

9-29-1961

## Opening Assembly Address, 1961

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### Recommended Citation

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President Rosemary Park at All-College Assembly, September ~~28~~, 1961

I should like to add my word of greeting to Dean Noyes' and express to all the members of the faculty and the student body the best wishes of the College for a successful year.

As you know, we begin this year our 47th academic year, but actually the College has been a legal entity since 1911, and therefore it is fitting that in this October we should observe our 50th Anniversary. Beside the representatives of other colleges who will join with us for a formal Convocation on Saturday morning, October the 21st, the College is honored to have José Limon and his Company open our celebration on <sup>the</sup> ~~this~~ previous evening with a performance here in Palmer Auditorium. On Saturday morning, Hannah Arendt, who is familiar to many of you, will be the speaker at the Convocation, for which Miss Alter, of the faculty, has composed special music. Mrs. Boatwright, also of the Music Department, will give a program of songs in the afternoon at the Lyman Allyn Museum and official greetings will be brought this college ~~and~~ from neighboring institutions and academic associations at a special luncheon for invited guests. All in all I think this will be a memorable and a festive occasion for the College. *P* It is especially fitting in this Anniversary year that we should have as a visiting member of the faculty, in the English Department for the first semester, Professor Mary Marshall, of Syracuse University, whose father, Benjamin T. Marshall, was the second president of Connecticut College, from 1917 to 1928. We also welcome another new member of the faculty, Mr. Marvin Hardin,

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Associate Professor of Government, who comes to us from Wichita University. There have been other changes in the faculty; you will meet Mrs. Lord in the Classics Department and Mr. Nikanov in Russian, Mrs. Knollenberg in Art, and a number of other new faces will appear in the classroom.

As usual the summer at the College was an active one. The tangible evidence of that you can see in the progress which has been made in the North Dormitory Complex. Mary Morrissson House is already in use; two other dormitories on the east side will be completed by the first of February, and we expect that the total project will be finished by the first of July.

In addition to the work on the dormitories you will see new tennis courts, and you will see, too, that we have almost completed the finishing of the two library wings. These last two items were made possible by the success of the Fiftieth Anniversary Fund, and I had the very great honor and pleasure of announcing our successful conclusion at Commencement. Even more important, and deriving from the success of that Fund, is the improvement in the faculty salary scale, the enlargement of the scholarship program, as well as an increase in the library book budget.

Now there are a number of other items of local interest which I should like to talk about but, since in a very special sense, I am a member of this year's graduating class, I should prefer to use the moments remaining in this opening Assembly to talk of some matters of more general concern.

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May I, in parenthesis, say to you what I have said to faculty and staff, to alumnae and trustees, that my decision to leave the College at the end of this academic year has been the most difficult decision of my life. All of you have made this difficult, and for this I am grateful. But this, today, is not a time for mournful sentiments on my part. We have ahead of us a new academic year, which I hope will be one of the best and most fruitful in the history of the College.

PP At every opening Assembly, I have tried to emphasize the gratitude which we feel to the men and women in New London and in Hartford who originated the idea of a college for women in New London; and to their successors as well, who have nurtured this institution to its present stature. We must always, I think, ask ourselves this question: Why did so many people care so much about this College, and about other American colleges? Surely there were other ways in which they might have spent their time and their substance; why did they choose to do this?

Now our answer, I think, must lie in the continuing conviction of succeeding generations concerning the value of education, whatever they may have meant, whatever they may mean, by that term--and indeed, there has seldom been any unanimity about this, nor is there, I think, at the present day. Particularly there has been no agreement as to what women's education ought to be. I, personally, have always been a bit annoyed at the idea that it should vary completely in substance from the education given to men, because the

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implication is that women couldn't take the straight stuff. Now, I am perfectly willing to concede that women learn differently, and that they find different uses, often, for what they learn. Certainly you ought to know something about cooking, preferably as a fine art. Just, I think, as men ought to know something about heating plants. And both men and women would surely profit by some knowledge on how to bring up Junior, provided there is any basic agreement on how this last should be done. But, as I have delighted to tell you here on numerous occasions, most of you will live to be a hundred. And what is more important, you are now living in ~~whatxix~~ one of the great and dangerous eras of history. Cooking and hints on child rearing alone are not going to get you through such a complex and lengthy lifetime in any state of sanity. You need to demand more, much more, of your education. As Dean Noyes has mentioned, we suggested to the Freshman Class, and to others of you, ~~xx~~ a suggested series of books; and as you have read those books, and as you have discussed them, you will, I hope, perceive that they do reflect the problems of shaping an individual life in times like these. You will further, I hope, become aware that the characters and the ideas which are presented there are not distant and remote from you, but that they are in a very real sense of the utmost relevance. Such questions as "Does the end justify the means?", "Are men more real than forces?", "What certainties can there be in life?", "What is courage?"

Obviously, as you know, there are no easy answers. ~~Whatx~~ to these questions. And occasionally we all think perhaps, would you be better off if we never raised these questions with

you? Would you be better equipped to live if we taught you a skill, or a trade, which would help you contribute to the gross national product or to the national defense? ~~In fact,~~ In fact, how important is it that you be an individual rather than a unit in a smooth-functioning economic or social machine? Only you, I think, can really reply to that question. Because the answer depends on how much you expect of yourself and for yourself, and how much you are willing to contribute to realize that aim.

But there is a more general consideration which enters in here beside your own <sup>on</sup> personal desires, and Dean Noyes has already touched upon it. You were ~~like~~ selected out of all the young people of college age in our population--you were selected to come to college, because your teachers thought, and think, that you are capable of more, of more than the simple adjustment to the economic and social demands of your time.

What is this more? We could discuss this at length; and I will simply suggest now, in brief, that it is the perpetuation of the basic ideas of your society. This is another way of saying that you are responsible for this society, you are its leaders. And as such, you need to grasp, and to understand, and I believe to defend, its most fundamental concepts. ~~Now~~

Now there are two of these about which I should like to speak briefly today, ~~and~~ because they seem to me particularly threatened in the modern world, and because college has a clear role in helping you to defend them.)

One of these beliefs is the belief in the power of speculative reason, and the other is the belief in the potential dignity of each human being. Now your relationship to these insights of

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the Western world, your relationship may determine their continuance. Each one of these ideas in its own way implies, and results in freedom and responsible living. Each one in its own way resists the tyranny of social, political, or economic organizations, and each one, I think, upholds the individual as a creative entity, not merely as a functional unit of a system.

Today the concept of human dignity is threatened by political tyranny of many sorts, and in many lands. It is further affronted by the outmoded social organization in large areas of our own country, and throughout the world. Indeed the very number of human beings presently crowding on this planet questions whether the idea of human dignity can continue to have relevance. And I think we must recognize, too, the silently growing power of the machine— that this power could displace millions of men and women from the only meaningful activity within their capacity. In this connection, one of the leading business journals back in 1958 predicted that in ten years' time a digital computer would be the world chess champion; it would discover and prove ~~and it~~ an important new mathematical theorem; and it ~~would~~ will compose music of considerable aesthetic value. We have seven more years to wait.

No one has suggested that machines can have baby machines without human intervention, but it would seem to me that a bright machine will be able to figure that one out too. ~~Now~~

Now in a world which is threatened by dictators, by overcrowding, by race prejudice, by increasing modernization and mechanization, the ideal of the potential dignity of each human being can be lost, as if it had never been dreamed. And as you

study here history, literature, sociology, religion and philosophy, observe carefully the centuries of toil and suffering which brought your immediate forefathers to the recognition that all men are created free and equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights.

This is still a revolutionary statement, as it was in 1776 when Thomas Jefferson set it down. It still can produce bloodshed, if we decide to negate it completely and pretend that our forefathers could not possibly have meant what they said; and it may produce bloodshed if we try to put it into effect. To be sure, Jefferson's world was less complicated than ours. And we might ask, would he have hedged his thought with limitations? would he agree, as some claim today, that America never was a democracy, and so why should we try to make it one? Before you answer this question, perhaps you should study the alternative. Study the civilization where there is no claim made for the dignity of the individual human being, such as is set forth in our Declaration of Independence. Study the society where the single individual human being is not important, and where the death of these human beings is a means to an end. And then decide whether it is worth exerting yourself to perpetuate and to extend this basic idea of your society.

Now the other idea which I think is threatened today is this belief in the power of speculative reason. Partly the threat comes from what Whitehead has called "the narrowness of men with a good methodology." This, I think, is another word for



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"expert."

The history of warfare and the history of science is filled with the work of men who were in advance of their time. This work was <sup>p</sup> suppressed because the experts of that time could not judge it correctly; it did not fit in to their methodology. But exactly this power to transcend the experts of the time, this is what has brought progress, in history and in science. Our civilization depends upon the expert as no other civilization before. And for that reason we run, I think, the risk of losing some of the great speculative ideas which bring new insight in science and in social and political life as well. We cannot live without the expert; but neither, I think, can we exist for long without men and women who ~~speculatively~~ speculate, in reasonable fashion, beyond the words and theories of the expert. The need of any society which pretends to be free--the need of such a society for these people is the best defense, if one is needed, for the liberal arts. Because these liberal arts try to teach you to think in general terms over wider areas than you could possibly be expert in. These liberal arts try to teach you to speculate about the meanings of what the experts say, whether these experts be political dictators, or or scientists, politicians, or clergy. And by speculation I don't for a moment mean idle dreaming; I don't mean just mulling over the Sunday paper before dinner. I mean a speculation which is orderly, which is logical, and which brings into focus forms of experience and learning of different kinds. It takes discipline, it takes practice, but the results have been the great revolutionary insights of our

history into the nature of reality and of man.

Now I do not claim for all of us that our insights or our speculations will be epoch-making, but I do claim that if we do not recognize the existence of this capacity in ourselves and in others, and if we do not defend the right to exercise this capacity, we will be delivered over to a society which takes its hope, its shape, and its direction from the few rather than from the conviction of the many. Now I have said that it is the men ~~with~~ with the good methodology who are the chief threat, but actually a greater threat lies in our own inertia. We don't want to discipline our minds if there is an easy way out. Gadgets in our civilization are so important to all of us that, by false analogy, we most of us think there must be an easier way to do it; there must be a way out, a simple way to learn the process of <sup>logical</sup> thinking. And so when we discover that there is no shortcut, the way there is to dishwashing or potato peeling or shifting gears in cars--when we discover these things, we give up. There is no substitute for mental exertion. And if we give up, then someone else will do the thinking for us. <sup>P</sup> And so, as you study here, as you study sciences, as you become more thoroughly acquainted with mathematics, philosophy, economics, you will learn, I think, these processes of logical thought, and almost more important, I hope, you will begin to marvel at the great systems which speculative human reason has constructed out of the raw material of isolated events. And if you sense the ~~grandioseness~~ grandioseness of this effort, and if you gain some satisfaction in the increased orderliness of your own thought, then you may wish to encourage and to

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preserve the respect for speculative reason which is a fundamental part of our Western ~~tradition~~ tradition.

These are all very solemn words, and this is a solemn time. Hannah Arendt has said that ours is a time when it is easier to say what we are against than what we are for.<sup>))</sup> I do not believe this is quite true. And particularly it is not true should you decide to defend these ideals I have mentioned and follow them into their modern consequences. To have convictions, and to work to embody those convictions in daily life, no matter how restricted the horizon of that life may be, this is surely what we would wish for all of you, ~~and~~ and what indeed we believe College can help you to achieve.

Constantine the Great, Emperor of the Romans, lived through a time not unlike ours--of political change, of widespread brutality, and of emerging ideals. He is reported to have said, "To become Emperor is a matter of destiny; but if the power of fate has imposed the necessity of rule upon a man, he must strive to appear worthy of the imperium." Now we are not called upon to be emperors, and we cannot strive, therefore, to be worthy of an imperium, but we should all acknowledge the power of fate in placing us here, and at this time, and try to appear, if not worthy, at least conscious of the greatness of the times in which we live, and play what part we may in them.