

A MEMORANDUM FOR RIGHT LIVING

offered to the Graduating Class
of Gould Academy, Bethel, Maine
at their Commencement Exercises
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Sixty-four members of the 1974 Gould Academy graduating class have asked me to say a few words of greeting, of encouragement, and of warning, as they leave academia and enter the teetering, treacherous adult world called western civilization.

I am glad to comply with this request because it will enable me, through this class, to address some of the twenty million high school and college students in the United States and perhaps a few of the young people in the capitalist segment of present-day human society.

You graduates are entering adult life in a nation and a world caught in the crunch of a deep and widening economic, political, social and moral crisis. The society built up by western man during the past ten centuries is at the same time breaking down and breaking up. The full impact of this general social crisis will be felt during your entire adult lives.

Americans born as you were, between 1950 and 1960, should have a life span of around 70 years. That life span should carry graduates of your class and of your generation to 2020-2030 A.D. That period will probably witness the dissolution of capitalist society to a point at which it will no longer be a viable social system anywhere on our planet. Speaking sociologically (if you stay in the United States) you will probably live most or all of your adult lives in a dying society.

The United States of America, richest and most powerful among western nations, is passing through the early stages of a general social crisis marked by five million unemployed among its 80 million gainfully employables. The percentage of unemployment among American youth is nearly twice as great as it is among all American employables. Widespread unemployment means for you graduates a growing difficulty in finding congenial, meaningful life careers.

Our general social crisis involves social and economic insecurity, a break-up of normal family life, a rising crime rate, a sharp increase of suicides, particularly among young people. It includes government by rival gangs of law-breaking lawyers, led by our elected representatives and financed by big business money.

The general social crisis is not confined to the United States. It exists throughout western civilization. It is expressed in the instability of governments, in inflation, in two general wars in one generation (1914 and 1945) and extensive preparation for a third general war, which may be fought with nuclear weapons.

This assumption is based on a careful study which I have been making of western society during the 73 years since I graduated from high school — in 1901.

Immediately after the second general war, nearly half the human race threw off the yoke of the chief empires and in the name of self-determination, organized sovereign states and took the thorny path to self-government. Currently they are known as the Third World.

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During the same period, socialist-communist governments emerged, -- the first in Soviet Russia, after 1917. After 1943 socialist governments multiplied, especially in Asia and East Europe. Today about one-third of the human family lives in countries dedicated to the construction, first, of socialism and ultimately, of communism.

The general social crisis through which the western world is passing is the logical and probable result of the competitive struggle for pelf and power among individuals and among nations which has occupied western man during the past five centuries - from 1450 to 1974. It is the tangled, twisted, inter-dependent social chaos which we incompetent, irresponsible adults are passing on to your generation. It is to our eternal shame that we have not found a way to avoid economic instability and social insecurity, and to build a society patterned on justice, mercy, love and right living.

With this confession of our failure, we pass the current crisis of the western world on to you. It is your challenge; your opportunity.

We Americans, old and young, face a common problem: we must learn to govern ourselves, -- locally and planet-wide. We must govern ourselves as a nation. We must govern ourselves as a human family.

Our forebears approached the national problem two centuries ago in the preamble to the Constitution of 1789: "We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

What do these words mean in June 1974? They mean that we as a nation of 205 million people should take the steps necessary to establish justice, order and social decency in this country.

Specifically:

We must own, preserve and conserve our natural heritage -- the land of the United States, and its resources.

We must own, plan and manage our national economy to ensure our general welfare.

We must provide all necessary public services at local, state and national levels.

We must take our place and play our part as a member of the family of nations.

Planet-wide, as a human family, we must conserve and improve the earth, its resources and its inhabitants.

We must own, plan and manage our planetary economy.

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We must provide and develop all necessary public services at the planetary level, and for the general good.

We must formulate and enact world law and preserve world order.

As a member of the family of nations we should help in writing a preamble to the Constitution of a Federated World. The preamble of this Constitution should read: "We, the people of the Federated Nations, in order to establish and maintain fraternity, cooperation, order, decency, self-respect and peace among the nations and peoples of the earth, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the Federated Nations."

At the outset, this Constitution should declare: "All persons born or naturalized in any of the Federated Nations are citizens of the Federated Nations and of the nation in which they reside." As citizens of each nation, and as citizens of the Earth, they must learn to govern themselves.

These things we must do as soon as possible. The situation is critical. The time is short. We must act for our own well-being and for that of our children's children.

Some of your elders may wag their heads and repeat the time-worn admonition: "Let well enough alone. We never had it so good. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

You graduates should not be deceived. This is only a side-step. It is their confession of their failure to lay the foundation for a good life for the people of the United States and for the human family on this earth.

A great economic, political and social revolution surfaced about two hundred years ago. It has turned human society upside down during the past two centuries and has put in your hands the implements, agencies and institutions necessary to make the Earth a useful and beautiful homeland for the human family. As you graduates reach adulthood, the possibility of effective self-government passes into your hands.

If you will, you can learn to govern yourselves. You, as citizens of North America and citizens of the world, can join hands to make the Planet Earth a fit and fine home for mankind and for the many other forms of life which inhabit it.

This graduating class is a part and a potentially meaningful part of the total picture. Do not be satisfied with any "lesser evil" or any "second best". Demand only the best, and struggle valiantly until you have won it.

Observe, analyze, think, decide, resolve, organize, act. In your generation, you can build a world which will exalt and ennoble man and prepare humanity to play its part as planners and builders of the good life universal.