

For Release on Delivery
4:45 p.m., EDT
June 13, 2001

“Moving up, Moving Forward, and Moving Out”

Remarks by

J. Alfred Broaddus, Jr.
President
Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond

to the

Graduating Class of 2001
Thomas Jefferson High School
The Landmark Theater
Richmond, Virginia

June 13, 2001

Thank you very much. Ms. Roberson, members of the faculty, parents and friends, and – most importantly – members of the Thomas Jefferson High School Class of 2001, it is truly a pleasure and an honor to be with you this afternoon. Speakers in situations like this routinely start speeches by noting what a pleasure it is to be with their audiences, so I know that's a pretty shopworn phrase. But this is truly a treat for an old TJ alumnus like me. Even so, I promise I won't keep you long. Instead, I'll give you my Domino's Pizza speech – if I haven't delivered it in 10 to 12 minutes, you get a free pizza.

The first thing I want to do is to congratulate each of you on this important achievement – and a particular word of congratulations to Shani Bonaparte, your valedictorian, and Clarissa McKithen, your salutatorian. We are all very proud of what you've done.

I, too, graduated from TJ, but way back in 1957. To put that in perspective, Coach Holdren didn't graduate until 1960; if I'm not mistaken, he was a freshman when I was a senior. And he was still several years away from beginning what would turn out to be one of the most illustrious careers of any track coach anywhere, ever. And I think that Russell Flammia, another great TJ teacher, was probably still in middle school.

Let me make another point about time. This is a \$100 bill – a Federal Reserve note. When I graduated from TJ in 1957, this piece of paper could have bought a small family enough groceries to last for over six weeks. Today, it would only cover the same family's grocery bill for *one* week.

This money lost much of its real buying power because our nation's policymakers didn't always do what was necessary to maintain the dollar's value – and that includes policymakers at the Federal Reserve, where I work. Curious as it may sound, the U.S.

dollar is like a car – if you don't take care of it, sooner or later its value will rust away. Eventually, we policymakers figured this out and also learned how to hold inflation down and *keep* this piece of paper valuable.

But I'm not here today to lecture you about monetary policy or the economy. I'm here to talk about you and your future. Today, after a lot of hard work, you've earned a piece of paper worth thousands of dollars to you – your TJ diploma, which says you're well-informed and knowledgeable. But the world, and what constitutes being well-informed and knowledgeable is constantly changing, and if you're not careful, your diploma can lose its value just like the \$100 bill did. To keep your diploma valuable, and make it even more valuable, you absolutely have to continue to acquire knowledge – street sense, to be sure, but also book sense – every day for the rest of your lives. You know this already. But I want to underscore the point this afternoon because it is so crucial to your future, to Richmond's future, and the nation's future.

TJ Then and Now

Like you, I graduated from TJ. I walked the same halls, ate the same not always so great food in the same cafeteria, and looked out of the same windows as you. (Truth be told, I'd be a lot smarter today if I'd spent less time looking out the windows.) I received my diploma in this same auditorium. Like you, I had teachers whose lives were dedicated to helping students learn and grow. My own mother taught English grammar and literature at TJ for about 25 years. In the spirit of full disclosure, I have to confess that earlier in her career she taught at John Marshall – our arch-rival back then – but she moved to TJ as soon as she could.

For me, TJ still echoes with the voices of my mother and the other teachers. I can tell you this: they would be tremendously proud of your class and of your teachers and administrators, as I am. And my mom, who passed away a few years ago, would be proud that I was asked to give this commencement address, although if she were here she would be listening carefully to see whether I make any grammatical errors, so that she could correct them later, which – bless her – she never failed to do.

But I don't want to go overboard talking about how much your class and mine have in common. The TJ of 2001 is similar to the TJ of 1957 in many ways, but it is very different in other ways. After all, 1957 was 44 years ago. The TJ of 1957 had a larger student body than the TJ of 2001, and many different kinds of people. But it was rigidly segregated; there were no African-American students. They were at Armstrong and Maggie Walker, where many faced obstacles and struggles most of us at TJ did not face. Beyond that, while we certainly had our problems at TJ, many of the challenges that all high school students face in 2001 were unknown to most of us in 1957.

I think the biggest difference, though, between my class and yours is this: We didn't have to worry as much as you do about *maintaining* the value of our TJ diplomas, and building on it, by continuing our formal educations and continuing to learn more and grow in other ways. In 1957, a reasonably intelligent and talented high school graduate could still have a fair shot at a good job, if he or she wanted a shot, and might even rise to the top of a big organization. I know people who followed that path.

But that's a lot rarer in 2001. In 1957, most doors were still open to people without college degrees. Not so in 2001. Even college graduates sometimes have difficulty these days, as any parent whose college graduate has moved back into the house will quickly

tell you. In 1957, there were a lot of jobs where you could learn a skill in the first year and then just do that job in much the same way until it was time to retire. Not so in 2001. In 1957, if you got a law degree or a medical degree, you might feel set for life, financially and otherwise. Not so in 2001, because even in these prestigious professions, change is now exceedingly rapid and demanding. In 1957, education and advanced knowledge were almost luxuries; today they are necessities, or close to it.

Recently my boss, Alan Greenspan, said that, "The day when a high-school or college education would serve a graduate for a lifetime is gone. Today's recipients of diplomas expect to have many jobs and to use a wide range of skills over their working lives." He's right about that.

So continuing, life-long education and learning are essential today. But do you know what? It's not drudgery – it's actually fun. If someone had told me that when I was sitting where you are, I would have thought he or she was either crazy or dishonest. But it's true. Somebody once said that knowledge is power. It is. But knowledge is also amazement and fascination and joy and satisfaction, and it just gets better and better as it cumulates.

I hope I've convinced you that you need and want to keep learning. How do you do it? Let me offer a few suggestions, and then I'll sit down and let you get on to the really important part of this program – diploma awarding.

Some Suggestions

My first suggestion is to get all the formal education you can get. You've already

cleared the biggest hurdle by getting your TJ diploma. Believe me, a lot more doors will be open to you tomorrow than were open last week.

If you can get a college degree – by all means, get it. Seventy-five to ninety percent of today's TJ students eventually go on to college, and that's a wonderful statistic – although I wish the figure were 100 percent, or closer to it. And if you can go still further and get a masters, a Ph.D., a law degree, or a medical degree, do that too. As I said earlier, a graduate degree these days is not a ticket to Easy Street – but it will at least get most people into the Easy Street neighborhood.

Let me stress that if you can't afford to pay for college, there are lots of ways to get there anyway. There are loans and scholarships. When I went to graduate school, the U.S. Army paid a big part of my way with what we called the GI Bill. Some of your moms and dads probably benefited from that program too. It doesn't exist anymore, but the armed services have other programs now, and one of them may be your ticket to further education. And, by the way, you'll learn a lot about technology, and, more importantly, people, communication and responsibility while you're in the service. Beyond this, the Federal Reserve and many other employers help employees complete college and graduate degrees. We're not being charitable, we're making a good investment in our most important resource: well-trained, qualified people.

One other point on this: getting more formal education is what economists call an investment, which means you have to give up something today – like more money or a temporarily less stressful life – for more money and a better life tomorrow. I was on the track team at TJ, and I'm still a runner – albeit a much, much slower one – mostly in long-distance races. At the beginning of a 10-K race, it's tempting to break out of the pack and

try to grab an early lead. But that's often a dangerous strategy – you run the risk of wasting energy that you're going to need later in the race. The trick in long-distance running, as I think Coach Holdren would agree, is figuring out when to hold back and how much to hold back.

Education is like holding back in a race. For the last couple of years, you could have been out earning money instead of finishing high school. But like a good runner in the first mile, you held back and got your diploma. And now you've got that reserve of energy ready to carry you to the next step. The strategy has been a winner for you so far, and it's always a good idea to stick with a winner.

My second suggestion is to keep learning forever, whether you get five more degrees or no more. This may be my most important suggestion. Continuous, never-ending learning obviously will increase and broaden the opportunities you have, and help you get more interesting and higher-paying jobs.

But it's much more than that. Knowledge is food for the spirit, and unlike food for the body, you can never have too much of it, no matter what your individual circumstances are. I have two colleagues at the Fed who illustrate this suggestion well.

One is a painter who works in our building maintenance and equipment department at night and also operates a contracting business during his off-hours. He's an extraordinary person. He's in what I would describe as a permanent learning mode: always listening intently, asking questions, thinking about how he can do something better and more efficiently. He's also one of the happiest, most positive people I know, because he knows that he's constantly growing.

The other colleague has lots of advanced degrees and an international reputation as a thinker and writer. You'd think he already knows enough, but he, too, is in a continuous learning mode. And he's happiest when he learns something new, which he is constantly doing. You may be assuming this guy's a real nerd. But he's not. He has as much street sense as anybody I know, because he values that kind of knowledge as well as the more formal kind.

I can give you my other suggestions more quickly. Suggestion three is to read like crazy. Mark Twain said that the man or woman who doesn't read good books is no better off than the man or woman who *can't* read them. Read newspapers, magazines and books – whatever. Read about what interests you, but set aside time to do it every day. Again, it cumulates. You get a sort of knowledge momentum, a little like the momentum in a ball game.

Suggestion four is if, a few years from now, someone tells you it's too late to get more education and move ahead, prove 'em wrong big time. It's never too late to go back to college, or to graduate school, or to trade school, or to on-the-job training programs and add a new piece to your education. In the movie "The Legend of Bagger Vance," Will Smith tells a washed-up golfer, "I hear you lost your swing. I guess we got to go find it." And never say "never." Your parents and I have seen things happen neither we nor *our* parents thought would *ever* happen. The Berlin Wall, the ugliest symbol of the Cold War, was chopped into pieces and sold for souvenirs. The Soviet Union, the biggest threat to American security, disappeared from the face of the earth. And here in Virginia, a former student at Armstrong named Doug Wilder became the first African-American elected

governor of *any* state. If others discourage you from your dreams, take a cue from the best advertising slogan ever thought up: "Just do it."

I'm almost finished. Suggestion five is to use your knowledge to help make Richmond an even better city. Your class's motto is "Moving Up, Moving Forward, Moving Out." I love it. When I was your age, my motto was "Moving Away," because I didn't think there were many opportunities here. I wanted to go to New York or Washington, and I did go to Washington and Europe and several other places for a time. A few years later, to my surprise, my motto became "Moving Back," and I'm glad I did. Richmond is a great place, especially compared to everywhere else. So by all means, travel. Increase your knowledge by experiencing other places and cultures. But then consider coming back and helping us make Richmond the very best town anywhere.

My last two suggestions are very brief. First, never forget how important TJ, its teachers and your fellow students have been to you. And, finally, never – ever – forget how important you have been to TJ.

Thank you, and warmest wishes for good luck and great success in the years ahead to each of you. I'm proud to be your fellow TJ alumnus.

#####