Some Important Parallels

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Some Important Parallels

It is a pleasure to be with you today for this significant student convocation and I am deeply grateful to the Chief Justice and to the members of the Honor Court for this opportunity. Northwestern State College wisely, I think, sets aside this period in its annual college calendar to emphasize the importance of the work of your Honor Court in student leadership and achievement and thereby recognizes the merit of the purposes to which you Honor Court is dedicated. Promotion of higher standards of citizenship on your campus, maintenance of a code of honor among the students in the college, and the administration of justice through your student-sponsored judicial tribunal are meaningful objectives of concern to you during your college days. They also have their parallels in values and responsibilities which you will inevitably carry with you beyond the borders of this campus. It is fitting that the College should recognize and reward honor and achievement. Shakespeare's dictum comes to mind. He wrote: "If it be a sin to covet honor, I am the most offensive soul alive." Let us always honor the best. Let us not be like the grouchy New Yorker who sent his son to what he considered the best of colleges - Harvard. The young man worked hard and tried to excel in his studies. He succeeded beyond expectations so that when he came home at the end of the first year, he proudly announced to his parents that he stood next to the head of his class. "Next to the head of your class", exclaimed his father, "what do you mean, next to the head of your class?" "Why aren't you at the head? What in thunder do you think I am sending you to college for?" This discouraged the son a bit, but he nevertheless returned to college with renewed determination and worked so hard that he won the coveted honor - he stood at the top of his class. He won a medal at the Honors Convocation and all the way home he imagined how delighted his father would be.
When he broke the good news, the old gentleman looked at him a moment; then shook his head sadly and remarked: "At the head of your class - so? Well, I must say that is a fine commentary on academic standards at Harvard University." I trust we will never discount individual achievement to that degree.

Organizational achievement in student government merits recognition as it is of considerable value in shaping the quality of future citizenship. A participation in his student government brings the college student face to face with the more important aspects of the difficulties inherent in governing in a democracy; it means that the student begins to appreciate the complexity of our free society. In practice, the student is already learning the meaning of pressure, how to work under it and how to resist it when it is exerted for improper ends. The student learns that the minority exerts a power and an influence making the task of the leader more difficult and constituting a constant challenge to his ability to lead. He learns what it means to have the blessing of free speech which he enjoys used against him by those who fight the objectives for which he strives; he learns a basic rule of democratic living - that those who prescribe rules must themselves abide by them. These are valuable lessons having their parallels and application in later life.

At Northwestern State College, your education must look to the whole man and must aim to produce the good man, the good citizen and the useful man. A wise balance is imperative between the intellectual disciplines of the classroom and the other human values all of which combine to produce in the college graduate a leader who has the poise, firmness, integration and a philosophy of giving and taking in our society which is daily becoming more complex.

I have said that there are parallels to the objectives and purposes of your Honor Court existing in current problems you must soon face as citizens. May I briefly comment upon several of the parallels I have in mind? They are of vital importance
to all of us as American citizens. In American life today, there is great need for higher standards of citizenship and constant re-dedication to its responsibilities. Too many Americans take their citizenship and its privileges for granted. I wish such citizens might see some of the camps for displaced persons in the cauldron of misery in unhappy Europe and see the light of hope that burns in the eyes of any displaced person who even merely contemplates a bare possibility of achieving the coveted status of citizenship in the land of promise and opportunity they know as the United States. Veterans in this audience who have served beyond the continental limits have seen this and well understand of what I am speaking. Yet do we value our citizenship?

Some time ago, I chanced across an address delivered before the National Municipal League, an organization devoted to improving the processes of government. The speaker was the former Governor of New Jersey, Mr. Charles S. Edison. He pointed out that America need have no fear for the cause of freedom, individual liberty and dignity if it will put its house of citizenship in order. We have a heritage of success which should banish fear and give us confidence in an era of fear and uncertainty. Why the apathy, asks Mr. Edison, when forty-three million of our citizens eligible to vote did not even take the trouble to go to the polls in the recent presidential election? Edison finds the answer in a conviction on the part of millions of our fellow Americans that there is too much political double-talk in public life today and there is too much of a political double standard. Platforms of the major political parties reflect standards in marked variance with actual administration under a system in which party hacks and political bosses must be reckoned with on a basis quite different from the lofty sentiments expressed by the major political parties. This is, indeed, a stinging indictment; but consideration of the contemporary scene reveals that it is not far beyond the mark. The remedy,
according to Mr. Wilson, is to cast out seven deadly sins of public life. These sins
first, indifference. Too many citizens saying, "I am not interested." Secondly, there is laziness. Too many citizens taking the attitude, "I don't care." And, third, there is a form of cowardice. Citizens often in high places in business, labor, industry, in finance or in the professions, taking the position that while they cannot individually subscribe to the governmental policy or contemplated action, they cannot afford to take a position on the matter for personal reasons. We have all heard this many times. Next, there is greed and all of the group selfishness that it engenders, and a perverted form of loyalty to political parties, and party leaders or to false labels inviting a renewal of sectional divisions in our Nation. There is also false pride that leads many Americans to say "I'm too good for politics. Politics is dirty business and we must stay out of it." This philosophy of leaving politics to the professional politician means non-participation in Government by many of our strongest and most able leaders who might contribute much to public affairs. Finally, there is a cynicism that quickly merges into a kind of defeatism; here we see problems avoided with the dictum "I agree upon the necessity for correction but nothing can be done about it." In these sins of citizenship which we encounter everywhere, in ourselves and in our fellow Americans, there is as great, if not a greater threat to our security, than that of force or political idealogies threatening us from beyond our borders. Emphasis, therefore, that your Honor Court places upon good citizenship on this campus and facing up to your responsibilities is well taken. One may do well to mention nine promises of a good citizen, promulgated by the Seattle Municipal News, quoted also by Mr. Edison. The promises are:

"1. I will, vote at all elections. I will inform myself on candidates and issues and will use my greatest influence to see that honest and capable officials are elected. I will accept public office when I can serve my community or my country thereby.

"2. I will serve on a jury when asked."
"3. I will respect and obey the laws. I will assist public officials in preventing crime and the courts in giving evidence.

"4. I will pay my taxes understandingly (if not cheerfully)

"5. I will work for peace but will dutifully accept my responsibilities in time of war and will respect the flag.

"6. In thought, expression and action, at home, at school and in all my contacts, I will avoid any group prejudice, based on class, race, or religion.

"7. I will support our system of free public education by doing everything I can to improve the schools in my own community.

"8. I will try to make my community a better place in which to live.

"9. I will practice and teach the principles of good citizenship right in my own home."

When you, as students, strive to promote higher standards of citizenship as members of your campus community, I suggest that you keep constantly before you the parallel; the need of similar emphasis upon more general acceptance of citizenship responsibilities throughout America and that you strive through such practical means as these suggestions to make a strong America stronger.

A second parallel to which relates to your objective of maintaining a code of honor among the students. Here, the parallel is on an international plane. It is one which poses for us all the greatest problem of our age and time. It is the broad question of whether a group of nations working together even as citizens in a single politically organized society can succeed in developing and maintaining a code or tradition of honor under which international agreements will be respected with honor as a part of a program designed to make secure the peace, and by securing respect for treaty obligations, usher in an era of progress such as the world has not known up to now. World War II, in historical retrospect, was in large measure the outgrowth of our inability to maintain a code of honor among nations. Treaties were scraps of
paper. Renunciation of war and outlawing of aggression by solemn treaties, including the Small Sacrifice of Paris, were a promise that need not be kept. An effective policy of "stop the aggressors" developed faltering in our fear of war. The Western World would not run the risks that maintenance of a Code of Honor by decisive and early action would entail. The will to resist became effective too late to avert the final catastrophe of war. Aggressor nations experimented gingerly at first with single violations. When the aggressors became firmly convinced that regardless of the degree of international immorality reflected in violating an international Code of Honor by territorial aggressions; when aggressors became convinced that the powers advocating the respect for treaty obligations would (or at least it was a good gamble that they might) not take the field to stop aggression, they gambled then with the peace of the world at stake. The loss was humanity's and the world's. We are still fighting the war in uneasy peace. The kind of international code of honor to which I am referring requires observance not only by those who would violate international law by aggression, but requires, as well, observance, high purpose, and the assumption of no little risk by those who are charged with the solemn responsibility of preserving the peace and security and of stopping aggression before it becomes effective in the application of divide and conquer. Only firmness in a policy of resistance, backed by the force to make that resistance effective, may result in leading the future aggressors not into the paths of temptation. It is a policy that will make known the intentions of the policemen in advance to the would-be violators of the law. I use the word "may" advisedly because no one can foresee what the exact result will be. For Americans and the Western World, this means that the Atlantic Pact must become part of our international code of honor. It must be ratified by the Senate of the United States. Further, we must cooperate in making the defensive alliance effective regardless of costs and despite the risks that must
be entailed. We must chart our course if we are to avoid the major errors of indecision and lack of purpose which made World War II a dread reality. The firmness of an Atlantic Pact may well avert such compromise to an international code of honor as we saw in the Munich Pact, which only paved the way to war and which, if repeated, with other aggressors, may pave the way to atomic war and final disaster. There are, of course, Americans of marked intelligence and high purposes who would not agree with these assertions. There are those who bask in a lassitude of nostalgia for the good old days. They do not openly advocate a return to isolationism because that particular label has become unpopular, but they assert that we must beware of a surrender of sovereignty inherent in making the treaty commitments most likely to be effective in the world-wide present day gamble to preserve the peace. We Americans, in the strength of our leadership, and our present world responsibility, must beware of those prophets of an easy road to peace who would direct us again along the path of isolationism. In our antipathy to regimentation, to governmental controls and in our distaste for mobilization in time of peace we must not make the mistake of failing to recognize that paradoxically we must become a garrison state to make secure the freedoms which we cherish. Action along distasteful paths may soon be required if we as a nation are to maintain the Code of Honor to which we are committed. Conversely the exact nature of our material commitments must be constantly re-examined. We can no more pursue indefinitely a policy of spending our way to peace than we can afford to cast aside the mantle of our world leadership. It has become an historic mission of our nation to lead in the struggle for a stable world, to champion the cause of the freedom and dignity of the individual and to preserve the human values of our western civilization. Our new internationalism bind us to these high purposes. It is a part of our code of honor and however grim the prospects may seem to eventual success short of war, war is not inevitable and an united, resolute and resourceful
people dedicated to a recognition of their international obligations in these crucial
times, may, despite temporary frustrations incident to a cold war, achieve that peace,
security, and freedom for which the world yearns.

A great American has recently put his finger on the crucial point for the benefit
of the American public. Bernard Baruch in a recent article relates that at the close
of World War I he called upon an ailing Woodrow Wilson to tell him that ratification
of the Treaty of Versailles might be obtained if he would consent to modification of
the obligations assumed in Article 10 of the Covenant of the League of Nations which
bound the signers to "respect and preserve as against external aggression the
territorial integrity and existing political independence" of all League Members.

Baruch states that President Wilson snapped: "Article Ten is the heart of the League.
This proposal is nullification, not a reservation. If I should accept it, I'd be
false to every young man who lies dead in Flanders."

History testified to the correctness of this judgment and the crucial point is
that we must recognize that in the event of aggression, we will inevitably be compelled
to resist even by means of war. This is the reality of our present position.

A third parallel I would mention concerns administration of justice. Your Honor
Court has had initiation to this problem in your student-sponsored judicial tribunal.
In the international field, any regime of peace and security must be based on law.
A law which will have sanctions and adequate machinery for its enforcement. This will
call for a renewed determination in the administration of international justice.
Already in the war crimes trials, the future path of a rapidly developing field in
international penal law is being charted. In fact, the development of the substantive
international law, in its major content, tends to outdistance our enforcement
machinery. This is a problem which is a challenge to statesmen and leaders who seek
to develop adequate sanctions for a truly effective system of international penal law that will be subject to enforcement in the time of peace. Here again there will when the Senate considers shortly come before our Government certain treaties in the field of international penal law and human rights proposed by the United Nations, the grave question of the extent to which we are willing morally to commit ourselves to a system of international penal law in time of peace; a system carrying with it treaty obligations becoming supreme law of the land, for affirmative action to make the treaty effective by implementing measures. Are we as a nation devoted to the ideal of an administration of international justice to this degree? There is no easy or certain answer to the problems raised in such consideration. There are those who assert that international agreements, embodying the principle of individual penal responsibility even as applied to the crime of race extermination or "genocide", may have in them the means of making a stronger central government in opposition to traditional constitutional concepts under a dual government of delegated and reserved powers such as ours. Yet, we have embarked far upon this course which is only a logical extension of principles for which we were advocates and leaders in the establishment of the Nuremberg Charter and in the enactment of the statutes upon which their jurisdiction was based.

But my plea is for the maintenance of the open mind which, the open mind in the quest for justice on an international plane, will face the problems of a new international order with courage and confidence - a confidence in our ability in common with the law abiding nations of the world to work out those means of vindicating human rights in time of peace which may spell human progress without violation of principles inherent in the constitutional system we cherish. I should hate to have America proclaim it cannot be done.

If, in these parallels, I have opened vistas of issues which your generation and mine must, in these times, face up to, I do so mindful that somehow you will manage to meet them, as indeed, they constitute a part of immeasurable responsibility that is the heritage of our leadership and of our power as a nation.