

Western Kentucky University

TopSCHOLAR®

WKU Archives Records

WKU Archives

5-13-1978

UA45/6 Commencement Address

Julian Carroll

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc_ua_records



Part of the [Higher Education Administration Commons](#), [Mass Communication Commons](#), [Public Relations and Advertising Commons](#), and the [Speech and Rhetorical Studies Commons](#)

This Transcription is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in WKU Archives Records by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.

TEXT OF REMARKS BY GOVERNOR JULIAN M. CARROLL
WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY COMMENCEMENT
BOWLING GREEN, KENTUCKY
MAY 13, 1978

This surely is a very exciting day for all of you. It is one of the very few times in life that is both a beginning and an end.

Most of you who are graduating here today now will be setting out really on your own to begin making your way in this world. That is an exhilarating idea.

At the same time, this marks the end of that period which has been devoted to preparing you to make it in this world on your own -- a period during which, for the most part, most of you have been sheltered from many of the hard decisions and tribulations that now probably lie ahead of you.

I know each of your families and teachers has striven mightily to make your preparation the broadest and best possible, using all the resources they had available. Now it is up to you.

High school and college students probably are known more than anything else for their idealism. For years, they have been studying about problems in the world, in their society or family -- or even in the mind.

Students see and hear about a lot that is not right in the world. They get fired up on the coals of right and justice and set out to correct these shortcomings in quick order.

I urge each of you to set such a goal. But I would like to warn you that it probably will not be as easy as it seemed in the classroom. Society does not change quickly.

There are a lot of old folks around who feel things have been going along pretty well and there is no need to alter their behavior or outlook. Let's face it -- they may be right, for now.

There may be times that it seems you are in pursuit of an "Impossible Dream," fighting "the unbeatable foe," seeking to "right the unrightable wrong." Don't be discouraged. The goal still is a noble one.

All that I really ask of you is that you take time to study the world classroom -- not from a book. . . not from a professor -- but from hard experience.

Don't barge on blindly in pursuit of your own vision of good, without any regard to the rights and needs of others. Things often are not as they seem to be. So keep an open mind, even as you keep your wits about you.

I have been in public life for 16 years now. A lot has happened in those 16 years -- both in my own life and in the outlook and expectations of the public itself. Personally, I feel the changes have been overwhelmingly good.

I am fairly well satisfied with my own life. I may not have been able to accomplish quite everything that I set my sights on but neither have I met any great failures.

But most important of all, I can look anyone straight in the eye and say with complete honesty: "My motives have always been only for the greatest good of all the citizens of my community, my state and my nation. I have done nothing of which I am ashamed. And I always have tried to take the time to listen."

I feel it is vital that any public official, especially,

always be able to say that. But I also would commend such a principle to every private citizen as well. It makes for a better world -- and for private peace of mind.

My chosen career, up to this point at least, has been public service. The vehicle I have used to cover the greatest distance on this path is politics. I do not back away from that term.

Some people consider "politics" to be a dirty word. I do not. Politics has been described as "the art of compromise," an expression that I think is appropriate. But some people even attach unsavory connotations to the word "compromise," which shows, I guess, the difficulty we can encounter in trying to convey thoughts from one mind to another.

"Compromise" is bad only if it means a lowering of our moral principles. In that sense, I renounce the word.

To me, however, "compromise" represents a blending of diverse interests into a single policy or approach which protects the legitimate interests of everyone concerned, and harms none.

Some people have accused me of dominating the Kentucky General Assembly, which is made up of 138 very able men and women. The charge is ridiculous.

I will admit, however, that I know the system pretty well. I worked within it, with some success, for 10 years as a state representative and three years as Lieutenant Governor.

And then I also worked within that system as Governor, an approach which was unfamiliar to outsiders -- and even to the news media -- and so was not readily recognized.

I have no reservations about sharing with you the secret of my success in getting my proposals approved by the General

Assembly. It is nothing more than relying on the trusty tool of compromise -- in its good sense.

Nothing is gained by picking a fight in public. So I avoid that approach. Instead, I invite all the diverse interests affected by a particular issue to come sit down together and work out something that is acceptable to everyone. The resulting product then is easy to approve. And I firmly believe that it is unlikely to be harmful to anyone.

This brings me to another point which seems to be overlooked, generally, even by close observers of our democratic form of government. I am referring to the idea -- which has become very widespread of late -- that government always should be on the alert to fight against the wishes of "special interests."

Think about it for a minute. Just what is a special interest? Well, one special interest is business. Another is labor. Others include coal miners, coal operators, public utilities (many of which rely on coal to operate), farmers and, yes, consumers.

What I am saying should by now be obvious to all of you. The "special interests" really are ourselves. In fact, most of us are part of several special interests all at the same time -- some of which may be conflicting.

We in government should not have as our primary goal to oppose all special interests. Obviously, we could not do so anyway because there would not be anything left to support. Our task, then, once again must be to blend all these special interests together to the benefit of all.

We cannot be opposed to all special interests. What we must do is to be sure that no single special interest is allowed

to get its way to the detriment of any other special interest. And the bottom line, of course, is the welfare of the average citizen -- and all the special interests that he represents.

Politicians undoubtedly have been guided by this principle for years -- although they might not have thought it through in these terms in their own minds. Certainly there has been little written about it.

I was very pleased, therefore, to see a Washington, D.C., magazine editor make this very point in a recent column in Newsweek magazine.

That columnist, Tom Bethell, cited a trenchant quote on this point that California Senator S. I. Hayakawa offered in a debate last year. That quotation is:

"Disgusted with politicians, some people from time to time yearn for government without politics. Sometimes, to their dismay, they get it, as in Soviet Russia, Poland and North Korea, where the political process has been abolished."

It's not politics or politicians that are bad. I have known a great many politicians during my life. I have observed them and worked closely with them.

Many of them are very able, many are just average -- and some aren't very good. In short, they aren't much different from the people in any other line of work.

I urge you not to single out politicians in general as the enemy. Democracy will not work without a solid political process. We always should strive to strengthen and improve that process, but we must be careful not to undermine it or destroy it.

When I ask you not to regard politicians as your enemy, I

don't mean to imply that you always should accept them at face value, to assume they always have only the highest motives.

I will not deny for a minute that there are some politicians who put their own interests first, and perhaps who actually give very little thought to the common good of their citizens. You should always be on the alert against such people, and not let them get into public office.

Public trust is a sacred gift, and a heavy obligation. If you are put in such a position, take extra pains to be sure you don't abuse it. And if you are a private citizen, be alert to be sure no one else does.

My message to you here today, therefore, is: Don't be misled by catch words or stereotyped concepts. Examine from all angles any suggestion to change an established institution or pattern in our society. And, above all, always take the time to be sure you have a "better idea."