

# Change From Within

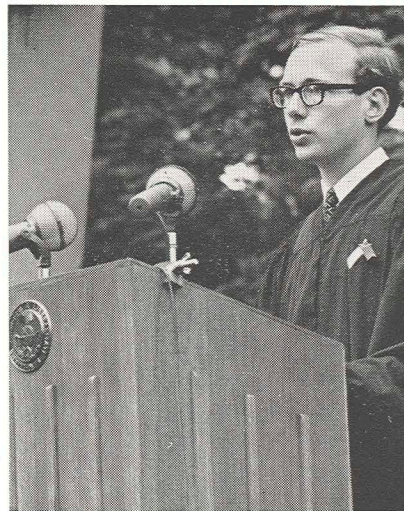
By GEORGE BENSON '70

President Sawyer, honored guests, students, faculty and trustees, my feelings about graduation are strangely ambivalent. On the one hand, I am sad to leave the Williams community; on the other, I am eager to move into a somewhat more responsible way of life where I can better apply what I have learned here. I do not think that my feelings about this graduation are at all unique. For most of us, our life styles will undergo an abrupt change as we leave the often-confining role of student and become full-fledged members of society.

At times like this it is tempting to step back and try to take account of where we are as members of a peculiar student generation and to speculate about where we are going — I shall succumb to this temptation to-

day. I feel that the resolution of the current malaise felt in American society will be shaped by the manners in which we students adjust to non-student roles.

People never seem to tire of telling one another that this generation of students is substantially different from all that came before it. We students are among the first members of a generation of people who have had the good fortune to have grown up in a time of uninterrupted and widespread affluence. We have been pampered by parents who have given us many of the things they would have liked to have had when they were younger, but which they achieved in abundance only later. We have been flattered by a society that has become perhaps overly youth-oriented. We have been educated



Valedictorian

longer than any preceding generation and better, at least in some respects.

However, the important differences between our generation of students and those that preceded us are not those that can be measured so easily.

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## *Washington*

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a plethora of political messages filled with big and little lies, or large and small inconsistencies that eventually all sound the same?

What shall I offer you?

I am not sure. For, I am troubled in the depths of my blackness. From these depths I can offer you only three things, even though they have been kicked around like corpses. I offer you faith, hope and love. I have faith that you will help us get back what was ours, and was taken away. I have hope, a dim hope, that the rest of Western mankind will understand our quest. And I have love.

I have love, you remember, for our beginnings when, under the beams of sunlight, in our African savanna, you were free to walk tall as a warrior-prince, to sing as a poet, and with great pride, to create new life as a lover.

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## *Benson*

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They are the results of these different conditions of existence, and since they are less obvious, they are often misunderstood. We have become, in a sense, anti-materialistic. It may seem paradoxical that a generation that is so dependent on economic prosperity can be called anti-materialistic — but our generation is so in the sense that it has ceased to regard material things as ends in themselves. It is not ready to forswear the material benefits of the post-industrial state; it simply wants to use them more rationally. We have become extremely idealistic, at least in contrast to our immediate predecessors. Our idealism springs from a more ready grasp of the promise that is contained in the post-industrial state. Our idealism has manifested itself in social concern. We are more anxious to eliminate those defects of society that seemed ineradicable to previous generations. We have been upset by the appearance of new problems, peculiar to highly developed economies — problems whose solution requires a re-

thinking of many basic individual and social values. Unfortunately, our social concern has found inadequate outlets, and we have become increasingly frustrated. We have been (or at least we feel we have been) little utilized socially, relative to what we can contribute.

I feel that we students have a unique opportunity. As members of a society that is moving into stages of greater and greater affluence, we have the possibility of achieving a level of human development that is more complete than any that was possible before. It is our challenge to take advantage of this opportunity. I do not think that we have been especially well prepared to meet this challenge — there is no obvious preparation for achieving an end the nature of which is yet so unclear. What we will need is some clear thinking and the freedom to experiment and to be different. In the years to come, we will see the increasing development of alternative life styles — many of the alternatives will be unattractive, but only by tolerating life styles that do not seem satisfactory to us can we hope, in the end, to achieve something of value. Persuasion through the force of example should take the place of less thoughtful, more coercive means of persuasion.

Fellow Classmates, I feel that our importance in the years to come does not lie in making dramatic political efforts, but rather in consciously striving to attain a reasonable life style, appropriate for our times. The ultimate answer to America's problems will come only after a reaffirmation of individual integrity, tempered by social responsibility. I feel that we have tried unrealistically to change society while we were still outside of it; we must change society in the only way possible, slowly, by the force of example.

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## *Hollar*

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life around us, the very life on which we are inevitably dependent.

President Nixon may believe his