

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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Good day, and welcome to the great, big, beautiful outside world. It is great and big, certainly, and it can be beautiful. That is pretty much up to you.

Undoubtedly you look with some trepidation, bordering on panic, at the prospect of facing the job market in a time of an uncertain economy. But few of you are likely to take the advice of a well-meaning humorist friend of mine who told a college graduating class a couple of years ago:

Don't! Don't leave these cloistered halls. Don't go out there. It is horrible out there. Stay here. Keep on studying. Play dead. Do anything but don't leave.

Some of you may take that advice, but for reasons other than fear -- indeed, to better prepare yourself for what's out there. For all of you, though, this is a day not for worry and concern for the future, but a day of celebration of accomplishment.

It has become customary to bring in an outside speaker for the happy occasion -- and you may think that this is for your benefit, to let you know that the congratulations you are receiving from family, friends and your professors are shared by the outside world.

Actually, the commencement speaker is there for the

benefit of the older generation. It is our celebration of congratulations to ourselves. For here we pass the baton -- which is a sneaky way of saying that we unload on you all the problems that WE inherited and didn't solve, and the additional problems we have created. So we say:

"Congratulations! It is all yours! See what you can make of it."

To brighten up the day, let's review just some of the problems we are unloading on you.

The litany starts with a disorganized (to say the least!) economy, a political system that fails to excite the public with the candidates it produces, an industrial plant so decrepit as to be unable to compete in the world markets (and, in many cases, managers of matching capabilities), an appalling transportation network; an educational body that turns out functional illiterates, an overburdened welfare system that barely nurtures the stomach and does nothing for the spirit, lagging social justice and equal opportunity, a medical system moving increasingly beyond the reach of the average man, an entire population sinking into solipsism -- a philosophy of "get mine and the devil take the hindmost."

And to deal with all those complex issues, communication media, particularly television, that far too often are far too superficial.

Those are just some of our little problems. There are

some even bigger problems with which unless you -- and we -- come to grips right now, civilization as we know it cannot survive.

These megaproblems are our modern Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. They are riding down upon us, scythes at the ready, and, unless we succeed in unhorsing them, all is lost.

They are: The population explosion, pollution, the depletion of natural resources (including food and energy), and atomic proliferation. It is hardly necessary to expand on these items for a group of Michigan graduates -- you know that the world population will double by the time you are fifty and will almost double again by the time you sit here to watch your grandchildren graduate; and almost 90 percent of that growth will be in the already poor, starving, underdeveloped lands.

You know that our blind devotion to immediate profit instead of future security continues to poison the water we drink and the air we breathe and threatens the entire food chain at its source.

You know that, because of mismanagement, we are running out of fuel and arable land and dozens of vital minerals and metals.

You know that experts count a score of nations on the threshold of nuclear energy, and its by-products of bomb-grade material. Hanging heavily over us is the thought of

atomic bombs in the hands of the Khadaffis and Khomeinis of our world.

These are problems that will not wait much longer for solution. Among the more pessimistic of our scientists there is the gloomy assessment that we already may have passed the point of no return on one or all of them.

Well, I should think that is a proposition that at least you would want to test.

The reason that there is an international malaise today, a great international funk that afflicts all people in all societies, is our inability to get a handle on these problems. The improving standard of living which most of the world has enjoyed since World War II has not satisfied our souls because of an awareness of the threats of imminent destruction -- a feeling that things are not quite right, a certainty that things could be a great deal better.

And the feeling is nurtured by the knowledge that man has the tools to do the job; a frustration that comes of having the tools in our hands but not being able to figure out how to use them for the benefit of all mankind.

In your lifetimes, certainly in the lifetimes of your parents, this world has almost simultaneously plunged into five eras, any one of which alone would qualify as an entire age of man: the atomic age, the computer age, the space age, the petro-chemical age, the telecommunications age. Together they comprise a technological revolution perhaps greater in

its impact than the industrial revolution of the last century. And there is evidence that we are living through it just as blind to its social, economic and political impact as did our grandfathers through the industrial revolution.

The very invention and development of these devices of the technological revolution give proof of man's intellectual capabilities. Can we really believe that he is incapable of applying equal brain power to solving the great problems?

Can we believe that the beleaguered peoples of the world will long be tolerant of those who possess the tools but who can't make them work for the good of men everywhere?

There is going to be, in the wake of the technological revolution, a social and political and economic evolution, coming with such explosive suddenness as to have the character of revolution.

The revolutionary forces already are at work today, and they have man's dreams on their side. It is up to us -- to you -- to get into the leadership of that revolution.

To do that we've first got to put our own house in order.

There is a growing feeling, and mounting evidence, too, that government doesn't work very well anymore; that it is

unwieldy and not very competent; that it is ill-equipped to handle many of the more critical problems the nation will face in coming years.

Ways must be found for government to cope with the vast technological changes taking place today, to anticipate new problems and to safeguard the health and interests of the people. Three Mile Island and Love Canal are all the arguments any sane society should need for that proposition.

You will need to look hard at Congress and its procedures. For, if the government is to be updated, brought up to speed, some way must be found to make the legislative branch more efficient, more responsible and more knowledgeable.

The Presidency also needs careful examination -- especially the way we pick our presidents. You should ask yourselves whether the talents and qualities that get a man elected have anything to do with those needed to run the country -- whether the current process selects the best man for the job.

The relationships between the branches of government also desperately need review. You will hardly be able to afford the kind of paralysis that so often seems to afflict government today, just when the need for effective action is most urgent.

You should also re-examine the relationship between government and industry to see if there is not a more

efficient and productive way of ordering the nation's economy. However you do it, you are going to have to get the country's economy moving again and competing effectively in the international marketplace.

You are going to have to develop a system for managing this nation's resources, while there still are resources worth managing.

You will have to devise a means of coping with the growing problem of immigration to this country from other nations whose borders are spilling over with excess people. That could provide one of the great policy challenges of your generation.

An even greater test is likely to be in finding ways to meet our problems while at the same time making sure individual liberty has room enough to breathe.

And you will have to look beyond our borders. Our house cannot be in order unless affairs abroad are as well.

So far, the international community seems unable to find ways to make the engines of progress work equally for all mankind.

And the approach of many developing countries to those global problems symbolized by the Four Horsemen has been anything but enlightened. Typically, they argue that pollution controls hold back their development; efforts to contain nuclear proliferation are conspiracies to maintain a military

status quo; suggestions that poor countries spend more on food and less on expensive military hardware, draw similar responses; and population control is seen as a form of racism.

But if the so-called North-South negotiations to reform the world economy have been marred by overreaching and posturing on the part of the poor, they also have been harmed by indifference on the part of the rich -- by the impression that many affluent countries merely have been going through the motions. We have been too ready to plead hardship and to give up the effort as impractical -- beyond our means. That is a short-sighted response. For helping that poor majority of the world is very much in our own interest.

In the straightened conditions this planet faces, it seems unlikely that freedom can endure easily for very long among an affluent ten percent or less of the world's population. We are going to need converts to the cause of freedom if it is to endure. Freedom must be a growth-industry. And converts will not come from nations bulging with people so hungry they cannot think or work efficiently. And they will not come from countries with illiteracy rates of 70 and 80 and 90 percent.

Thomas Jefferson once wrote, "The disease of liberty is catching." It was not one of his better metaphors. Liberty is not a virus. It requires special conditions -- the satisfaction of basic needs, such as food and shelter, some sense of physical security, at least a modicum of hope. It also requires a certain level of cultural development



and literacy if it is to function efficiently. Jefferson was closer to the mark when he warned that "if a nation expects to be ignorant and free, it expects what never was and never will be."

We need the Third World. We need its peoples as allies, we need its cooperation in tackling those global problems such as population and pollution, which threaten rich and poor alike. We need, too, perhaps more than anything else, the ennobling self-satisfaction that we have done our best to bestow the dignity God intended on every human being.

We must recognize that the natural aspirations of people long-depressed, for whatever reason, are likely to take on a revolutionary aura. We should not quaver terrified in front of such development, but, instead, seek to use our own once universally-admired revolutionary heritage as a guideline to extending a helping hand to the emerging peoples.

If, instead, we turn our backs on them and insist on preserving the status quo, we shall drive them into the arms of those whose claims to revolutionary leadership are based on false doctrine and phoney promises. Liberty and freedom can't be imposed by helicopter gunships.

All this does not mean that we should be apologetic about our own success, or timid in our leadership, or suicidal in our generosity. Our first duty, to ourselves and to humanity's future, will be to preserve those beach-heads of liberty which we and our friends already hold. To

that end, we must strive to make America as self-sufficient and self-reliant as is humanly possible. We need badly to strengthen the foundations of our own economy. We need to modernize much of our industrial plant, and we probably will have to spend more on capital goods and less on social programs to do so. We must reduce our dependence on foreign oil and other resources, insofar as that is possible. And, above all, we must restructure our defense establishment -- waste must be eliminated and weapon procurement rationalized so that it no longer consumes 30 percent of our budget, absorbs from a third to a half of all of our scientific talent, and consumes forty-six cents out of every dollar available for investment in the American economy.

Yes, some adjustments and re-ordering, some modernization of our economy are in order, but the past history of this great nation of ours should give us confidence that the capitalist society can do the job. And with a strong economy we should, while exercising prudent caution, not cringe before a system and an ideology whose weaknesses should be transparent.

Our great strength, the winning margin in this titanic struggle for leadership of the revolution, is in our economic well-being and the principles of our own American Revolution. That is the idea which I think must order this country's agenda for the '80s and beyond. Our own values and traditions urge upon us a special mission in this world to help and to lead the inevitable social, political and economic evolution which our magnificent technological revolution forces upon us, our interests demand that we assume that leadership.

The principles of the American Revolution -- Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness -- still are goals to be achieved in much of the world, still are REVOLUTIONARY ideas in much of the world. There is no reason for us to be timid in our unwavering support of them. It is the legacy we owe to freedom, and therein lies the key to leadership and the last best hope of mankind.

In the course of the 20th Century, America has grown up, or, we hope it has. We have turned in some spectacular performances economically, militarily, in science and technology. We have added enormously to man's store of knowledge, and to his reach. We have begun the exploration of space, which may prove the great agenda for the 21st Century.

We also have learned the lesson, paid the price, particularly in Vietnam, for arrogance and the careless exercise of power; and we have learned, as well, the futility of cringing from its responsibilities. We have sinned and we have come of age. We have learned that we are neither omnipotent nor omniscient. Now, to apply those lessons.

In sum, your task will be to make American work again, to overhaul the system, discarding defective or outmoded parts and restoring those that still serve. You will be rebuilding, even redesigning, America to preserve what it always has been and must remain -- a nation of free men, an example to all men; in Lincoln's phrase, "the last best hope of earth."

The task sounds gargantuan. But don't despair. You, of all people, are up to it.

You have survived one of the more formidable intellectual obstacle courses in the world. You have made it all the way through the American educational system without apparent brain damage, and you have even managed to get an education.

You are graduates today of an eminent institution which has turned out its share of the nation's moral, intellectual and political leadership. You become the upholders of a fine tradition. You march behind an honored banner.

The challenges ahead of you are immense, but the greater the challenge, the sweeter the taste of victory. It is not a time for the fainthearted. Marshal your courage and your convictions. Pick up your cudgels and man (and woman) the barricades -- seize, with joyous enthusiasm, the opportunity to carry on the fight that inspired your revolutionary forefathers on this continent -- the dream of a world of liberty and justice for all.

It is in your power to make your revolution a model to live, as did that other revolution, for two hundred years.

Good luck, God-speed -- for the good of us all.

T H E E N D