

Ross Perot, Jr.
Commencement Address
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"The Texas Century"
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Thank you, Mr. President.

Fellow members of the Board of Trustees . . . distinguished faculty . . . honored guests . . . friends and family . . . and most of all, the graduates of the class of 2006: I am honored to be with you on this proud and hopeful day.

President Turner was very kind in his introduction. I asked him what I should talk about today.

He said, "About 12 minutes."

That's a request I intend to honor.

I want you to know: the invitation to speak here today went over very well in my home.

My wife Sarah is a proud 1984 graduate of SMU.

And my father-in-law, Jerry Fullinwider, graduated in 1951.

Even though I'm a Vanderbilt graduate they've done a good job indoctrinating me with SMU tradition.

For instance, I do my best to wear red on Saturdays.

I have foresworn all donuts except Mustang Donuts.

And what a great day it was back in September of 2005 when SMU beat TCU to take back the Iron Skillet at Gerald Ford Stadium.

But there is another thing I've learned about this school:

SMU graduates are not only the best that Texas has to offer – you are some of the best that America has to offer.

That is a tribute to your professors . . . your mentors . . . your religious leaders . . . and your coaches.

But above all, it is a tribute to your parents and your loved ones.

I am honored to be your speaker today.

But the truth is the best wisdom . . . advice . . . and inspiration you'll receive won't come from the person standing in front of you . . . but from the people seated behind you . . . who have guided and supported you from the start.

Before we go any further . . . class of 2006 . . . let's hear it for your mothers and fathers . . . your grandparents and friends . . . who *really* made today possible.

I certainly understand the benefit of strong parents: I am blessed to have 2 of the best parents any child could ever have.

Roughly 25 years ago today, I was graduating from Vanderbilt.

On my graduation day, my father gave me a unique gift: a 67-page book that he wrote just for me, filled with practical advice about how to be a success in life.

It serves as a constant reminder that we never do anything by ourselves in life. We are always part of a team -- something larger than ourselves.

The good news for your parents is that the Dallas Morning News recently reported that in the past year, North Texas added more than 92,000 jobs -- and Texas added nearly 300,000.

It means that all of you are going to have a difficult time convincing your parents that you can't find at least one of these great jobs.

But the truth is, I don't think jobs are going to be the problem for your generation.

Never mind the fact that in the next 20 years tens of millions of new jobs are going to open up in our country as the baby boom generation retires.

Your generation has opportunities today that past generations could only dream about.

It was 1987 when President Ronald Reagan looked at the wall built by the Soviet Union separating East and West Berlin and he said, "Mr. Gorbachev . . . tear down this wall."
Two years later, that wall *was* torn down.

In the decade and a half since, billions of new citizens have joined the global economy.

If you listen to the pundits, the smart money says that the 21st Century is going to belong to Asia. It's going to be a Chinese century . . . or some say, an Indian century.

But if our nation continues to apply the same can-do spirit that we have the past 100 years, I have no doubt that the 21st Century will be another great American century.

From where I stand, I also have to tell you. . . I think the 21st Century is shaping up to be a Texas Century and a Dallas Century.

Why do I mention all of this?

As SMU graduates, in the days and years to come, your talents will be sought near and far. The whole world is open to you.

But I have a very simple message for all of you today: Think big . . . Go far But at the end of the day . . . please *stay here*.

Stay here and put your talent to work in this city.

Stay here and raise your family.

Stay here and help us write a whole new chapter in the great story that is Dallas.

Why am I so optimistic today? When you think about it, the global economy plays to our strengths.

People like Tom Friedman say that we live in a flat world.

Tom is right. Today, the playing field *is* level. In a world where everyone has access to the same technology . . . the cities, companies and countries that will succeed are the ones who are best able to imagine the future, and then make it happen.

In other words . . . the global economy is being played on our field.

If there is any region of the world that has been able to imagine the future, and then make it happen . . . it is North Texas.

When you stop and look back over the past 170 years, Dallas is a little bit of a miracle.

Back in 1841, we were a river crossing with miles and miles of open land.

People used to joke that the only reason John Neely Bryan settled here was because his ox died.

We did not have a navigable river, ocean, or port in sight.

We didn't have many of the natural resources that other cities relied upon to grow.

All we had was determination . . . hard work . . . courage . . . and optimism.

When the railroads came across Texas, we also happened to have a shrewd state representative by the name of John Lane . . . who added a clause into the charter of the Texas & Pacific railroad that required it to cross within a mile of the Dallas courthouse.

And when people heard about this new town where the citizens were friendly and the opportunities were plentiful . . . they came, too.

At every step along the way, each new generation has dreamed of what Dallas could be . . . and then made it happen.

Residents of this city imagined Dallas as a trading post . . . a manufacturing center . . . an aviation center . . . a commerce center . . . and then a technology center . . . and that's what it became.

And now . . . THE TORCH IS PASSED TO YOU.

Ten, 20, 50 years from now, Dallas will still be a great city, because of what visionary students like you work to build . . . imagine . . . or inspire.

One thing is for certain . . . Dallas is going to have a whole lot more people to build that great future.

When SMU opened its doors in 1911, Dallas had 100,000 people. Today, the Dallas Fort Worth Metropolitan Area has 6 million.

By the time your kids are ready to graduate from SMU, in 25 years, our population will be over 8 million. Both our ingenuity and our size can be our strength.

There is no question that there are big things going on in China and India today.

I know . . . because the men and women of Perot Systems have helped make it happen.

We opened an office in India in 1996 and currently have over 6,000 associates in that country.

In places like India and China, our associates are just like you . . . motivated, staying up late, working hard and dreaming of a better life.

In fact, a year ago, we had an employee event in Bangalore. I stood at the back of the room, looking at a thousand of our associates with spouses and children. They were all wearing American branded clothes and dancing to American hip hop.

In fact, they are becoming more and more like us every day.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. We're still leading the global economy – by a *lot*.

With 5 times the number of people . . . China's economy is less than one-sixth the size of ours.

And with more than 3 times our population . . . India's economy today is the same size as the economy of California.

The Indias and Chinas of the world will do well. But, wherever I go . . . I still don't see the great spirit of Texas.

What makes us different . . . what makes Texas different . . . what makes *America* different . . . is that we're not aren't afraid to take risks, and we're not afraid to fail.

Our individual rights and freedoms . . . our energy and drive . . . have made America the greatest engine for innovation and productivity this world has ever seen.

And nobody dreams bigger dreams than Texans.

Today, Dallas Fort Worth is the fifth largest area in population in the United States.

We have tens of thousands of companies of all sizes that call Dallas Fort Worth home – including 22 Fortune 500 companies . . . fourth highest number in the nation.

If you take the revenues of those 22 companies alone . . . it would rank as the fifth largest economy in the nation – ahead of the entire states of Illinois . . . Pennsylvania . . . Ohio . . . New Jersey . . . and Michigan.

And we have never played a more central role in the global economy than we do today.

For the third year in a row, Texas is the largest exporting state in the nation . . . and North Texas accounts for nearly a fifth of that total.

According to the Greater Dallas Chamber of Commerce, Dallas Fort Worth did more than ten billion dollars of business with China in 2004.

Through our AllianceTexas program alone, we move more than 600,000 containers per year – half of which originate in China.

All of that means jobs. Between now and 2030 . . . North Texas is projected to create three quarters of a million new jobs.

A good number of those jobs are going to be created in Dallas and in downtown Dallas and developments like Victory Park . . . where our team is working today to turn an old industrial site into 75 acres of shops . . . hotels . . . restaurants . . . apartments . . . and condos.

By the time you come back to SMU for your 5-year reunion . . . downtown Dallas will be transformed into a real urban center, like many of the great capitals of the World.

As Dallas grows, our diversity will continue to grow.

We are home today to growing Indian . . . Hispanic . . . and Asian populations . . . all making unique contributions to the fabric of this great city.

If this is what our region looks like at the beginning of the 21st Century . . . I can't imagine what it's going to look like in the 22nd Century.

But, what is exciting is you can.

You are the ones whose imagination will make the next Century a Texas_Century.

One of the issues you'll need to tackle in the years ahead is our environment.

We must do a better job in Texas of taking care of our water . . . land . . . and air.

After all . . . if we're going to add another 2 million people in the next 25 years to Dallas/Fort Worth . . . we must take better care of our environment.

We have to make sustainable development a priority.

I know it's difficult to say in Texas . . .

But we have to wean ourselves off of fossil fuels.

Alternative energy is the economy of the future. It will create millions of jobs. I'd like to see many of those jobs end up in Texas.

It certainly fits our heritage. Texans pioneered the discovery and use of fossil fuels. We can also pioneer the discovery and use of alternative energy. Yours_is the generation that needs to get it done.

Here's the last bit of wisdom I'll leave you with today.

When I graduated from college in 1981 . . . one of the best pieces of advice I received was from the late Bob Dedman . . . who was truly a distinguished graduate, trustee and life long supporter of SMU.

Mr. Dedman was also the founder and chairman of Club Corp, a great Dallas company.

Mr. Dedman's advice to me was that I needed to plan my decades . . . both professionally and personally.

Your generation has more decades to plan than any that have come before it.

Many of you should expect to be productive into your 80s and 90s.

As you step into that future . . .

I encourage you to think about serving your country . . . and giving_something_back_to the United States.

In your 20's . . . I encourage you to travel and explore the world. Get to know and respect the citizens of this planet. Have some adventure and learn about yourself and discover your true passions.

And then . . . I hope you bring it all back to Dallas.

I hope you bring it all back here to start your career . . . raise your family . . . and build a better Dallas.

I promise . . . if you do, you won't be sorry.

And no matter what you do . . . along the way, don't forget_SMU and all that it's done for you and this community.

But start all of this tomorrow.

Today, enjoy your family . . . enjoy your friends . . . enjoy your loved ones . . . thank your parents . . . celebrate your achievement . . . and be proud to call yourselves SMU graduates.

Congratulations, class of 2006.

Job well done.