

which should I talk about!
should I write

I'm greatly honored to be asked to do this, and I know I speak for everyone in this audience in congratulating the recipients of degrees tonight.

When we look back upon this occasion, we will have no difficulty at all remembering when it took place. We may not recall the day of the month, the 13th, and we will recall the month, June. But fixed in our memories, forcefully and indelibly, will be the year, 1992, not so much for what happened at UCLA this year, or even so much for what happened in the classes we took this year -- though both occurrences have no doubt been considerable and impressive. But 1992 is the year of, well, how do we best describe it: the turmoil in Los Angeles, the riots, the burning and looting, the destruction and devastation. By whatever name, the traumatic events occurred here, in the very city whose name is officially included in the name of this educational institution: UCLA. So this is the CLASS of 1992, the Class that had to cope with the traumatic events in Los Angeles in 1992, the class that experienced (and is still experiencing) what in psychological nomenclature we refer to as post-traumatic stress. This is the Class of 1992 -- the year that no one will ever forget, the year that has already gained prominence in history even before performances in the Olympics occur, even before we learn who will be elected to the Presidency of this land and to the other high offices.

I was thinking of the time, the place, the setting, the kairos of 1992 when I prepared this address. But I was also thinking of other years, say the year 21 or 22 or 23 years ago when many of you were born. Let's take 1969 or 1970, for example, and recollect a little about what was occurring at that time. Most of you who are graduating tonight will not remember the year very acutely, but your parents and grandparents will, and many of your professors will.

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1970 -- Well, for starters Richard M. Nixon was President of the United States. Henry Kissinger was his National Security Adviser, and William Rogers was Secretary of State. There was a war on at the time, called the VIETNAM WAR, and it was raging. The American leadership was talking peace, but military involvement was accelerating. The President was making decisions about widening the war into CAMBODIA, and this was creating an exceedingly hostile environment at home. Eminent professional men and women were speaking out against the invasion. Thirty seven college professors took out a full page ad in THE NEW YORK TIMES and the LOS ANGELES TIMES urging the President to end the war. College students were staging protest rallies. In Ohio, Governor James Rhodes condemned the students, saying that they were "worse than Communists." After a protest rally at Kent State University on May 4, 1970, Governor Rhodes ordered national guardsmen to the campus. Confused by what they encountered, the

Guardsmen fired a volley into a crowd of students, hitting fifteen and killing four, two of whom were just observers. In a similar incident two students were killed at Jackson State University in Mississippi. Students gathered in protest in Washington. In the middle of the night President Nixon walked out to an area near the Washington Monument to talk with the students. He said that his goal was like theirs: "to stop the killing and end the war." But the students were not convinced, so the President talked about other things -- travel, football, surfing, arms control, clean air, clean water. Then, after shaking hands with "a bearded fellow," he got back in his car, and was driven back to the White House.

During the same time the chroniclers of culture were telling us that sweeping changes had or were taking place. In 1969, Theodore Roszak issued a book called THE MAKING OF A COUNTER CULTURE, which documented that the youthful rebellion against authority was expressing itself less in hard political action than in counter-cultural life styles. Roszak attested that it was an intellectual, spiritual and psychic shift. The understanding of what it means to be a human being had changed dramatically, he said. "Building the good society is less a social and political task than a psychic undertaking." The next year, 1970, Charles Reich gave us the book, THE GREENING OF AMERICA, which stated that traditional but older values were giving way to the behavioral preferences of the alienated younger generation. "What hap-

pens is this," Reich explained. "In a brief span of months a student seemingly conventional changes his haircut, his clothes, his habits, his interests, his political attitudes, his whole way of life." Reich cited the music festival at Woodstock in 1969, this largest of happenings, as an example of what he had in mind. He called it a "love-in" -- a "rock festival of communal joy." But just as impressive to Reich was what he witnessed in the courtyard of the Law School at Yale University, where, for a few weeks, "this Gothic citadel of the elite" became the site of a commune. Could anyone now believe, Reich asked, that a fresh wind was blowing?

Well, that was 1969 -- the year the United States landed two men on the moon, the year that Lew Alcindor in his senior year, helped John Wooden's basketball team win its 3rd straight national championship, the year that Charles Young was made Chancellor here at UCLA, the year that two members of the Black Panther Party were shot and killed in gun fire between rival groups on this very campus....or 1970, when the Bank of America burned in Isla Vista, when California's population was still less than 20 million, when UCLA's student enrollment topped 28,000, -- 1970, the year of Simon and Garfunkel's BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATERS, the year that JAMES TAYLOR came out with his album, SWEET BABY JAMES, the year that Ruben Salazar was killed, the year of the Charles Manson trial....

And I'm giving recognition to all of it, as precedent, to suggest that there are dramatic times in the history of the human race, when decisive events occur, when our entire way of looking at life comes under adjustment, and perhaps some transformation.

Let's take a fresh look at 1992. We've already described a portion of it. Let's look a bit deeper.

On two occasions recently I had opportunity to meet and speak with Mikhail and Raissa Gorbachev. On one of these occasions we had opportunity to converse rather easily about the intellectual roots of perestroika, during which the Gorbachevs identified the numerous American authors who had influenced their thinking. I heard Mikhail Gorbachev say that the challenge was to find an effective way to critique

a totalitarian political system from the inside, that is, from within the midst of it. And he said that he found good assistance in the writings of the American John Dewey. He had been inspired by Dewey's pragmatism on more than one occasion, he confided.

Now you think of it. For almost all of my life, there was a great divide between the American people and the Russian/Soviet people, and the relationship between the two was regulated primarily by fear, associated with enormous astronomical arms buildups. But then, quite suddenly, the wall came down, Mr. Gorbachev stepped out, or through, and we were standing, facing one another in a dramatically altered relationship.

Or, for another example. A great part of my life has been dominated by the war the United States fought in Southeast Asia. I know hundreds of veterans who fought there. I have accompanied hundreds of students who have made pilgrimage to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. And I have tried to make sense of these events both in retrospective and present-tense terms. But then, quite suddenly, I found myself in Vietnam itself last year, where I was talking with a philosopher who had been Ho Chi Minh's secretary, who told me that Ho's chief inspiration had been the American Thomas Jefferson. And when Professor Giau proceeded to describe the Vietnam War, from his vantage point, he said that it was a tragic conflict between brothers (in the north and the south) punctuated by a series of intrusions by foreigners:

the French, the Chinese, the Americans, as well as the Russians. Commenting directly on American/Vietnamese relationships, Giau called the war "a very poignant and tragic commentary on how much our two civilizations lacked love for one another."

~~Well...the clock is running, and this is to be a Commencement Address and not a classroom lecture.....~~

What does all it say?

I think I'd start with ERIK ERIKSON, who describes who we are human beings as involving a rather accidental coincidence of this particular life-cycle, this particular organism, with this particular moment in history. We certainly did not choose to have been born in 1970, and we may not have have elected to have to begin post-graduation life in 1992, but we didn't have a whole lot of choice. This is when it is, and, consequently, this is who we are.

Then I think I'd move from Erikson to talk about motivation and challenge. I don't think that we have the full ability to choose our challenges, or even to create or produce the necessary motivation. Much of this is assigned by the culture in which we find ourselves. But it is equally ~~clear that we are assigned significant challenges.~~ ~~clear that we are assigned significant challenges.~~ ~~clear that we are assigned significant challenges.~~ In fact, I can't think of a time when the challenge has been more significant.

Will we find a way, for example, as Rodney King enjoined, to demonstrate that "we can get along"? Can we find a way to settle differences before they lead to

war? Will we become effective in finding cures for diseases that now ravage the human family? Will we discover effective means of establishing even the most minimal conditions of human life, for all human beings? ~~Will we make some headway toward identifying and even establishing the common good?~~ As students of the humanities, can we find the language of the multi-culture? Will we discover the way to build a civilization that recognizes and normatizes diversity?

I don't know what you do when you are confronted with a list of challenges of such tremendous proportions, but I'll tell you what I do. I think long and hard about the people who inspire me, and I draw energy from the examples they offer. The very day of the riots, for example, I had opportunity to talk with Jesse Jackson, and I asked him, "Reverend Jackson, on a day like today, how do you keep hope alive?" His somber, quiet and soul-full response was that he didn't have much hope that day. A week later I was with him, and I asked him the same question: HOW DO YOU KEEP ALIVE? And he answered, "sometimes all one has is hope, but hope creates hope." And he spoke about a boy whose face had been badly burned in the Los Angeles fires, but even through this pain, managed a smile for Jesse Jackson when he visited him in the hospital ward. Jackson said, "the smile on that boy's face renewed my hope."

And I think this is the way it is. It is sometimes said that there aren't any heroes any longer. But we know that there are; we meet them every day: the fifth grade teacher who helped you write your first term paper, the

a school nurse I love dearly who travels from school to school each day in her beige Volvo, bringing health and good cheer to the people she meets, or the students at this school who, on impulse, organized a relief drive for the people in the South Central district of this city even as the fires were still burning, or the friend I have in Santa Barbara who suffers from cerebral palsy, who is writing his book, NEVER GIVE UP. And I also think of the creators^{→ sufferers} of civilization -- the ones you've been reading about, including BLACK ELK, CHIEF SEATTLE, MALCOLM X, MARTIN LUTHER KING, MAHATMA GANDHI, DAG HAMMARSKJOLD, the DALAI LAMA, SOJOURNER TRUTH, AND THE NAMELESS MEN AND WOMEN, MOSTLY WOMEN, ABOUT WHOM WE KNOW TOO VERY LITTLE....

The BIBLE speaks of "the cloud of witnesses" who surround us on every side. In a setting like this, an arena like this, it is easy to capture the spirit of this reference. For as we set out to meet the challenges that this culture places before us, we are surrounded on all sides by persons who are cheering us on. As a faculty member, I trust that you have met many of these in the courses you have taken: in the books you have read, in the teachers who have stood before, the administrators, staff, coaches, and others who have encouraged you. As a human being, I know that you have already established a support network among the friends you have made -- a network on which you will continue to rely throughout your life. But it is important to recognize that some of the people who are cheering you on today are no longer visible to any of us -- no longer visible, but unquestionably present: to convince you that you can do it, that you must do it, and to remind you that the tasks are worth doing and the challenges eminently worth addressing. For our work in the humanities gives us a resilient sense of the long haul -- of the striving of the human spirit against formidable odds, and also, from time to time, of the triumph of the human spirit, and of the humane spirit, against those challenges.

I sat on a national commission one time whose assignment was to give definition to the humanities. We tried our hardest, selecting the right words, choosing the best concepts, finding the most appropriate terms. But throughout this process one member of our committee remained conspicuously silent. He was SCOTT MOMADAY, the renowned native American poet, novelist, scholar. So when we asked him to help us, he said simply "THE HUMANITIES HAVE THEIR ROOTS IN HUMAN BEINGS EXPRESSING THEIR HUMANITY." -- sometimes in literature, sometimes in art, sometimes in music, sometimes in drama, sometimes in

And on another occasion I sat in on a seminar in London in art history wherein our assignment was to explain the building of community. why suddenly the medieval artists in VENICE painted clouds in their paintings of sky. After a long, complicated, somewhat tortured discussion, the seminar director, E. H. GOMBRICH, gave us his solution: THEY GOT THE HANG OF IT, he said, AND ONCE THEY LEARNED HOW TO PAINT CLOUDS, THEY TAUGHT OTHER PEOPLE TO PAINT CLOUDS, SO THERE WAS A WHOLE GENERATION OF CLOUD PAINTERS. And he asked us to think about the evolution of sound, from the first sounds that were heard, to sounds that could be reproduced, through the centuries, on and on, until we get to a Beethoven symphony, or to the work of AARON COPLAND... And this is also the way it is with that most impressive of all compositions: culture

And, finally, VACLEV HAVEL, who was Czechoslovakia's foremost contemporary dramatist before becoming the country's prime minister, has written a powerful essay on THE POWER OF WORDS in which he recalls the verse in the BIBLE that begins like this, "In the Beginning was the WORD." Havel comments, "WHAT IS MEANT IN THIS VERSE IS THAT THE WORD OF GOD IS THE SOURCE OF ALL CREATION." But then Havel quickly adds, "BUT SURELY THE SAME MUST BE SAID, FIGURATIVELY SPEAKING, OF EVERY HUMAN ACTION. EVERY HUMAN ACTION IS THE SOURCE OF ALL CREATION!"

If it is true, and I think it is, the class of 1992, which is also the class of 1969 or 1970, is headed for some enormous challenges, and the injunction about REBUILDING LOS ANGELES takes on even greater significance. Every

human action, the source of all creation. Every human endeavor, the source of a world at peace. Every human endeavor, the source of a resilient people and a resourceful culture. Every human endeavor, the source of a meaningful life, a life of happiness and enduring satisfaction.

This is what we who have gathered here today wish for those of you who are graduating, as we congratulate you on your distinctive achievements.

THANK YOU.