstances. It's about building a broader understanding of your world and acting responsibly in relation to others.

As I look out on this class, as I've read the statistics about who comprises this class, I have to say that now is no time to retreat on our nation's historic commitment to public education, to a mixed system of public and private higher education, and to the kinds of students who are graduating today. We might need to reform education, something that Tom Kean and my husband have worked on for many years. Yes, change it, improve it. But we certainly don't need to shut the doors of opportunity for young people who are willing to work hard and take responsibility in their lives. No young American, willing to pay the price in hard work, should be denied a college education! That should be an American commitment.

And education is one of those services that historically government has provided.

And so finally, we have to renew our faith in responsible government and politics. In a democracy, government is the people, so renewing our faith in our government means renewing our faith in ourselves and in our ability to perfect our union. James Madison for whom this town is named, understood, when he was the principle drafter of the constitution, that every generation would have to work hard to overcome the distrust and cynicism that naturally grows up around government and politics. We would have to really be recommitted in each age to the possibilities that reform and re-invention could provide.

I know it has become fashionable in recent years to bash politics and government, and to look upon public service with contempt. The airwaves are filled with that kind of talk.

And while I'm grateful in a country as this to live among people who do disagree, to be critical of our government, to be critical of the political process, I have to confess, I get tired of hearing people blame every problem we have on government.

I don't mean to suggest that government is perfect by any means. The practice of politics and governing has never been easy. Max Weber once said that politics is "a strong and slow boring of hard boards." I would add that sometimes it's just plain boring and there doesn't seem to be any way around that because politics is not just about who's elected to office. Politics is how we get along with one another. How we compromise with each other. When someone says to me, "How can you stand being involved in politics?" I always say, "Are you married? Do you have a family? Do you belong to a church or school?" Because politics with a small "p" is that process that brings us together peaceably to work toward common ends.

Politics is about more than casting and counting votes. Just as government is about more than buildings and bureaucrats. Both, however, are essential to the functioning of this democracy. They are not by any means the only responsible institutions. All of us in our private and professional lives are also responsible for how well this country does.

We are a better country today though because generations before us -- through our political process and system of government -- devised the G.I. bill or Social Security, and Medicare.

Adopted child labor laws and protections for workers.  
The minimum wage. Clean air and water and environmental  
legislation.

So, when I hear people complain about government,  
I think about all the blessings we take for granted in  
this country and I am reminded of all the people I have  
met in my travels overseas -- who have endured torture,  
and exile, and jail because they fought for the kind of  
political system and government we take for granted.

I remember meeting a young Peace Corps volunteer  
in Nepal who had walked ten hours from a remote village  
to catch a bus to come visit with me in Katmandu. She  
told me she'd been living in a house with no running  
water or electricity. Working at a school whose  
students were mostly boys, because most parents still  
did not send their girls to school and married them off  
by the age of twelve or thirteen.

She had thoroughly enjoyed her Peace Corp  
experience, but in addition to missing her family and  
friends, she missed the blessings of daily life we take  
for granted in America: safe drinking water that comes  
out of our faucet; meats and vegetables that you can  
eat without fear of getting sick; enough food all year  
round; free public schools for both boys and girls;  
warm baths and electricity at any time of day or night;  
paved roads, and cars, phones that work.

These may seem like trivial examples to us here at  
home, but to her looking at her country from a far,  
they represented what we have accomplished together.  
And also in a way the larger spirit of democracy that  
has enabled us to solve our problems for more than 200  
years.

I thought about that visit in Nepal again when I  
was in Bosnia with my daughter recently. I met with  
civilians from Tuzla and Sarajevo who described what  
life was like when civility, and respect, and tolerance  
broke down completely. During four years of war and  
ethnic violence where some people thought they had the  
corner on truth. People lived under the most horrible  
conditions. Doctors and nurses told me how they kept  
the rudimentary facilities of hospitals open despite  
being bombed daily. I heard from mothers and fathers  
who had lost children, and wives who hadn't seen their  
husbands since they'd been dragged away. I looked into  
the eyes of women who had been raped as a tactic of war  
and saw the pain there.

There was bewilderment in their voices as they  
tried to explain how this could have happened.

People who had lived peaceably together who had been fomented into violence against their former neighbors. Who believed the propaganda they heard about people who not like themselves. And yet, they also expressed hope that the world lead by the United States was helping them to return to the normalcy that we celebrate today.

Then I visited with American soldiers in Tuzla and at two outposts, Camp Alicia and Camp Bedrock. And I wish every American could have been there with me. When those helicopters landed and I saw the soldiers arrayed before me, I saw men and women, black, white, and brown faces, Christians, Muslims, and Jews, kids from the farms, the suburbs, the cities. Every one of them serving our country in the cause of peace. And every one of them serving as a model for Bosnia and the world, of how people of different backgrounds and beliefs can work together for common good.

It reminded me once again that, despite our imperfections and flaws, we have a system of government and politics that has endured because it is the best system ever devised. It was rooted in values. It understood the imperfections of human beings. It believed in education and service.

On the eve of this new century and millennium, our task as Americans is to work together to perfect our union, just as those before us have done. Our task is to respect our political process and our democratic institutions and respect each other when we feel strongly opposed to points of view never the less to treat each other with civility. Because we know we are granted privileges and rights here in this country that others have died for and continue to die for.

Each of us, and particularly all of you who graduate today, has a role to play in our democracy. Raising children who are resilient and self confident and believe in themselves builds democracy. Respecting neighbors and working to solve problems in communities that never make headlines. That's building democracy.

Teachers who show up in schools all over this country determined to give children no matter where they come from or what their background is, the chance to be somebody. That's building democracy.

Churches and mosaics and synagogues that tell people believe what you believe but in this country of religious freedom respect the beliefs of others. That's building democracy.

Businesses that know, yes, they have to make a profit to give people jobs and opportunities, but understand they have obligations to the larger community to make sure we still are the strongest economy in the world. That's supporting and building democracy.

Citizenship and service is everyone's responsibility. "Human progress", as Martin Luther King, Jr. once said: "never rolls on the wheels of inevitability", just ask the Bosnians, ". . . the time is always ripe to do right."

You may never run for office. You may never marry someone who runs for office. But I hope all of you who are graduating today and all who have joined in this celebration, your family and friends and proud teachers, will understand that each of us should think of ourselves as stewards of our democracy. As men and women who will keep the flame of freedom and justice alive.

I have every confidence, I am absolutely optimistic that just as every generation of Americans have met the challenges before them, we will do likewise and we will do so in part because of those of you who graduate today from this learning serving community.

Godspeed on your journey and please continue to be part of building this country.

Thank you all very much.

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