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President Shain's 50th Commencement Address

Charles E. Shain
Connecticut College

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Commencement June 2, 1968

President Shain's Introduction
of Professor Edwin O. Reischauer

The Class of 1968 has made a most happy choice for its Commencement speaker. In these days when the American campus, its professors and its students are at the center of America's attention, the Seniors have asked Professor Edwin O. Reischauer, one of Harvard's seven University Professors, to be the human center of our ceremonies today. I am sure that he strikes us on this campus as an academic man of whom we can all be firmly proud - at a moment when academic men are not a very bullish commodity on the American market. His mother and father were teachers and founders of colleges and schools in Japan where he was born. He marched in the old-fashioned way through a small liberal arts college, Oberlin, and then through the graduate school and instructor ranks at Harvard. He finally attained a distinction that only an academic man can savor, the possession of a popular undergraduate survey course (with his colleague Professor Fairbanks) that will always be called - even by those of us who never heard one lecture - by its famous nickname, "Rice Paddies." It was two products of the teachers of "Rice Paddies" who began the East Asian History concentration at this college, and Professor Reischauer's presence here today is in part a reflection of his interest in our major in Chinese and in gratitude to us for helping to prepare Miss Susan Hamilton, Class of '64, a student of Asian History and the Japanese language, to be his present secretary at Harvard.

Professor Reischauer's service to our Country as our Ambassador to Japan between 1961 and 1966 was a classical demonstration of Emerson's faith that the American Scholar would prove himself as a man of action. Ambassador Reischauer was at first the butt of the usual academic jokes. A Japanese newspaper greeted his coming with a cartoon showing the Prime Minister Ikeda brushing up on his

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Japanese grammar. But after he had set his tone on our embassy in Tokyo, a Japanese socialist confessed that instead of demonstrating outside the gates he was very pleased to be inside having lunch.

He has written studies of modern Japan and ancient China. His commentary on our present Asian policy, Beyond Vietnam: the United States and Asia, looks into and then far beyond the short-term flights of the hawk and the dove. He has said that "in many ways the real frontier in our Asian relationship is American education," but he has also borne his witness in public about what we should do now and next week. His chief task in this book is to remind us that Vietnam is only 2% of a vaster subject, Asia, and that our real interest in Asia is a long-range interest that will involve colleges like ours in a stronger effort year by year to prepare its students for the contemporary Asian world.

Professor Reischauer, we are all very happy to have you here.

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Charge to the Seniors

As a class you have the historical distinction, conferred upon you by a band of wilful Connecticut women in 1911, of being the fiftieth graduating class of this College. You are also distinguished by being the largest class, because you out-guessed Mr. Cobbledick and me four years ago at admissions time. For these sufficient reasons we launched you with champagne two weeks ago.

But you deserve more of our homage than this for being wise in your generation.

When you arrived as Freshmen in 1964, I said that American colleges renew themselves not only by adding new courses and new buildings but especially by adding new Freshman classes. I predicted that the more lucidly you saw your own educational purposes the more vivid a force you would be in beginning the next 50 years of our college's history.

I believe you as a class have been such a stimulating force. Your college years expressed themselves to you, as they always do, as a series of choices, and I think you must have made many right ones, for with your help Connecticut College has changed in many good ways. You were responsible critics of the College, but I don't think you made the error of preferring controversy to learning. What our Faculty hopes, I am sure, is that the same currents of responsibility that you felt for the College have fed and will continue to feed the heightened responsibility you take for your own education. You were not of course docile. (The history of the word docile, I suppose, tells us a lot about the history of student power and privilege. It used to mean, alas, only teachable.)

Now you leave the group identity and privilege of being students. I suppose we graduate most of you today into that treacherous moral station in life called being a good middle-class liberal. If you feel a slight shudder at that fate

Charge to the Seniors

perhaps it is because you already know that students have a peculiar freedom to express despairs and angers that adults in an orderly society lock away in their breasts.

But some moral purpose is served if we admit this. Your generation, if you are the example we choose, has done better than most, I believe, in learning to use the contemporary weapons of discontent. I hope you will continue to use them with force and grace. Your record in college has aroused our expectations. The whole duty of a graduate is to put her education to work. Good-bye and good luck.