

Abridged XXX

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 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. 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 A WEEK AGO WHEN THE
WORLD WATCHED PRESIDENT GORBACHEV
VISIT OUR COMMUNITY. THOUSANDS OF
MINNESOTANS — MANY WITH CHILDREN —
LINED OUR STREETS TO SEE 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,
A SINGLE 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. THE SOVIET
UNION'S 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. 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.

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.

BUT 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.

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.

UNBELIEVABLY, THIS GREAT SUCCESS
STORY OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY 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.

BUT 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. 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.

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, TO 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 IN DESTROYING
THOSE DANGEROUS WALLS THAT STILL
DIVIDE US.

THANK YOU.



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