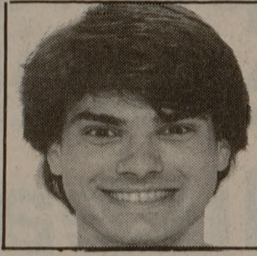


Opinion

In search of a good commencement address

Graduation. It's that special time when, after four long years of hard, rock-pounding labor, we receive our diplomas in our greedy little hands and march off to threaten the REAL world with our newfound knowledge. Graduation: where we're supposed to be smarter and wiser, and we sit through a ceremonious ceremony dressed in black robes, wearing funny looking square hats on our heads to show exactly how much smarter and wiser we really are.



Mark Nair

I should know. I was there. Graduation, May, 1988. I am a college graduate.

So what am I doing here? Don't ask. Just take a little consolation in the fact that, yes, in August my mind will be subjected to the merciless mind-numbing experience of law school. But until then I am a free man.

But that's not the subject today, although it does have, in some weird abstract way, something to do with the graduation ceremony — something I'm sure every student here would like to go through.

Although, if you ask me, I don't know why.

Now, graduation is all fine and dandy. Pomp and circumstance. All that stuff. I like it just as much as the next person. But I have to admit, being a political science graduate, a liberal arts kind of guy, I was expecting some grandiose speech at graduation inspiring me to go out into the world, giving it my all and making the world a better place. Either that, or I was expecting some scary speech about how all graduates should lock themselves in the library (a fundamental and evil necessity during one's college tenure) and stay away from the REAL world because the REAL world is such an ugly, ugly, ugly, ugly place.

Apparently, our benevolent university president had other plans. He asked the Honorable William Clements (what a coincidence! He's the governor too!) to give the commencement address.

When I heard the news, I seriously considered going to the Vet Med graduation. They had Dr. Red Duke, those lucky dogs.

But, I went to my own ceremony. After all, it was THE GOVERNOR speaking. He had to have something inspiring, something frightening, something overflowing with wisdom and experience to share with us, the wide-eyed, open-eared graduating class of 1988.

I was wrong.

Unfortunately, I cannot accurately relate each and ever bit of wisdom bestowed on us by our State Leader. It was my nap time, and I didn't want to be cranky when I received my diploma.

But the parts of the address that I did hear have stuck with me like an ice pick through my cerebral cortex. Yum.

You see, this was a speech given to the College of Liberal Arts (and the College of Architecture and Environmental Design). This was a speech given to the up and coming caretakers of the humanities, philosophy and the social sciences. This was a speech given to the supposedly well-rounded, those who will work for the betterment of mankind.

So MISTER Clements decides to dust off a speech (circa 1950, I believe) he found in his closet and deliver it to us with the zest, the zeal and the fire that made him the governor he is today.

And what do I remember about the address while I was struggling to stay awake? Engineering. Every other word was about our great new engineering marvels and how engineering can do wonders for our country. He pointed out engineering marvels of the 20th century, i.e. roads. He inspired us to embrace technology like we would embrace Texas politics. Engineering, engineering, engineering.

I think he forgot to whom he was speaking. We weren't interested in that stuff. Give me a liberal arts commencement address, or give me death.

It was apparent that the governor's speech was making no headway — not an inch — when, toward the end of his address, he told us he wanted to recap what he had just said. At that, the collective body of the 1988 graduating class (not to mention relatives in the stands) let out a low "groooooan" and did the old uncomfortable shift around in the seats maneuver. But, much to our chagrin, recap he did.

So, what's over is over. I was inspired nor frightened. I was wondering: really, what does this have to do with me? WHERE'S THE VANCE! I am left to enter the world bemused and confused, to decipher irrelevant antecedents, engineering marvels in our own efficient 20th century.

It's time we got it straight. We're a school of 100 percent engineers. There is a HUGE proportion of OTHER students here as well. Surprise, fellas.

And now I hear that U.T. wants to get Bill Moyers to give its commencement address. But we wouldn't do something like that. Instead, gust, maybe A&M will shafting one who can offer some interesting insight into crop rotation.

Oh, golly, a "world class" commencement address. What? Us?

Mark Nair is a graduate student and opinion page editor for The Battalion.

Our torture of the Indian

President Reagan's remarks about Native Americans at the Moscow summit last week were not merely ignorant, they were indoor-record dumb.



Donald Kaul

You'll recall what he said: that we shouldn't have "humored" the Indians by allowing them to retreat into their "primitive" lifestyles on reservations. That was the word he used: "humored."

And he got away with it. Oh, the editorial pages of the nation turned on their "tsk-tsk" machines, the bleeding heart liberals offered a collective groan and a few Indian leaders produced outrage from their badly depleted stock, but it wasn't even a one-day story. He was forgiven the moment he made the remark — another misstatement by the old boy, isn't he a caution? The American people were more interested in whether Raisa and Nancy were holding hands and why.

When Russian spokesmen deliver their ludicrous denials of the brutal treatment Soviet dissidents receive at the hands of their government, we rightly brand them as liars. Ronald Reagan acts as though our annihilation of the Indian cultures is the product of overindulgence, and we say he is misinformed.

There is a point at which the difference between lying and willful ignorance becomes irrelevant and he's reached it.

Our treatment of the native peoples of this continent is surely one of the most shameful episodes in our history. We took their lands — by cheating when we could, by force when we had to — and gave them the worst of our culture while denying them the best of theirs. We herded them onto barren ground and withheld their traditional means of livelihood, forcing them into beggary. That was our humor.

Here is the white man as seen through the eyes of an Indian, Chief Black Hawk of Sauk nation, in 1832. He was attempting to rally his tribesmen to the warpath against the white enemy at the time:

"From the day when the palefaces landed upon our shores, they have been robbing us of our inheritance and slowly but surely driving us back, back, back towards the setting sun, burning our vil-

lages, destroying our growing crops, ravishing our wives and daughters, beating our papooses with cruel sticks, and brutally murdering our people upon the most flimsy pretenses and trivial causes . . . They brought their accursed firewater to our village, making wolves of our braves and warriors, and then when we protested against the sale and destroyed their bad spirits, they came with a multitude on horseback, compelling us to flee across the Mississippi for our lives, and then they burned down our ancient village and turned their horses into our growing corn."

To feel, at this late date, no twinge of conscience at what we did to the Indians is immoral.

A surprising number of speeches by Indian chiefs were preserved by white men who transcribed them on the scene. The Indians, lacking a written tradition, were eloquent orators. A good many of the speeches have been collected in a book, "Indian Oratory," by W.C. Vanderwerth, published by the University of Oklahoma Press.

Seattle, chief of the Suquamish (cq) and Duwamish (cq) tribes, delivered this poignant epitaph and prophecy at the signing of the Treaty of Port Elliot in 1855, at which the Washington tribes were humored with a reservation:

The Indians' night promises to be dark. Not a single star of hope hovers above his horizon. Grim fate seems to be on the Red Man's trail, and wherever he goes he will hear the approaching footsteps of his fell destroyer and prepare stolidly to meet his doom, as does the wounded doe that hears the approaching footsteps of the hunter.

"A few more moons. A few more winters — and not one of the descendants of the mighty hosts that once moved over this broad land or lived in happy homes, protected by the Great Spirit, will remain to mourn over the graves of a people — once more powerful and hopeful than yours.

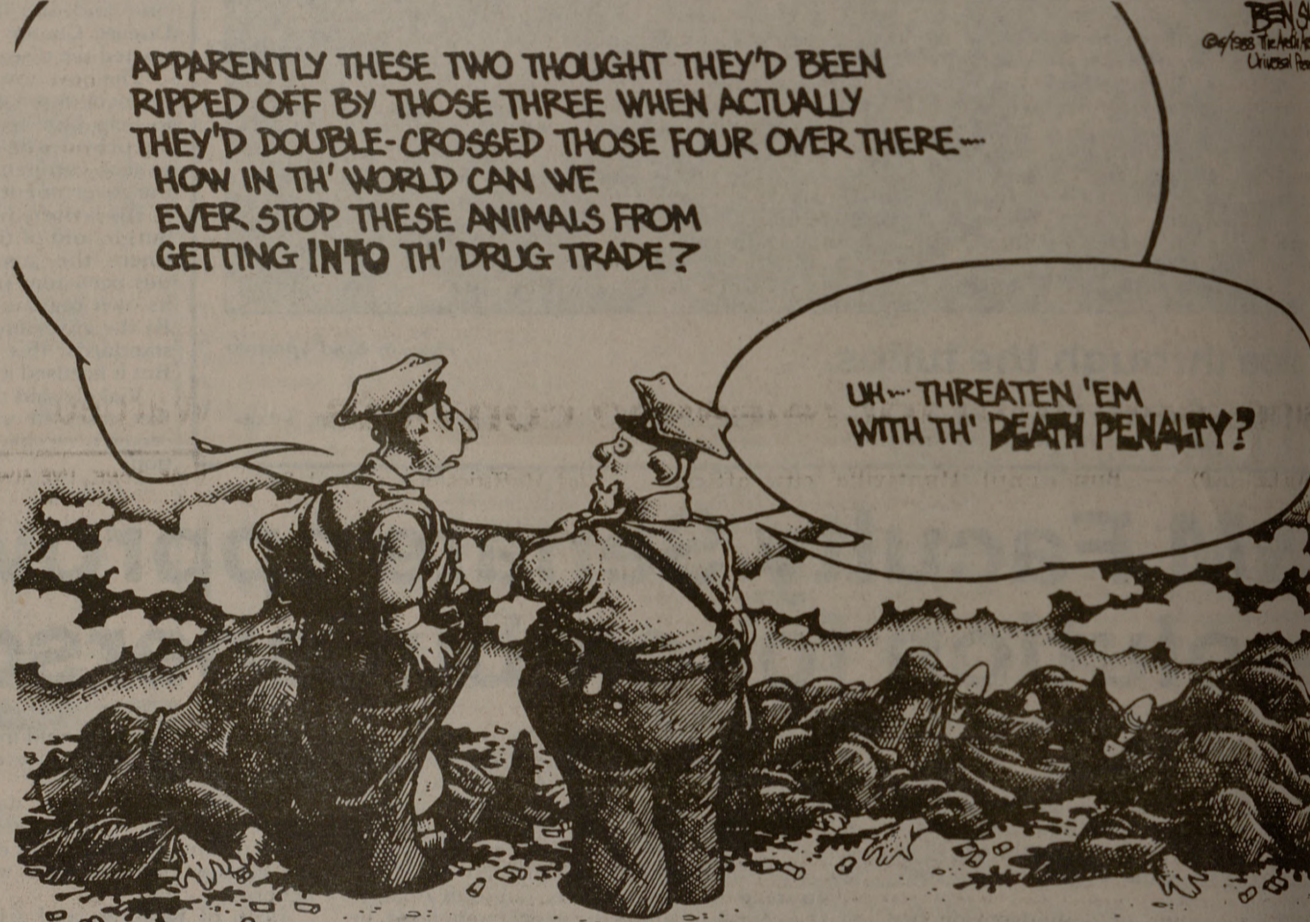
"But why should I mourn at the untimely fate of my people? Tribe follows tribe, and nation follows nation, like the waves of the sea. It is the order of nature, and regret is useless.

"Your time of decay may be distant, but it will surely come, for even the White Man walked and talked with him as friend with friend, cannot be exempt from the common destiny.

"We may be brothers after all. We will see."

Indeed we will, and sooner than we think.

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BLOOM COUNTY

by Berke Breathed



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The Battalion

(USPS 045 360)

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The Battalion also serves as a laboratory newspaper for students in reporting, editing and photography classes within the Department of Journalism.

The Battalion is published Monday through Friday during Texas A&M regular semesters, except for holiday and examination periods.

Mail subscriptions are \$17.44 per semester, \$34.62 per school year and \$36.44 per full year. Advertising rates furnished on request.

Our address: The Battalion, 230 Reed McDonald, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-1111. Second class postage paid at College Station, TX 77843.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Battalion, 216 Reed McDonald, Texas A&M University, College Station TX 77843-4111.