

# The Red Queen



Peter Berck



J. Keith Gilles, Peter Berck, and Sofia Berto Villas-Boas at the College of Natural Resources Commencement, May 12, 2018.

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This is a transcript of the commencement address that Peter Berck gave upon receiving the Distinguished Teaching Award from the College of Natural Resources, three months before his death.

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We professors are pledged to teaching, research, and public service. By far the best of it is teaching. I've taught you for 41 years, and every year you teach me something new, something radically new. I know I've taught many of you basic economics. Your exams reflect your knowledge quite well.

I hope I taught you the way of scholars. First comes the problem, then comes the analysis, and the conclusion comes last of all.

In *Alice in Wonderland*, the Red Queen does everything backwards—she demands the punishment first, and then the trial, and then the crime comes last of all. Today, the Red Queen is everywhere.

Everyone recognizes the Red Queen when we don't approve of her. Many of you feel you can see her work in our nation's capital. We could spend all night talking about the Queen's work at EPA.

The hard lesson is to see the Red Queen at work when you *do* agree with her. Some of the measures to reduce climate change cost too much; some may not work. I hope the scholar in you will examine the evidence before signing on to the case.

Some of your very own relatives likely think what happens to people is mostly of their own doing. I had an uncle who even voted for Ronald Reagan. I hope the scholar in you will listen to their evidence and come to your own conclusions.

In a few minutes, you will all have diplomas to prove you think deep thoughts. The biggest challenge as a citizen and a scholar is to keep the Red Queen in her place – in a lovely children's book where she cannot push the levers of power.

As Cal graduates, you have another obligation. And one I hope I've taught you about. Each year I teach you about the limits to systems based entirely on self-interested choices. Pollution cannot be controlled in such a society. But that's not the only lesson.

Every year my class reads out loud John Donne's *Meditation 17*, "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main." These are days when students lack food and shelter. Pledge yourself to make the blue and gold possible for all those who follow you.

You're soon to be "Old Blues" – I'm from the class of '71. Your cheers now take on new meaning. They are a commitment that the blue and gold will never fail. Join me now in the traditional expression of support for Cal – you all know how this goes: I say "Go!" and you say "Bears."

Go! Bears! Go! Bears! Go! Bears!

Thank you.

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