

# THE NEW CHALLENGE

## COMMENCEMENT SPEECH

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

JUNE 10, 1990

NEARLY 40 YEARS AGO, I HAD MY  
OWN UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
GRADUATION. OUR WORLD THEN WAS SO  
DIFFERENT FROM YOURS NOW. IT'S THE  
SAME PLANET, BUT TOTALLY DIFFERENT  
WORLDS.

THEN, THE SOVIET UNION WAS  
PURSUING AN IDEOLOGY OF EXPANSION

AND WORLD REVOLUTION; WE RESPONDED WITH THE DOCTRINE OF CONTAINMENT. FOR US, COMMUNISM WAS A WORLDWIDE THREAT. EVERYTHING WE DID, AT HOME AND ABROAD, WAS SHAPED BY THIS STRUGGLE.

THE SOVIETS HAD JUST DETONATED THEIR FIRST ATOMIC BOMB. THE IRON CURTAIN HAD DESCENDED ACROSS EASTERN EUROPE. NORTH KOREA WAS INVADING SOUTH KOREA. NATO WAS ESTABLISHED. RELATIONS BETWEEN THE U.S. AND THE SOVIET UNION WERE FROZEN IN HOSTILITY AND WE WERE DIVIDED INTO

A WORLD OF SUPERPOWER CONFLICT. OUR  
NUCLEAR ARSENALS CAST AN  
EVER-LENGTHENING SHADOW OVER THE  
WORLD. YOUNG PEOPLE DOUBTED THAT  
THEY WOULD LIVE OUT A FULL LIFE.

THE GREAT JOY TODAY, IT SEEMS TO  
ME, IS HOW PROFOUNDLY THAT GRIM  
WORLD HAS NOW CHANGED. TODAY, WE  
CAN TRULY HOPE FOR PEACE; WE CAN  
ACTUALLY PLAN A NEW WORLD BASED ON  
HUMAN UNDERSTANDING, A WORLD  
WHERE THE MASSIVE RESOURCES RELEASED  
FROM MILITARY SPENDING CAN HELP BUILD  
HUMAN PROGRESS AND COMMUNITY.

ALL OF THIS CAME TO US SO  
DRAMATICALLY THIS PAST WEEKEND WHEN  
THE WORLD WATCHED PRESIDENT  
GORBACHEV VISIT OUR COMMUNITY.  
THOUSANDS OF MINNESOTANS — MANY  
WITH CHILDREN — LINED OUR STREETS TO  
SEE AND HONOR THIS REMARKABLE LEADER.  
FOR ALL OF HIS FAULTS , HE IS A LEADER  
WHO CHALLENGED THE HOPELESSNESS OF  
THE OLD HOSTILITIES. DURING THE VISIT,  
MINNESOTANS SHOWED THAT WE VALUE  
HIS VISION AND COURAGE, THAT WE PRAY  
FOR PEACE, FOR UNDERSTANDING, AND FOR  
THAT BROADENED SENSE OF HUMAN

IDENTITY THAT BRINGS US TOGETHER AS  
ONE PEOPLE, INSEPARABLE PARTS OF ONE  
HUMAN RACE.

NO WONDER WE WERE AWED BY  
PRESIDENT GORBACHEV!

IN JUST THE PAST YEAR, WE  
WITNESSED THE END OF A WORLD MY  
GENERATION TOOK FOR GRANTED.  
COMMUNISM HAS COLLAPSED. POVERTY  
AND MISERY IS ETCHED ACROSS THE FACE OF  
THE SOVIET UNION. ITS EXTERNAL EMPIRE IN  
EASTERN EUROPE, AFGHANISTAN, AND  
ELSEWHERE HAS DISINTEGRATED.

EVERYWHERE, THE VOICES OF DEMOCRACY  
CAN BE HEARD — IN THE BALTICS, IN  
EASTERN EUROPE, IN SOUTHERN AFRICA,  
EVEN IN PLACES AS REMOTE FROM OUR  
SHORES AS ALBANIA, MONGOLIA AND  
BURMA .

OF COURSE, IT'S NOT ALL GOOD  
NEWS. WE STILL HAVE A BRUTAL  
COMMUNIST REGIME IN CHINA. (BUT THEN  
A REGIME THAT KILLS HER OWN CHILDREN  
CANNOT SURVIVE.) THE SOVIET COLLAPSE  
HAS CREATED A VACUUM IN CENTRAL  
EUROPE. THESE NATIONS CONTEND WITH  
TERRIBLE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS; SERIOUS

ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS, AND NATIONALISTIC  
CONFLICTS; AND DREADFUL ANTI-SEMITISM  
WHICH HAVE CURSED THAT REGION FOR  
CENTURIES.

BUT, NEVERTHELESS, YOU GRADUATE  
IN AN EXTRAORDINARY TIME WHEN A TRULY  
PEACEFUL WORLD ORDER CAN BE BUILT. WE  
WILL REAP THE ECONOMIC DIVIDENDS OF  
PEACE. BUT, BEFORE WE START LOSING  
OURSELVES IN AN ARGUMENT OVER THE  
DOLLARS WHICH THE NEW PEACE DIVIDEND  
MIGHT BRING, WE SHOULD FOCUS ON WHAT  
HAS ALREADY BEEN WON. AND HERE I  
REFER TO A PEACE DIVIDEND FOR THE

IMAGINATION. YOUR GENERATION IS NOW  
FREE TO RE-IMAGINE AMERICA AND THE  
WORLD IN A WAY THAT MY GENERATION  
NEVER COULD.

IN MANY WAYS, IT IS YOUR  
GENERATION THAT IS ALREADY CHANGING  
THIS WORLD. IN CHINA , IT WAS THE  
STUDENTS WHO DIED FOR FREEDOM IN  
TIANANMEN SQUARE. ALL OVER THE  
WORLD, YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN HAVE  
BEEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE STRUGGLE  
AGAINST DICTATORS. IN HUNGARY, A  
POLITICAL PARTY MADE UP OF YOUNG



PEOPLE ELECTED SEVERAL CANDIDATES TO  
PARLIAMENT THIS SPRING.

AND YOU HAVE MANY ADVANTAGES:

FIRST, YOU HAVE MADE A WISE  
DECISION IN CHOOSING A LIBERAL ARTS  
EDUCATION. IF WE EVER DOUBTED THE  
IMPORTANCE OF THE HUMANITIES TO  
FREEDOM, JUST LOOK AT EASTERN EUROPE!

VACLAV HAVEL [ VACKLAV HOVEL ],  
THE PLAYWRIGHT, LED CZECHOSLOVAKIA TO  
FREE ELECTIONS AND IS NOW ITS FIRST  
PRESIDENT. IN HUNGARY, THE NEW

PRESIDENT, ARPAD GONCZ [ OURPOD GONCH ] , TRANSLATED THE TREASURES OF ENGLISH AND AMERICAN LITERATURE FOR HIS NATION. THE FREE DEMOCRATS OF HUNGARY, ARE LED BY A PHILOSOPHER AND RUN BY A SOCIOLOGIST. A MUSICOLOGIST GOVERNS LITHUANIA. THE POLISH PRIME MINISTER IS A WELL-KNOWN CATHOLIC INTELLECTUAL. AND SOLIDARITY'S LEADER IN PARLIAMENT IS BRANISLAW GEREMEK, A PROFESSOR OF MEDIEVAL HISTORY.

SECOND, WE NOW HAVE THE NECESSARY TECHNICAL SKILLS THAT ARE ALREADY TRANSFORMING OUR WORLD. WE

HAVE SEEN ASTOUNDING TECHNOLOGICAL  
REVOLUTIONS IN TRAVEL AND  
COMMUNICATIONS — WITH TELEVISION,  
SATELLITES, COMPUTERS, FAX MACHINES  
AND CHEAPER TRAVEL. THEY MAKE THIS  
WORLD COMMUNITY POSSIBLE IN A WAY  
HARDLY EVER IMAGINED. WE HAVE  
LITERALLY DEFEATED TIME AND SPACE.  
SOUNDS, WORDS, AND PICTURES CIRCLE THE  
GLOBE IN A FLASH; TRAVEL IS ONLY A BIT  
SLOWER.

THIS WORLD HAS NEVER BEEN MORE  
CLOSELY KNIT — ECONOMICALLY AND  
TECHNOLOGICALLY. BUT THERE IS A

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COMMUNICATION  
FACE-TO-FACE AND BY TELEVISION OR  
COMPUTERS. REAL COMMUNICATION  
DEPENDS UPON HUMAN REASON AND  
HUMAN SYMPATHIES. IT IS AN ART, NOT A  
TECHNOLOGY.

THE EMERGING WORLD COMMUNITY  
CANNOT SIMPLY BE THE OLD LOCAL VILLAGE  
WRIT LARGE. OUR WORLD NEEDS A  
COMMUNITY BASED ON UNIVERSAL,  
EMBRACING PRINCIPLES, NOT ON LOCAL,  
EXCLUDING IDENTITIES. THIS NEW WORLD  
NEEDS YOUR IDEAS.

IF WE'RE NOT CAREFUL, OUR NEW  
WORLD COMMUNITY WILL HAVE A  
DANGEROUS ANONYMITY, A FACELESSNESS, A  
COMMUNITY OF STRANGERS. TO AVOID THIS,  
WE MUST LEARN ABOUT EACH OTHER —  
ABOUT OUR CULTURES, HISTORY,  
GEOGRAPHY, AND LANGUAGES.

WE ARE NOT DOING VERY WELL. WE  
HAVE BEEN CALLED "THE TONGUE-TIED  
AMERICANS" BECAUSE WE DON'T LEARN  
OTHER LANGUAGES. OTHERS SPEAK OUR  
LANGUAGE; WE DON'T SPEAK THEIRS. THE  
SOVIET UNION ALONE HAS MORE TEACHERS

OF ENGLISH THAN WE HAVE STUDENTS OF  
RUSSIAN HERE.

WE ALSO SUFFER FROM AN  
EMBARRASSING RATE OF "GEOGRAPHIC  
ILLITERACY." A RECENT SURVEY TESTED  
ADULTS IN NINE COUNTRIES. WE RANKED  
IN THE BOTTOM THIRD. 75 PERCENT OF US  
COULDN'T FIND THE PERSIAN GULF; ALMOST  
HALF COULDN'T FIND CENTRAL AMERICA.

LESS THAN TWO PERCENT OF OUR  
COLLEGE STUDENTS STUDY ABROAD. WE  
SEND ONLY 24,000 STUDENTS TO STUDY

OVERSEAS EACH YEAR — A SMALLER NUMBER THAN MALAYSIA SENDS HERE TO STUDY.

OF COURSE, THERE IS THE PEACE CORPS, SENATOR HUMPHREY'S WONDERFUL IDEA. UNDER IT, OVER 120,000 VOLUNTEERS HAVE GONE OVERSEAS. IT IS ONE OF OUR MOST SUCCESSFUL INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS. IT'S MOST OVERLOOKED VALUE IS THE TRAINING IT HAS GIVEN TO SO MANY AMERICANS. IT BUILDS PEACE , HELPS PEOPLE, AND EDUCATES OUR LEADERS.

YET THE TOTAL ANNUAL BUDGET FOR THE PEACE CORPS IS ONE-FOURTH THE COST

OF A SINGLE STEALTH BOMBER. THE PEACE  
CORPS ONCE HAD MORE THAN 15,000  
VOLUNTEERS. NOW IT HAS ONLY 6,000.  
ALTHOUGH OUR UNIVERSITY RANKS NEAR  
THE TOP IN GRADUATES ENTERING THE  
PEACE CORPS, ONLY 30 VOLUNTEERS FROM  
OUR UNIVERSITY WERE ACCEPTED THIS YEAR.  
THAT'S PATHETIC! MINNESOTA SHOULD BE  
SENDING 300 — OR, BETTER YET, 3,000 — PEACE  
CORPS VOLUNTEERS EACH YEAR!

THERE IS ALSO THE FULBRIGHT  
EXCHANGE PROGRAM. SINCE 1946, THIS  
PROGRAM HAS HELPED OVER 60,000  
STUDENTS AND TEACHERS GAIN



KNOWLEDGE OF OTHER NATIONS; MORE THAN 100,000 PEOPLE FROM OTHER COUNTRIES HAVE STUDIED AND TAUGHT HERE.

THREE MEMBERS OF POLAND'S SOLIDARITY-LED GOVERNMENT ARE FULBRIGHT ALUMNI. MANY OF THE CHINESE STUDENTS IN TIANANMEN SQUARE WERE RETURNEES FROM STUDY HERE. ONE OF GORBACHEV'S KEY ADVISERS STUDIED AMERICAN HISTORY AS A FULBRIGHT SCHOLAR IN THE LATE 1950S. YET, UNBELIEVABLY, ONE OF OUR GREATEST SUCCESS STORIES HAS HAD A FLAT BUDGET

FOR THE LAST FIVE YEARS — CAUSING A SHARP DECLINE IN THE NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS. LAST YEAR, THE U OF M SENT MORE FULBRIGHT SCHOLARS ABROAD THAN ANY OTHER UNIVERSITY. BUT EVEN THEN, THERE WERE ONLY 21 OF THEM.

WE DON'T HAVE TO GO ABROAD TO COME IN CONTACT WITH THE REST OF THE WORLD. THE WORLD IS RIGHT HERE. THERE ARE MORE THAN 4,000 INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND FACULTY HERE ON THIS CAMPUS; THEY COME FROM 114 DIFFERENT COUNTRIES. ALMOST 800 STUDENTS AND FACULTY ARE FROM CHINA ALONE, THE

LARGEST NUMBER OF ANY UNIVERSITY IN  
THE UNITED STATES. THIS HAS BEEN TRUE  
FOR A DECADE. HOW WELL HAVE WE  
GOTTEN TO KNOW ANY OF THEM?

SOME OF YOU WHO GRADUATE  
TODAY ARE IMMIGRANTS, OR THEIR  
CHILDREN. SOME OF YOU CAME HERE AS  
REFUGEES FROM VIOLENCE AND  
CATASTROPHE.

BUT, IN THE BROADEST SENSE, WE ARE  
ALL IMMIGRANTS. WE KNOW THAT THE WAY  
IN WHICH OUR HUNDREDS OF DIFFERENT  
AMERICAN ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS AND

OTHER COMMUNITIES TREAT EACH OTHER IS  
CRUCIAL TO OUR DEMOCRATIC FUTURE.

WHILE WE SPEAK OF  
STRENGTHENING THE WORLD COMMUNITY,  
THIS MUST MEAN AN EXPANDED SENSE OF  
COMMUNITY AT HOME AS WELL. ELEANOR  
ROOSEVELT ONCE SAID: "WHERE, AFTER ALL,  
DO HUMAN RIGHTS BEGIN? IN SMALL  
PLACES CLOSE TO HOME. . . . SUCH ARE THE  
PLACES WHERE EVERY MAN, WOMAN, AND  
CHILD SEEKS EQUAL JUSTICE, EQUAL  
OPPORTUNITY, EQUAL DIGNITY WITHOUT  
DISCRIMINATION. UNLESS THESE RIGHTS  
HAVE MEANING THERE," SHE SAID, "WE

SHALL LOOK IN VAIN FOR PROGRESS IN THE  
LARGER WORLD."

THAT'S GOOD ADVICE, BECAUSE  
AMERICA IS CHANGING. AND I THINK WE  
ALL KNOW THAT SOME OF THESE CHANGES  
ARE VERY TROUBLING.

OUR SOCIETY HAS GROWING  
DIVISIONS BETWEEN RACES AND BETWEEN  
CLASSES; BETWEEN NEW AMERICANS AND  
OLD AMERICANS; BETWEEN THE HAVE-NOTS  
AND THE HAVE-A-LITTLE'S. WE LIVE IN A TOO  
VIOLENT SOCIETY. A GENERATION OF THE  
YOUNG IS BEING DESTROYED BY DRUGS

WHICH GROW MORE ADDICTIVE AND  
LETHAL. MORE PEOPLE ARE HOMELESS AND  
HOPELESS. TOO FEW AMERICANS ARE  
RECEIVING THE EDUCATION NEEDED TO  
COPE WITH OUR EVER MORE COMPLEX  
WORLD.

WHILE WE ARE STILL CALLING OURS  
A POST-COLD WAR WORLD, SURELY WE  
SHOULD DESCRIBE OUR TIME, NOT AS AN  
EPILOGUE TO AN OLD SAD STORY, BUT A  
PROLOGUE TO A NEW AND HOPEFUL ONE.  
THIS STORY IS YOURS TO WRITE; IT IS YOUR  
CHALLENGE AND IT WILL BE YOUR LIFE. I

PLEAD WITH YOU TO BE A PART OF YOUR  
TIME, MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

AS PRESIDENT HAVEL RECENTLY SAID:  
"THERE ARE STILL MORE DANGEROUS WALLS  
THAN THOSE THAT DIVIDED EUROPE. THOSE  
ARE THE WALLS THAT MUTUALLY DIVIDE  
INDIVIDUAL PEOPLE AND THAT DIVIDE OUR  
SOULS."

I ASK YOU TO HELP DESTROY THOSE  
DANGEROUS WALLS THAT STILL DIVIDE US.

THANK YOU.



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