


Willard Wilson

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When this speech was first drafted it was entitled "December Thirteenth," because it was a topic of the day and was to be given on December thirteenth. Then it became "January Fifteenth," then "March Seventh." In fact it's had more dates than a sorority pledge during rush week. Now logically it should be entitled "April Third," because that's TODAY. Why then do I risk your condemnation for egotism by speaking under the title "Willard Wilson?" Because that's my name? No! Because an incident occurred which made me realize that this is not only a problem of our day but a problem of our generation, a problem so personal that the discussion might be called by your name—or yours.

You might have felt as I did when, one Saturday night four months ago, a couple of fellows walked into my room. One of them sat down on the table, swung his legs back and forth and grinned. The other walked over to my desk with a copy of the *Evening State Journal* in his hand.

"Fine fellow you are, stealing cars again!"

He pointed to the headlines of an article on the front page. "Willard Wilson Arrested!" There it stood in bold type, my name. The article told further that the Willard Wilson was a W. P. A. worker just four years older than myself. He had robbed a student of two dollars and fifty-five cents. Freshmen at the fraternity house pasted my picture over the picture of the Willard Wilson in the paper. Then the newspaper clipping was posted on the bulletin board. "Willard Wilson sentenced to ten years in state's prison." My name, my picture.



Funny? Well, yes.

But there is nothing humorous in the fact that unemployment and the degeneracy bred of poverty make this Willard Wilson a more typical example of our day and generation than you are, or than I am. Look at some of the social and political factors involved in this youth problem.

First, Economic Facts.

There are between eleven and sixteen million young men and women, between the ages of nineteen and twenty-nine, living on relief. More unemployed young people, Willard Wilsons, in the United States than there are inhabitants in the entire Dominion of Canada. These are the only unemployment statistics I'm going to give you. Unemployment doesn't seem to mean much any more. We've taken the advice that Mephistopheles gave the student in Goethe's Faust, "Fur was drein ghet and nicht drein ghet ein Prachtig wort zu dienst in steht." Translated freely in the vernacular of the college student, "for what we do not comprehend we substitute a word and let it go at that." That's what we have done with youth, labeled them "The Lost Generation," and let them go at that.

But the maladjustments in living which have come as a direct result of these economic facts may not be so easily ignored. Richard Hellman, Ph.D. candidate in banking and finance, points out with the cold candor of the scientist that this so called lost generation constitutes a rotting population, and he concludes with a tocsin of warning, "Rot Spreads!"

No one in this audience is untouched by this problem. No man who speaks from this platform can be sure that he will not join this lost, this rotting generation.

No longer does education or industry, or both, guarantee us a place in the scheme of things.

We can't get jobs we are fitted for, we're lucky to get any jobs. Music students in filling stations.

Writers like the author of "Good Earth" contend this generation is overpampered; needs to stand on its own feet and face the world. Dean MacLean, of the General College, University of Minnesota says, on the other hand, "Grown-ups and youngsters are in ruthless competition for jobs—we oldsters are covering up the situation by being noble and humanitarian with our compulsory education and anti-child labor laws, reforestation and erosion control camps." One of these noble humanitarians is Aubrey Williams, executive director of the N. Y. A. Mr. Williams maintains with unctuous diction that we shall solve the problem the democratic way, "Rededicate ourselves to the faiths and formulas of the fathers of the republic."

Incidentally young people are definitely NOT to force older people out of jobs. The period of preparation for life is to be lengthened. We can't become normal citizens. Many of us can't establish homes. Our marriage rate was the lowest last year that it has been for a quarter of a century. Well, we don't want our period of preparation for life to be lengthened. WE WANT TO LIVE NOW!

Enforced Idleness inevitably brings maladjusted living conditions which in turn introduce a third social corollary; namely, crime.

Crime is becoming increasingly a youth problem.

When you and I were throwing our rattles out of our cribs the average criminal age was thirty-six; when we were boy scouts the average age of the criminal was twenty-six. Now that we are able to think about casting our first presidential ballot the average criminal age is less than twenty-three. Edgar Willis, finalist in the Interstate Oratorical last year, pointed out that our penal institutions were putting out four times as many as our colleges and universities. To quote him, "John Dillinger, killer of seven, claims Indiana as his alma mater. Ohio gave us Merton Goodrich, brutal slayer of Lillian Gallagher. From Illinois came 'Baby Face' Nelson. He's a Joliet man." What Mr. Willis did not point out is the fact that our college graduates are getting older; our penal graduates are getting younger. In 1926 Judge Childs said that not one criminal in twenty is motivated by poverty. Today nearly every young criminal either is motivated by poverty or believes that he is so motivated. District Judge Shepherd insists that these kids are hiding behind poverty as an excuse for crime. He is the judge who after hearing the Willard Wilson case sentenced the boy to ten years for taking two dollars and fifty-five cents with a gun. Here are the facts as I have gathered them from Willard Wilson, from Judge Shepherd, and from appellate docket T212.

Wilson worked his way through the freshman and sophomore years of high school, helping in Boyd's Print Shop and washing dishes in Pytries Cafe. He was married about the time the depression broke and his life became a series of odd jobs to keep himself, his wife, and baby girl off of relief rolls—farming, trucking, peddling fish, finally selling newspapers on the corner of the Terminal Drug at Tenth and O streets. But he couldn't manage!

He was working on a W. P. A. project when he was injured—ruptured. After much red tape there was a charity operation; then came a period of straight relief followed by the decree that he was well enough to work. So he was assigned to a wheel-barrow on a grading job. Three days of that and then he said he was so stove up he couldn't stand it. He took his relief check; bought a thirty-

two Remington and a half pint of whiskey to brace up his nerve; went out and got in his model T and tried to use the gun. The firing pin was pitted and it wouldn't work. He went to Goldberg's and changed the gun. Then he said, "I'd lost my nerve. So I decided to stick somebody up."

He did! Now the sovereign state is allowing him as a convict to expiate his sin at the rate of 25½ cents a year. Do you think that unemployment and consequent maladjusted living conditions had anything to do with this case?

Such social factors as idleness, maladjustment and crime, cumulate to form a political problem which cannot be overlooked. Look at the youth of other nations under hunger and oppression. Russia found herself in the grasp of a young mob shouting, "We are changing the world." Italy's Lost Generation donned black shirts and cheered IL Duce when he shouted, "You don't want liberty, you want jobs." German youth swell the ranks of the brown shirts. Schturm Abtilung; and the Schultz Staffelen chant "The Song of the Black Banner."

"Black is our bread and our misery;
Black is the flag of the peasantry;
And black is the earth the plowshare throws;
Black goes the peasant in mourning clothes."

You don't think that American youth would ever put on a shirt and take up a song deafening their ears to liberty. I hope you're right. But there are radical and discontented elements at work in society. If you doubt this statement, go to the library; pick up the "Readers Guide;" look under the heading, "Social Revolution!" From nineteen hundred to nineteen-twenty there were two articles on Social Revolution; from nineteen-twenty to nineteen-thirty, forty-eight; from nineteen-thirty to nineteen thirty-five, eighty-three.

Is it unreasonable to suppose that young people may join this radical element demanding a change from a political system which doesn't give them an even break?

The Government can't force youth to stand idle like the land the Kansas farmer failed to put to wheat. We can't plow them under as we did every third row of Georgia cotton. We can't destroy them like Nebraska cattle. We can't throw in the wash to decay as California did with the surplus oranges dumped down San Timeto Canyon.

Solution? I don't know what the solution is. You can condemn me for this. Perhaps I should figure out a pretty answer and offer it to you in terms of high sounding verbiage. Shorter working day to provide for an equal opportunity in industry! Wise use of leisure

time! Education as a means of crime prevention! But for an immature orator to administer to himself or to an audience the opiate of such an idealistic, theoretical solution would be to rob our discussion of realism and integrity. We don't ignore the findings in a study of cancer because the research scientist hasn't found the cure. We no longer demand of the novelist that he substitute sentimentality for actuality. The characters in a modern drama need not live happily ever after. Why must the orator *always* save the world? The youth problem is baffling sociologists and statesmen. I repeat, as an undergraduate, I don't know the answer. But I do know this! Before my generation can make a contribution to any other problem it must deal with this problem. We are a lost generation, on relief—jobless—homeless. We commit nearly sixty percent of your crime; nevertheless we must not put on a black shirt or a brown shirt and go out with a song of destruction. You and I are responsible for the intelligent leadership of this—our own generation.

That isn't going to be hard for me to remember, because along with my driver's license and my Y card, I used my Pi Kappa Delta membership card number 13837 as means of identification for admission to Lancaster state prison. Through three barred doors I came to stand on one side of the double screen as that other Willard Wilson was turned into the runway by a guard and came to stand on the other side. I couldn't see him very well, the light was bad, the steel mesh, very fine. But he's a little shorter than I am, slighter built, level eyed, dark where I am fair. Willard Wilson number 12486 and Willard Wilson number 13837. His number stands for maladjustment and consequent crime. My number and your number stands for privilege and consequent responsibility.
