

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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Address of Honorable Cordell Hull  
Secretary of State  
at the Commencement Exercises  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, Michigan  
June 17, 1935, 9:00 A. M.

In addressing this large graduating class, I feel a peculiar sense of responsibility. For the field of endeavor in which fate has placed me - the conduct of this nation's foreign relations - is one which perhaps more than any other must affect the lives of the young men and women now leaving their campus in order to assume a share in the burden of carrying our civilization onward. The vast majority of you will not directly participate in the work of the State Department. Some of you will scarcely realize its existence throughout your lives. Others will come in contact with it or its representatives only as a nuisance requiring you to go through all sorts of so-called red tape to obtain, at a price, a passport to go abroad, to live abroad, and to come home. A few in this last category will find occasion in foreign lands to call upon our diplomatic or consular representatives abroad to lend a helping hand in carrying on legitimate business operations, or in settling difficulties of one kind

kind or another. Another group, entering into academic life as a profession will perchance, in the capacity of historians or teachers of international law or government, have occasion to study in further detail - as many of you have already begun during your student days - the organization and functioning of the Department of State.

A small number among you - and I hope it will be sizeable - will occupy desks in the granite structure at Washington occupied by the State Department and assist in executing and formulating our country's foreign policy, or will hurdle the Foreign Service examinations - and I believe, when you are faced with them, you will agree they are meant only for those of the highest quality. These latter will find in the diplomatic and consular corps careers giving full play to the creative instinct and permitting them to combine service to the United States with an opportunity of acquiring at first hand a knowledge of foreign peoples and governments.

In speaking of my great responsibility in talking to you, however, I am thinking of you not so much as future direct beneficiaries or servants of the State Department, but rather as members of the new generation which, whatever your individual occupations, will be profoundly influenced throughout your lives by what my fellow foreign statesmen and I accomplish at this critical juncture in world affairs. I do not mean to imply that the fate of mankind is in the hands of the tribe of foreign ministers. They are, in the first instance, agents of their peoples and can not run counter to the wills of the nations they represent. What they can and must do is, as far as is humanly possible, to interpret and guide these frequently conflicting and sometimes incompatible wills in ways which will avoid the disaster of war or loss due to economic conflict.

We have passed the lowest depth of our domestic and economic crisis and there are unmistakable and refreshing signs on every hand that recovery despite variations now and then is well under way, but the evidence is overwhelming that the situation in the international field is still deteriorating. If in keeping with this occasion and the facile optimism many believe it calls for, I should make light of these trends and assure you that they hold out no dangers, I should be belittling the seriousness of the situation. I am not among those who think a new world war inevitable, for if there are undeniable forces driving toward war, there are other powerful forces which are striving for peace and I would be the last to proclaim that the latter can not and will not win the day. Nor do

I believe that even a major war abroad should engulf this country; for if there is one thing on which the American people is unanimous today, that thing is its desire and determination to remain at peace with other nations - to help them, wherever possible, in maintaining friendship between themselves, - but when and if this should fail, at least to preserve that friendship ourselves. It is one of the tasks of American statesmanship to do what it can to make that wish and determination a reality. But, even assuming the continuance of peace in this continent, any clash abroad would at best so dislocate the slow progress of recovery here that we could not, in the long run, avoid its disastrous effects, just as neutral and belligerent alike are still agonizing in the aftermath of the World War. I can not, therefore, with a good conscience tell you that as Americans you are immune from *the effects of a possible conflict* by being far removed from its locus, and that you may look without concern on the darkening clouds around the magic circle of the United States.

There is much loose talk today about self-sufficiency, nationalism and reduction of foreign contacts to a minimum. I do not know to what extent these theories have made their advent on your campus, yet I feel certain that the great majority here - and certainly those who in their studies have given thought to the question of international relations - will agree with me that there are but two alternatives facing modern civilization - either we go forward to other greater achievements of material and spiritual culture with a concomitant growth of every kind of material and spiritual interchange within each nation and as between nations, or we must recognize that our culture has reached its apex and is entering into definite decline and decay. In the latter case - and in that case only - every manner of relationship built up in preceding centuries will become loosened and dissolved and nations will again achieve "self-sufficiency" -, the self-sufficiency of barbarism and savagery. This last picture is an extreme, but the directions, to my mind, are clear. And the possibility of a return to the dark ages in some form is not, I think, historically excluded. Human history has known such cycles before. Civilizations have been born, have grown, flowered, declined and ultimately disappeared except insofar as they were absorbed in later cultures. I need not remind you of the rise and fall of past civilizations of Egypt, of Crete, of Babylon, or of Phoenicia. The Western world that we know was itself an offspring of the Dark Ages which followed the disruption of the greatest of

previous civilizations, that of the Roman Empire. Out of this period of travail there evolved a rebirth of deep moral and spiritual values, a basic idealism which blossomed anew and was the foundation on which our ancestors built our own civilization. I refuse to believe, however, that it is necessary to go through the abyss again in order that our high ideals may be revived and restored; rather, it should be possible without backsliding to advance from this point on and carry our civilization to even greater heights.

We also learn from history that in any epoch of stress and readjustment a small minority of the total population of the world, usually not more than two or three nations at a time, bears aloft the torch of leadership. If such a nation loses the unflinching purpose to lead, if it is content to rest on past achievement, if it expects others to assume its burden, then it does not merely remain static but a definite period of retrogression sets in. It is not an idle boast when I declare to you that our country, under the guidance and direction of our forebears, has been holding high that torch of leadership. They built up our national civilization on the basis of integrity and hardihood, on the basis of individual initiative coupled with give and take for the common good. Throughout the decades there was a driving force that led them inexorably toward their goal, a vision which never let them falter. Hardships were merely obstacles to be overcome. Today, with increasing comforts and opportunities for indolence and ease, there is a danger that we may forget the sacrifices and exertions of the earlier generations. Instead of the physical obstacles that were overcome by our ancestors, we are faced today with a new series of political, social, economic, and moral problems which it is our task to solve without sacrificing either the traditions or the fundamentals of our great democracy.

Throughout the entire world we have been witnessing since the war a growth of distrust in established beliefs and institutions, a disregard of traditional criteria of conduct, and, along with an anarchic rejection of accepted standards, a profound search for new thought forms and ways of living.

Such departures from the past are nothing new; indeed they may be nothing more than the natural stages of evolutionary process. The perennial tendency of each passing generation is to doubt the wisdom of the new ways in which the succeeding generation is seeking to meet its individual problems. But when, as at present, new theories are presented all over the globe with such vigor and persuasion

as to enlist the sometimes reasoned, more often fanatical, loyalty of millions, and when such mass movements far from losing momentum with the passage of time actually reach the point of attempting to execute their ideals, then we are face to face with one of those critical moments of history in which the human race has reached a crossroads. As I look back through time, I can find few periods to compare with ours in the depth of its contradictions.

Consider for a moment the crisis in what we have come to associate with the term "democracy". Through the past century, the principles of democracy had spread so far that only a few years ago they could be considered the dominant trait of our era. Yet the democratic idea has of late been challenged in one country after another and several great peoples have seen fit to cast it aside entirely, as undesirable for themselves in favor of new systems of ideas which they consider superior. First, you have the challenge of communism, involving a frank advocacy of class dictatorship as a means for achieving a social ideal; subsequently, other systems established themselves in a number of countries, each characterized by a conscious rejection of democracy in principle and fact; until today we see four outstanding and rival systems of government struggling for the supremacy of their political philosophy.

In the face of such divergent, but vigorous, attempts in other countries to remould our western civilization, it is natural that we should be reviewing here the various aspects of democracy. I have noticed in recent years a wide-spread questioning among our people, and particularly among the younger generation, not with regard to the foundations of democracy itself--God forbid that we should ever lose the faith in Government by the people and for the people--but with regard to some of its more superficial aspects which have been mistakenly taken for integral elements.

In place of stampeding away from the fundamentals of democracy for no better reason than the obsolescence of certain of the methods of its application, our best minds are engaging in a serious effort toward preserving its substance. What I wish to emphasize today, however, is that the self-analysis which is proceeding within the camp of democracy itself, is peculiarly a call to the mind and heart of the young generation. It is an exciting adventure to be crossing, as you are, the threshold between two eras at an age when your minds are still open and your reasons and emotions still adaptable; to assist in the choice of our future course is a task which should fire your imaginations and call forth the best that is in you; and the

prospect of living to see the answer to the great question of where our civilization is going is a privilege for which your elders may well envy you.

The building of our future life in America is, necessarily in the first instance a task for domestic action. Yet, from all I have said, it is clear that our best efforts are bound to come to naught if the pacific competition between the divergent economic and political systems now wooing the allegiance of mankind should seek a solution through the arbitrament of arms, or, even if it stops short of war, should follow methods which create and preserve illwill or hamper the natural flow of trade so vital to recovery. It is not possible to cloister a nation's foreign policy away from its domestic life. That policy is an essential part of the national being. It is not merely a protector from foreign encroachment and a promoter of interests abroad; it stands as a beacon in the world for the particular type of culture it represents. To a large extent, one nation judges another by its foreign policies.

Just what ultimate modifications in our own foreign policy may emerge from the gradual restatement of democracy which we are now undertaking, I would not be rash enough to predict. From the very nature of international relationships, it is clear that we are not sole masters of the forms they will take, dependent as they are, on the inter-action of our own desires with those of other countries. I believe, however, that from a brief outline of certain major aspects of our foreign relationships, I may be able to indicate to you certain tendencies. Let me emphasize, however, that the present Administration has not broken with any of the basic policies which are the traditions of American democracy. It has merely added here and filed off there and has reinterpreted its principles and practices in harmony with the general modulation of our national thoughts. More particularly, it has had to bear in mind, and continues ceaselessly to bear in mind, that general deterioration in the international situation to which I have already referred.

It is natural, in view of this last factor, that virtually every major element in our foreign policy is directly or indirectly connected with two central objectives of which I spoke at the beginning, namely, to assist in the prevention of war and to insure that, in any event, the United States shall not be involved in war short of having to defend itself against direct aggression.

Before

Before modern students, there is no need to emphasize the importance of economic and trade rivalry as the causation of war. In fact, it is sometimes claimed by critics who hold other views that this factor may have been overstressed in recent years. Be that as it may, the present Administration is devoting much effort toward stemming the tide of economic nationalism with its accompanying disastrous throttling of international trade. It is endeavoring, through a series of trade negotiations, authorized by an amendment to the Tariff Act of 1930, to reverse the process of building ever higher tariff walls and of imposing sundry trade restrictions, and by mutual concessions to stimulate anew the flow of an international exchange of goods and services beneficial to each participant. To date, trade agreements reducing tariffs on a wide variety of articles, have been signed with five States and negotiations are being carried on with some dozen additional countries. It is my hope that in time a network of such agreements will stimulate our trade with countries scattered over the whole globe, and through the example they set to others induce them to conclude similar treaties among themselves, thus breaking the log jam behind which trade and production have been dammed and which is responsible for a larger proportion of world unemployment than the mere percentage of foreign to domestic trade would, at first glance, indicate. The guiding principle of this effort, and one which alone can prevent our modern industrial and commercial civilization from deterioration is equality in trade in its rights and in its opportunities.

In the political as opposed to the economic field, I should like to touch by way of example on just a few of our direct relations with foreign nations, for in these the spirit of the Administration's foreign policy has found its most concrete embodiment - the spirit which President Roosevelt has defined as that of the "good neighbor". The term is a general one, but it has a well-defined meaning and content as was clearly indicated at the recent Conference of American States at Montevideo, at which I had the honor to represent the United States. The American delegation went to this Conference determined to consider every question raised, not only without bias or prejudice, but with an appreciation of the several points of view represented by the other twenty nations in attendance there. The result of this sympathetic approach was to add impetus to a shift in public opinion throughout Latin America that is one of the most remarkable in recent years. The people of Latin America had come to look upon the United States with a certain suspicion, at times verging on bitterness. They lived in apparent fear of further territorial expansion by the United States, or of intermeddling in their domestic affairs. The

reassurance given them by the President in his inaugural message was heightened by the attitude of the American delegation at Montevideo and particularly the acceptance by this Government of the resolution providing that "No state has the right to intervene in the internal or external affairs of another". This declaration creates a precedent which, in my belief, will never be abandoned.

Hand in hand with the development of our friendly relations with individual nations has gone our effort to assist, without sacrificing traditional principles against political entanglements, in the building and strengthening of a cooperative system of pacific settlement of disputes and security against aggression.

In the field of armaments we have played a leading role in the long and thus far discouraging effort to bring about a limitation and reduction of instruments of war. We have advocated the abolition of weapons peculiarly suited to destroying fortifications, with a view to increasing security by strengthening the power of defense, as compared with the power of attack. We have pressed for the conclusion of a treaty controlling the manufacture of, and trade in, arms and implements of war. We have stood for the extension of the Washington and London Naval Treaties which expire next year, or if this is not possible of their basic principles and provisions. We have proposed the conclusion of a clear and simple pact of non-aggression, which cuts through a maze of technicalities and singles out as a criterion of aggression the sending of armed forces of whatsoever nature across a nation's frontiers. We have expressed our willingness to consult with other States in case of a threat to peace with a view to averting conflict. We have in practice associated ourselves with the League of Nations consultative procedure both in connection with the Sino-Japanese dispute over Manchuria and the Peruvian-Colombian dispute over Leticia. I could go on reciting other evidences of our constructive efforts - but it is less the efforts themselves, than their underlying purpose, that I am trying to outline to you today.

That these efforts have not given the results we hoped for is due in large measure to the suicidal race in armaments going on throughout the world. Each increase in armament has been met by a further increase, till today the vicious circle is virtually paralyzing all opportunity for permanent productive or creative work. Nations are rapidly bankrupting themselves in this race, and the toll it exacts in national resources is second only to the losses sustained in war. A return to the atmosphere of peace and stability, a return to international sanity,

requires