Most chapel speeches were extempore, with a few notes to quids. This one was recovered from a defective wire recording. It includes an announcement about the influenza epidemic.
GEORGE WASHINGTON

Before I turn to what I have to say, I would like to make an announcement. There are still beds in Andrews House for anybody who feels he has the flu. Colleges consist of a mass of rumors thinly surrounded by a faculty. The rumor is abroad that we are considering closing the University. The actual fact is we are hoping to open it. There are a number of you who do not yet know you are here.

The flu epidemic has gone across the world, we will not be exempt from it but when there is sickness the thing to do is to keep your head--in your bed. If you can not keep your head at least keep your bed and stay away from other people. You are cordially invited to have a temperature and go to bed in Andrews. Let us therefore have an end to rumors.

I was down at the Naval War College yesterday. There I learned some things about our policies here at Brown University which I had never heard and which, of course, were not true. They had come from students who have means of information not available to me. I may say, parenthetically, that a good deal of the uproar is about the draft. All the bright boys try to outguess Congress. Well, I admit you are brighter than Congress. That is no flattery. But you are never going to outguess them because they can not even outguess themselves.

This, I discovered, is the first time I have had an opportunity to speak to students on the birthday of George Washington in twelve years, a rather extraordinary thing. So I have to say something about George Washington.
George Washington led a revolt against taxes. Taxes are now at the highest point in the history of America; they are at one of the highest points in the world and they are going higher if you are moderately successful. Of course, if you are a failure you are all right because the Government will take care of you, but if you are moderately successful you will have to pay a quarter of everything you earn in indirect and direct taxes. Mostly they will be indirect because Congress does not trust you to pay taxes on your income. If you happen to be more successful they take a larger bite and very likely will prosecute you. In addition to cash, many of you are to be taxed two years of your life. If war comes you may be taxed your life itself. I suggest that these facts indicate that it is time for you to give less concern to whether you are going to be an engineer, a chemist, an economist, a doctor or follow some other vocation and give careful thought to your citizenship which appears to be in rather bad repair. I can illustrate that by something which I found more shocking than anything else in connection with the current basketball bribery. Why anyone would be surprised at it I do not know. Nevertheless I was not only surprised but horrified to learn that a student body was petitioning that the academic officers not be allowed to punish the people who had engaged in the bribery by dropping them from college.

It was evident that they can not learn anything at college. Surely they have not learned anything in college. If they now want to get an education they can take a correspondence course in jail and that is what they ought to do.

This brings me to citizenship, of which the culprits clearly had no understanding. George Washington offers a good illustration of what I mean by a citizen. He was the ideal of a public spirited, educated man.
He was competent in his own business and had a clear relationship in his mind between national prosperity and George Washington's prosperity. He knew the relationship of citizenship to his own life. Now let me tell you two or three things about him.

He was an educated man. He was educated in the only way a man can get educated--by himself. One of the most desperate confusions of modern times is the confusion of schooling with education. There is many a man who hears me pronounce some Latin phrases when he has not even energy enough to ask what they mean. He takes from me a piece of sheepskin on which are engraved things he can not read, including my signature at the bottom. Then he says that he is educated, whereas in reality he has avoided all possible education. I insist George Washington was a well educated man. He was not schooled; he educated himself.

He was, as you know, a poor boy and became a surveyor. That is how he made his living for a time. Let us concede that there have been better surveyors than George Washington. He made some mistakes. He was a very good surveyor, exceedingly conscientious but looking at it objectively. we have to admit that if you lined up all the surveyors in the world, George Washington would not be at the head of the list.

George Washington was a farmer. He said he liked being a farmer because it opened up to him the life of contemplation. That, in itself, shows that he was an unusual farmer. He was also an extremely good farmer. All the time that he was President he wrote each week about fourteen full folio sheets in his own handwriting telling his farm superintendent what to do. He experimented with fertilizers, about which few farmers did very much in Virginia in those days. He improved the breed of his sheep, another evidence of good husbandry. In his diary he always noted first
the wind and the weather. That also showed he was a good farmer. He had his mind on how to be a good farmer. He gave thought to the matter and did not just follow routine. But there have been better farmers, let's admit it.

He was a soldier. He spent years in that unwelcome occupation. He devoted great energy and took great personal risks in the successful effort to achieve independence. So we have to say that he was a good soldier. But we must admit, however regretfully, that there have been greater generals than George Washington.

He was a politician, but there have been shrewder politicians. Thomas Jefferson had an uncanny skill. He would never push a man down, he would invite him to be seated and pull the chair away. Abraham Lincoln could read the mind of the common man more accurately than anyone else in our history. He had an intuitive perception of what was going on in the public mind—much better than Washington. Washington was a better politician than most presidents, a better politician than John Adams or Madison or Monroe or John Quincy Adams or Buchanan or Herbert Hoover. Still there have been better politicians, we have one now.

George Washington was an extraordinarily good administrative officer. He never lost knowledge of the forest among the trees. I remember many years ago I was studying in the State Department, reading, in the archives. I came across the original files before it was called the State Department. When George Washington became president he read those same pages I was reading. In the margin in his own handwriting were the annotations he made as he studied the record. He read every single important diplomatic document in the United States while he was President. He clearly was a man of enormous industry in administration. Yet he sought and took advice.
As I say, he never lost the forest among the trees.

He gave close attention to his work; he was orderly, industrious, resourceful. But there have been better executives. I can not call one to mind among the presidents in modern times but there have been better executives; let us admit it.

Why then, though, was he surpassed in everything he did by others, does he hold so surpassing a position in history? The answer is very simple and extremely difficult. None had a better grasp upon the art of living. He did not learn that lesson during college years. He never went to college because, they sent an older boy under the rules of primogeniture, over to England. Washington did not try to learn it all in school and stuff himself with expertise. He never thought he was going to wind up tight like a clock spring and then wind down the rest of his life.

He made up his mind he would learn what he had to know when he had to know it. If I were to tell you of some of the items in his boyhood learning, it would astonish you. He would never engage in an argument about whether he would wear a coat and tie at dinner because he actually wrote down rules of behavior at the table. He did not put coat and tie down because he would not think of going there without a coat and tie. As each new demand came to him, he met it with courage, with intelligence, with industry, and with dignity.

The second thing to remember was that he was always conscious of his own deficiencies. He did not think he could write well. He never wrote an important state paper himself. He knew he could not write well. Therefore, he had drafts prepared for him by other people and chose the one which most nearly met his demands. Then he had it altered to meet...
his ideas. Knowing his own deficiencies, he surrounded himself with people who could supply what he lacked. When he turned from surveying to war he made some bad mistakes, but he learned. When he turned from war to agriculture he made bad mistakes, but he learned. When he went from agriculture back into politics he made some very bad mistakes. He said that he did not believe in the party system. He tried to have a nonpartisan government. Nobody has ever found out how to do that yet, but he learned what he could do, and what he could not. Because he had mastered the art of living, he was able to live a calm life in the midst of strife. He lived unafraid with bullets whistling around him. He was never careless. He was never reckless but he said he did feel exhilarated when the bullet whistled by his ear. He suffered economic storms such as your generation thinks are unique. He suffered political storms that are far worse than anything we have known in modern times. There were times when he knew that not only much depended upon him but that literally everything depended upon him.

He had a temper that makes Harry Truman's look pale. But when he was angry he went into a room by himself and talked to himself and not to the other fellow. If he ever wrote an intemperate letter he did not send it.

He was therefore a man who was in the midst of tremendous stress who lived an extraordinary, calm life. His life was so calm that stupid people thought he was insensitive; he was eating out his heart but he remained calm. Therefore he met each problem neither with fear nor pride, neither with carelessness nor bumptiousness but with fortitude and without fear. Almost the last words he uttered were, "I die unafraid." He was a man who knew poverty; he knew wealth. He met failure; he met success.
We think of him as always being praised but no president of the United States has ever been worse Drew Pearsoned than he. For the great patriot Tom Paine wrote to him, "As to you, sir, treacherous in private friendship, and a hypocrite in public life, the world will be puzzled to decide whether you are an apostate or an impostor; whether you have abandoned good principles, or whether you never had any." The bitterest words ever used to denounce a president of the United States were used against George Washington.

You do not know those things because he survived them. He lived over them. All this remarkable education, all this courage, all this industry, all this character were devoted to what?—To the public service. He was doing well in private life making money. He was a land speculator and successful at it. After his military service he said he wanted to go back to the farm. He gave up life on the farm with vast regret knowing that it would probably kill him. He died at a fairly young age, you know.

Washington's Birthday is a good day for me to say that I am weary of those who preach the futility of public life. I say to you that no education you get at Brown University or anywhere else is worth a fig which does not impel you to labor in the public interest, to give your time, your thought, and your energy in the public interest. If altruism appeals to you there is a field as wide as the world; if selfishness moves you, you dare not neglect your citizenship. When George Washington became president the population of the United States was only about 4 million. What a galaxy of names it produced—Franklin, Jefferson, Hamilton, Adams, Madison, Jay, dozens of others. The population of the United States today including the ones before me are no less fertile in
capacity or in genius, but they have turned their energies into private industry and other places that seem to offer a "better opportunity."

You have grown up in a world in perpetual crisis and though you live to be a hundred you will never know a world without crisis. It is, therefore, a world which summons you to a concept of citizenship and citizenship recalls the need for education, an education which at its higher level just begins in Brown University. It must then continue day in and day out, year in and year out, as long as you live. The most fruitful years of your life will not be those golden college years which it makes me so sick to hear about in the songs, but the years when full of labor and full of obligations and full, pray God, of wisdom you make a contribution to the life of the good society which may ultimately bring peace on earth and good will among men.