

# Fear and Freedom

By Edwin J. Feulner, Jr., Ph.D.

President Combee, Members of the Board of Trustees, relieved and exhausted faculty; parents whose car trunks are loaded down with books, CDs, old sneakers, half-eaten bags of potato chips, dirty gym clothes, and who knows what else; grandmothers who are getting their hankies ready; little brothers and sisters who already are asking, "Is that man about finished?"; friends, invited guests, and most of all, distinguished, educated, and happy graduates: thank you very much for the honor of this degree and of addressing you on this important day.

This is my third visit to Grove City College. The last time was when Jerry Combee was inaugurated as president of this institution. It's very nice to be back.

Earlier I was thinking that I appeared rather eminent wearing this academic gown. But then when we were parading in here, I heard someone say as I passed by, "Oh, look, there's Mrs. Doubtfire."

As you know, one of the jobs of a commencement speaker is to give advice. I don't know why you graduates should take my advice when my own children don't, but advice you shall get. And the first piece of advice is, don't listen to commencement speakers.

Why? Because if you surveyed all the commencement addresses being given this spring on our nation's campuses, you would be dismayed by the elitist, multicultural, politically correct effluvia that is flowing forth over the graduates. At some of this country's most august colleges and universities, you would hear discourses on classism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, anti-vivisectionism, Hillaryism, American Nativism, and, as one person put it, "every ism that ever wasm." The only ism that doesn't seem rampant at many of our universities and universities is honest intellectualism.

In clear contrast, Grove City truly is an intellectual grove on the academic landscape.

- ◆ Here you were educated, not indoctrinated.
- ◆ Here you were expected to face the future as individuals, not as victims.
- ◆ Here you gained the confidence that comes from accomplishment, not the false security that comes from entitlement.
- ◆ Here your education was based on the timeless precepts of Western civilization, not on some untested concept of contrived diversity that is, in fact, ideological conformity.

Graduates, if you emulate the independence and integrity of this unique institution, you will do well and you will go far.

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Dr. Feulner is President of The Heritage Foundation.

He delivered this speech as the Commencement Address at Grove City College, Grove City, Pennsylvania, on May 14, 1994, when he was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Literature.

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At a recent meeting, I ran into a previous graduate of Grove City, Dr. Alejandro Chafuen, the president of an economic research foundation. He told me of the many Grovers who are Argentinian and what great contributions they are now making to the Argentine renewal. A congressman, professors, corporate leaders—they are renewing Argentina. I believe you here will help renew America.

I've given a good deal of thought to what I should discuss with you today. You might expect someone from a think tank in Washington to talk about matters academic, intellectual, or political. Instead, I've decided to talk about an emotion that is crippling many Americans. I see evidence of it daily in the studies that cross my desk, in the newspapers and journals that fill my in-box, in the regulations and legislation put forth by government busybodies at all levels.

I am talking about the basic fear of freedom. It is ironic that in this age, which has produced Solzhenitsyn and other great consciences who sacrificed and suffered for freedom, many in our own country fear it. They fear the free will that God gave us. They fear the personal responsibility that democracy requires.

And so I want to relate three seemingly random, everyday incidents from the newspapers and then explain how they relate to your success as you leave this campus.

**Item 1.** I know Grove City has a strong elementary education program, so some of you are probably familiar with the children's book *Tootle the Train*. As you may recall, Tootle initially is a less than ambitious young train, but through endeavor and effort he becomes one of the most famous Flyers in the land. A professor at a teachers college in the Midwest told her students that the moral of this book should be discouraged. Do you know why? Because it teaches the lesson that if you work hard you'll make it. Of course, according to her, in this closed, oppressive society called America, we are misleading our children if we teach them that hard work will bring accomplishment.

As Ross Perot says, hold that thought.

**Item 2.** A pilot named Edward Cleveland and the company he worked for had a record of unsafe flying when they were hired to film a television commercial. Mr. Cleveland took the front seat out of his Piper Super Cub airplane and installed a rear-facing camera in its place. The cameraman squeezed behind the camera with his back covering the instrument panel and the front window. Mr. Cleveland was then going to fly the airplane from the rear seat.

The plane crashed before ever getting off the runway. Mr. Cleveland's lawyer sued the Piper Aircraft Company and won over a million dollars. You see, they argued that the plane's design was defective on the basis that it was impossible to see out the front window while flying from the back seat.

**Item 3.** During one of the 1992 presidential debates—and the term debate is used very loosely—a young man with a ponytail stood up to ask a question of the candidates. He said, "We are your children, we have our needs. What will you do to take care of us—to take care of our needs?" All three candidates predictably fell all over themselves explaining what they would do for this young man.

My friend and Heritage Foundation colleague Bill Bennett commented about this episode: "Wouldn't it have been refreshing," he said, "wouldn't it have been great if any one of them had said, 'Just a minute. Get a life. I'm not your father. This is America. This is a do-it-yourself society. I'm only running for the head of the government... satisfy your own needs. See a minister, see a priest, see your wife. Take care of yourself, man; get a hold of yourself.'"

Now, what all these items have in common is that they evidence a fear of the personal responsibility upon which freedom is predicated. Instead, everything becomes a matter of rights, entitlements, or blame—to the detriment of others' rights and to the abandonment of the individual's accountability for his own life. A result unachieved becomes a right denied. A desire unfulfilled becomes an entitlement due.

It is a terrible, debilitating curse to live your life more concerned about your rights than your opportunities, more preoccupied with what is owed you rather than what you owe others, more absorbed with placing blame than in accepting responsibility. These expectations are morally poisonous to the very premises upon which our Founding Fathers established the nation.

When I was in college, speakers on campus frequently quoted Dr. Albert Schweitzer, the great humanitarian who founded a hospital and worked in Africa for many years. You don't hear Dr. Schweitzer quoted much on campuses any more. No wonder. He emphasized the spiritual and the individual. He believed that, "Man must cease attributing his problems to his environment and learn again to exercise his free will—his personal responsibility in the realm of faith and morals." And I would add that personal responsibility is necessary in the realm not only of faith and morals but of government.

Now these ideas are not especially popular in our culture today. And yet there are oases where the traditional tenets of Western civilization and the great American experiment are valued. This school is one of those oases. It has rejected the idea that political, ideological, and philosophical agendas should supersede objective truth as the goal of liberal learning.

Let me remind you of the great advantage this has given you as graduates of Grove City College.

In preparation for these remarks, I did a little background check on you, the Grove City student body. You were described to me as being highly motivated and self-disciplined. You were described as believing in traditional values and being family-oriented. Those personal qualities drew you to this campus. And if you look at the research, you will find those qualities are major determinants of personal happiness.

You have not been made to feel fearful, victimized, or angry as so many on other campuses have. You will do well because the free are more successful and happy than the fearful. Someone said that happiness is 75 percent courage, and I believe that. This college, by the very fact it doesn't accept government money, embodies it.

I also learned something else about you. I was told that you are tired of hearing doom and gloom. In certain media and academic circles, this attitude would immediately mark you as insensitive to America's problems. These are the same people who, if given the choice between two evils, would take both. But to me it marks you as young people more focused on the future than on the past, which is the way it should be. It marks you as young people who want to get on with your lives and contribute to society in a positive way. You are right not to become burdened with doom and gloom. Mark Twain as an old man said that he had had lots of troubles in his life, most of which never happened.

The *Economist* magazine ran an article a while back about the extrapolation of bad news. It said, for example, that if you want to scare the people of Chicago about their rising murder rate, start with 1988, then draw a line through 1990, when the city had a record number of murders. Just continue the line upward and it will show that in time there will be more people annually murdered in Chicago than there are people who live there. As I've seen so often in Washington, if you torture the facts long enough they can prove anything.

What I came to say to you today is this: You came to this college with the enduring values instilled by your parents, grandparents, family, and others who cared about you. You are leaving this college with an education and an unmatched freedom of opportunity. Do not fear. Certainly, you have anxieties about your career and your future. But your ability, your degree, and the philosophy of the school awarding it are a potent combination. You have been given the freedom that knowledge bestows and an understanding of the personal responsibility that freedom demands. What a marvelous preparation for an accomplished, noble life!

In closing, just let me say that as you go your separate ways into the world, like the ancient Jews of the Diaspora, your challenge is not only to keep alive but to spread the beliefs that were made real to you at Grove City College.

I believe in what you can accomplish. I believe in what you value. I believe in *you*. And now, you are ready to show the world that you believe in yourselves.

My warmest congratulations and heartfelt best wishes to each of you.

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