

Ohio
Wesleyan
University

CLASS PRESIDENT ZEKE BRECHTEL '13 COMMENCEMENT REMARKS

Sunday, May 12, 2013

2013 COMMENCEMENT REMARKS

**Zeke Brechtel '13, President of Ohio Wesleyan University Class of 2013
May 12, 2013**

I spent this past spring break at my home in Colorado – instead of going to Cabo San Lucas or Florida – to spend time with family. And, most importantly, to get some of mom's chocolate chip cookies: Happy Mother's Day, Mom!

While I was at home, I came across a pile of books by the philosophical guides of my childhood: Calvin and Hobbes. Naturally, I picked one up, and while I was thumbing through it, I came across a comic strip. In this cartoon, Calvin was out trick-or-treating, but he is wearing regular clothes. When he's asked what he is dressed up as for Halloween, his response is, "I'm yet another resource-consuming kid, in an overpopulated planet, raised to an alarming extent by Madison Ave. and Hollywood, poised with my cynical and alienated peers to take over the world when you're old and weak."

This comic strip would have been just as appropriate if Calvin had been wearing a cap and black gown, because this is what it can feel like to stand at our college graduation and look into the unknown future.

Unfortunately, for our generation, this future looks bleak. The millennials stand to inherit a bankrupt world: a world in which the economy crashed in 2008, a world in which our environment is polluted and deteriorating, and a world in which many of us graduating seniors feel as if today, we stand on the precipice of our eventual and inevitable unemployment.

And as we look to the future, we see that these are the bleak realities of our future. So, parents, if your children seem a little reticent to graduate, find a job, and take on the real world, be a little understanding. We don't want to grow up and take responsibility for a world that we didn't corrupt.

But, parents and to my fellow seniors, before we become too nervous or too cynical and alienated, it's important for us to note that in the comic strip, Calvin was out trick-or-treating on Halloween. He was in a costume. He was dressed up as an alienated and cynical kid. And oftentimes, this is a costume that we also choose to wear. It's important for us to realize that this is a choice.

My fellow seniors, we can choose to wear our costumes of cynicism, or we can have the courage to take them off. We can have the courage to hope. We can have the courage to be true to ourselves and true to the realities of the world in which we live. We can admit that there are unprecedented environmental and economic challenges that our generation will face. The world needs change, and to my fellow seniors, we are the ones who are going to bring it.

Today at our graduation, we don't stand poised to enter unemployment, we stand poised, ready to apply the critical thinking and creative problem-solving that we've spent the past four years honing at Ohio Wesleyan University, a premier liberal arts institution, to help solve the woes of our world.

We have the capacity, in our lifetimes, to become the next great generation. We have the capacity to work together to leave this world in better shape than it was delivered to us. As OWU students, recipients of national recognition for our community service projects, we have the capacity to work in service of others – in the words of the NASA motto – “for the benefit of all.”