

6-5-1964

Objectives of Going to College

Lewis F. Powell, Jr.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.wlu.edu/powellspeeches>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lewis F. Powell Jr. Papers, Box 114/Folder 18

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the Powell Papers at Washington & Lee University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Powell Speeches by an authorized administrator of Washington & Lee University School of Law Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact lawref@wlu.edu.

OBJECTIVES OF GOING TO COLLEGE

In using the word "college", I refer to any school which you may attend, whether it be a so-called "finishing school", junior college, women's college or co-educational university. Whichever of these may be involved, the privilege of continuing your education is a very special one. It will be an exciting period in your life, and however much you derive from it, I suspect that in the years to come you will look back and think that you failed to take the fullest advantage of these golden years of opportunity.

There are many "objectives" in going to college, depending upon the individual and upon how one defines and classifies them. Of course, you will all go to college to continue your education and with the hope, quite properly, of having some fun doing it. If asked what you expect to get out of college, most of you in one way or another would probably say that you want to prepare to live a full and worthwhile life. This certainly is

the broad, general objective of a college liberal arts education.

But this evening I want to be a little more specific about certain things, I hope you will learn in college. I will not attempt to include everything of importance, but only a few "objectives" of a college education which interest me particularly.

1. My first objective is to learn how to get along well with other people.

Regardless of what you do in life, your present and future happiness will depend in a very large measure on your capacity to understand other people, and have them understand and like you.

College, particularly where one lives on campus, affords a grand opportunity to develop this capability:

(a) Your teachers (~~certainly, for the most part~~) will be wonderful people who, if you let them, will stimulate your interest in people as well as in books.

(b) You will meet girls - and boys - from all over the country, and from other parts of the world.

(c) There are various "college activities",

such as sports, literary publications, student government, honor system, and the like - just as you have at Country Day School. Reasonable participation in these activities is just as important as your studies. This will broaden your experiences, and promote the essential art of getting along well with other people.

(d) You will also visit the boys' colleges (you hope), and have the unforgettable experiences of college dances, house parties, weekends and football games. Yes, it is important to like the boys and have them like you too.

I do have one word of caution on this subject of getting along well with people. We tend in America to want to conform to the general standard or norm. Many people lack the courage to be different. Whether the subject is the latest fashion in Beatle hairdos or whether it is drinking or smoking, many of us - and especially college students - feel that it is necessary to conform to be popular. There has never been a greater fallacy. You may test this by asking yourself whom you really admire most - the "rubber stamp" type of person

who always follows the crowd / or the person of character and independent thought who makes her own decisions on the basis of what she believes to be right.

2. My second objective is to develop your cultural tastes.

The cultural pattern of your life will be pretty well set when you leave college. I know this is difficult for you to believe, but most of you will find it to be the truth. The reason for this is a simple one. After college, there will not be enough time in your lives to develop or originate new cultural tastes or habits. You will then be busy with marriage, homemaking, children - and in some instances the exacting task of making your own living. About a fourth of the graduates expect to marry within a year!

Thus, I urge you / to take every advantage during your college years / to develop a taste and understanding for (i) art, (ii) music, (iii) drama, and (iv) good literature.

Some of you will attend colleges in or near the great metropolitan centers / such as New York, Boston and

Philadelphia. You will have many opportunities to visit these cities. By all means, take advantage of them - and while the musical comedies and night clubs are certainly not unimportant, I hope these will have second priority in your tastes.

All of you know, from experience in your own families, that the cultural pattern of a family is usually set by the mother. Father is too busy at the office or on the golf course. You therefore have a very special responsibility in this field for the future of your own children.

3. My third objective is to develop an active interest in government.

Man has made startling progress in the physical sciences - especially in this century. Indeed, man has learned how to destroy himself and his civilization completely. But, as Einstein said shortly before his death, man has learned comparatively little about government and politics.

This is obviously a large subject - too large for my talk this evening. It does suggest, however, that we all should take a greater interest in government, and

that a major objective in any college education is to learn to be a good citizen.

In speaking of "good citizenship", I am not thinking primarily about belonging to the Junior League, working for the Community Chest, and voting when your husband takes you to the polls. This type of citizenship is important, but it will not be enough to meet the desperate need of your and my generation for intelligent leadership in government - at every level of government: local, state, Federal and international.

I think of a "good citizen" as one who considers it a duty to work for good government. This means (i) keeping informed on public affairs, (ii) encouraging well qualified persons to seek public office, (iii) helping elect such persons to office, and (iv) being willing to render public service yourself.

Few of you will aspire to be a Clare Boothe Luce or an Oveta Culp Hobby - but there will be many opportunities for all of you to promote good government. You can start right now by stimulating and encouraging your own parents, and when you have husbands you can

make good government a major family project.

In your years at college, you will feel largely removed from the activities of government. But you will have a stimulating opportunity to study and discuss this subject, and to develop a personal and constructive philosophy about your duty as a citizen. ~~Lurgently hope~~ you will not neglect this opportunity.

4. My fourth and last objective is to attain "maturity".

Maturity is a relative thing. Many people never attain it. On the other hand, many of you at ages 17 and 18 are already quite mature. In speaking of "maturity", I have in mind the personality traits of a mature person. These traits include the following:

(a) Sincerity. It is fashionable for some young people to assume an attitude of sophistication and indifference. You already know, I am sure, that genuine sincerity is a more endearing quality.

(b) Integrity. With your honor system here at Country Day School, the development of this most fundamental of traits should not be difficult.

(c) Humility. All of you are privileged girls. You have had and will enjoy special benefits and opportunities. But in the eyes of God, these privileges do not make you better than others. They do impose upon you greater responsibilities.

(d) Wisdom. Obviously you go to college to learn, and especially to learn to think. But here I am not talking primarily about "book learning". I am talking about developing "judgment" and "balance", and the capacity to "make the right decision" when important decisions have to be made. For example, a girl truly needs to have mature wisdom when she decides whether to say "yes" to some persuasive male.

(e) Tolerance. In our present world, no trait is more important than tolerance - tolerance of other races, tolerance of those whose views differ from our own, and indeed, tolerance of the shortcomings of friends and even our families. While genuine tolerance is a virtue, one must also guard against ^{being} excessively tolerant - to the point of tolerating marginal, illegal or even immoral conduct.

(f) Capacity to love. I am sure that all of you charming young ladies already have this capacity to

a very high degree. But I am speaking primarily about "love" in a broader sense. I have in mind the Biblical sense of "loving one's neighbor", or perhaps another way to put it is to be genuinely unselfish.

I suspect that by now some of you may think that I am taking this business of going to college a bit too seriously. I do take it seriously, as I am confident there will never be a period of comparable opportunity in your entire lives. I also know that many young men and women waste these years, and many more fail to take full advantage of them. On the other hand, I do not minimize the importance of just having a good time at college. There will also be plenty of opportunity for this. Indeed, you cannot attain many of the objectives which I have mentioned this evening unless you do have a good time.

Before concluding, there is one further point I would like to make. As graduates of Country Day School, each of you is entitled to face the future and go to college with a great deal of confidence. You have attended a school with high academic standards.

Moreover, you have had the spiritual inspiration of an exceptionally fine Christian atmosphere and education. With this background you will be able to compete on equal or better terms with most of your classmates, wherever you may go to college. You can always be proud of having attended Country Day School.