

# Speeches

## “Action, Passion, and Hope: A Foundation for Our Shared Future”

Spring Commencement 2008

Assembly Hall

IU Bloomington

Bloomington, Indiana

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### Education and Community at Indiana University

In his fourth inaugural address delivered in the closing months of World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt said, “We have learned that we cannot live alone, at peace; that our own well-being is dependent on the well-being of other nations far away... We have learned to be citizens of the world, members of the human community.”<sup>1</sup>

With these words, President Roosevelt identified the optimism at the heart of engagement in the civic life of this country. Our communities here in Indiana and throughout the world are interdependent and shaped by our ability to learn and grow.

Community and education are especially vital here at Indiana University. Education is the reason we are all here this afternoon. Your hard-won accomplishments in the classroom after years of hard work have led to this moment of celebration.

Equally important, however, are the many and varied communities that have given you support over the years leading to this day. Your family and friends have offered their love and guidance. Your professors and classmates have provided weighty intellectual challenges that have pushed you to ascend to the heights of academic achievement.

### Becoming Citizens of the World

Today we honor these achievements just as you gratefully recognize the many people who have helped you reach your dreams. These dreams have grown ever more ambitious as you have learned to be citizens of the world over your years here at Indiana University.

You have become part of the traditions of excellence that are the hallmarks of this great institution. You have forged new friendships here, many of which will sustain you the rest of your lives. You have broadened and deepened your knowledge, have honed your abilities in argument and reasoning, and have developed flexibility of mind and skills.

This is the firm foundation upon which you will continue to build in the coming years. It is a foundation that will lead you towards fulfilling careers, widened horizons, and lives of deeper meaning and purpose.

It is the foundation that can also lead to habits of engagement in our national life that contribute to profound social and political change. This is the foundation upon which our democracy depends.

## The Need for Action, Passion, and Hope

But our participatory government takes more than educated people and general interest to work, more even than the casting of ballots, as so many of us will do next Tuesday.

It takes people who are truly and deeply engaged in the lives of their communities. It takes action, passion, and hope. As Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “we must be able to show people that democracy is not words, but action.”<sup>2</sup>

This is the kind of action and passion that you have demonstrated during your years of study at IU. It has led you to invest your heart and mind in the pursuit of your dreams as you master your disciplines and improve your lives.

It has led many of you to volunteer countless hours to improve your communities. It has led you to places you would have never known, in countries around the world, as you have dedicated yourselves to a truly global education.

## Can We Fully Measure Passionate Dedication?

And sometimes we can measure the impact of your passionate dedication. We can calculate the number of pints collected during the IU / Purdue Blood Donor Challenge. We can count the number of dancers at the IU Dance Marathon and the millions of dollars raised by them over the years.

We can figure the distance traveled by students from places like Afghanistan as they return to their native countries to help rebuild communities. I met several such students just yesterday. We can measure the speed of our Little 500 racers.

But how do you measure the passion behind traditions that have lasted for generations? How do you measure the distance your dreams will take you in the years to come? How do you measure the pride that your family feels at this moment?

We might ask our own Trustee Sue Talbot that question. Her granddaughter is graduating today, and this marks the eighth member of her family to receive a degree from Indiana University.

We might ask the same question to Anita and Patrick Reece. Their youngest son Andy is graduating as well, the last of six Reece children who graduated from IU, and not one lost to Purdue!

For the Talbot and Reece families— and so many other families here today— who trace their IU histories back generations, today is a day of pride in your accomplishments and marvel at the courage and habits of engagement required for you to reach this moment of achievement.

## The Genius of Courage

This is the courage to envision a new future for yourselves and to make that future a reality. It is that courage that yields the strongest leaders and the most dedicated citizens.

American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson counted courage as one of the highest traits of humankind.

Courage, wrote Emerson, “is never quite itself until the hazard is extreme; then it is serene and fertile, and all

its powers play well.”<sup>3</sup> To borrow a famous line from Ernest Hemingway, we might say, “Courage is grace under pressure.”<sup>4</sup>

It has taken courage for you to achieve your dreams. The highest form of courage serves not ourselves, but society. It is the “genius of courage” that will change our world.<sup>5</sup>

That genius led President Roosevelt to create a New Deal for the American people. That genius led thousands upon thousands to dedicate themselves to civil rights for all Americans. That genius led IU’s own Herman B Wells to help integrate the Bloomington campus and the city beyond. And that kernel of genius resides in the hearts of all of our graduates today.

## Our Shared Community and Shared Future

In his 1902 commencement address, IU’s 10th President William Lowe Bryan said, “The world is not saved by a few good people. It is saved by the good in people— in all the people.”

Times have changed dramatically since then.

But here in this hall, over a century after President Bryan uttered those words, you have the courage to make a difference.

In the face of challenges both vast and sobering, you have the passion of commitment and the power of change.

Thank you very much.

## Source Notes

1. Delivered Saturday, January 20, 1945.
2. Roosevelt, Eleanor. *India and the Awakening East*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953. page 227.
3. From *Society and Solitude*. London and New York: Routledge, 1883. page 213.
4. Quoted in Donnelly, Honoria Murphy and Richard N. Billings. *Sara and Gerald: Villa America and After*. New York: Times, 1982. page 22.
5. The phrase “genius of courage” comes from Emerson’s *Society and Solitude*.