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COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

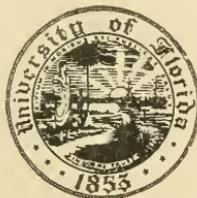
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FOREWORD

THE HONORABLE GEORGE COUPER GIBBS, who delivered the commencement address at the University of Florida on July 20, 1940, is the Attorney-General of the State of Florida. Prior to his appointment to the Attorney-Generalship, he served for many years as Circuit Judge of the Fourth Judicial Circuit of the State of Florida. As practicing attorney, Circuit Judge, and Attorney-General, Mr. Gibbs is widely known and greatly admired by persons both in and out of his profession.

Mr. Gibbs is a native Floridian. He holds the degree of Bachelor of Laws from Washington and Lee University. He is a member of the Jacksonville Bar Association, the Florida Bar Association, and the American Bar Association. He is a war veteran, a civic leader, and a patriot.

THE CHALLENGE OF TODAY'S CRISIS

ORDINARY TIMES would call for the usual platitudes, the usual hopes for your future in an ordinary world where your especial learning might be developed along the lines of your previous study.

Life would be pictured to you as a great opportunity for the development of your talents toward the upbuilding of man. And as you were usefully conducting yourself so would thousands of others be doing likewise and the world would be advancing as God means it to advance.

Alas! You reap what others have sown. And you are entering upon your life's work at a time when your energy and every talent that you have must be spent in the preservation for us, for yourselves, and for posterity, of that liberty so dearly bought by the founding fathers of our nation and so preserved through the years as to become something which we have felt was like the air which we breathe.

Having been given the opportunity of dictating a peace which would have safeguarded this liberty not only for ourselves but for all the world, we neglected miserably our opportunity and in the years since have so carelessly and selfishly conducted ourselves as to bring about a catastrophe which threatens to overwhelm us.

The threat today to our liberties is so great that every lover of freedom must unite devotedly in his country's defense.

The lights in some other countries may temporarily have gone out. In this they must ever remain alight that man may not lose hope in his destiny.

President Roosevelt, in, probably, the most important of all graduating addresses this year, told those gathered at the University of Virginia, in Charlottesville, on the day Italy joined forces with the Germans:

"Every generation of young men and women in America has questions to ask the world. Most of the time they are simple but nevertheless difficult questions of work to do, opportunities to find, ambitions to satisfy.

"But every now and again in the history of the Republic a different kind of question presents itself—a question which asks, not about the future of an individual or even of a generation, but about the future of the country, the future of the American people. "There was such a time at the beginning of our history as a Nation. Young people asked themselves in those days what lay ahead not for themselves, but for the new United States. "There was such a time again in the seemingly endless years of the War Between the States. Young men and young women on both sides of the line asked themselves not what trade or professions they would enter, what lives they would make, but what was to become of the country they had known.

"There is such a time again today. Again today the young men and the young women of America ask themselves with earnestness and with deep concern this same question: 'What is to become of the country we know?'

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"Now they ask it with even greater anxiety than before. They ask not only what the future holds for the Republic, but what the future holds for all peoples and all nations that have been living under democratic forms of government—under the free institutions of a free people."

Is the philosophy of force directed by the self-appointed few, under the guise of "the new order" to supplant what they call the "decadent" philosophy which supports that freedom which we now enjoy? If so, the condition of the peoples of Czecho-Slovakia, Poland, Norway, The Netherlands, Belgium, France, Esthonia, Latvia, and Lithuania is the answer—You will do whatever you are told to do by the men of force.

I am sorry and I am glad that you are to be given an opportunity not afforded many classes in the past. Sorry because you will have to suffer, but glad that out of that suffering will be awakened in you a strength and a spirit which I believe to lie deep in the soul of every lover of freedom—that spirit which animated our forefathers.

In the desperate strait in which England is now placed we have seen daily evidences of the resolve of its people to resist the invader to the limit of their ability.

Said Lord Churchill quite recently, coincidentally upon the day we celebrate the proclamation of our Declaration of Independence:

"This is not a time for doubts or weaknesses. This is the supreme hour to which we are called."

Said Mr. Priestley, the distinguished English author, in discussing lately the future of England's children:

"Rather than submit to their enslavement, we would prefer our children to die with us in the defense of liberty."

Abigail Adams, after the signing of that great American document, received from her husband John a letter:

"* * You will think me transported with enthusiasm, but I am not. I am well aware of the toil and blood and treasure that it will cost to maintain this Declaration and support and defend these States. Yet, through all the gloom, I can see rays of ravishing light and glory. I can see that the end is more than worth all the means. And that posterity will triumph in that day's transactions, even although we should rue it, which I trust God we shall not."

So wrote John Adams, a patriot unafraid, who, with his fellow signers, was willing to risk death itself that liberty should live.

Defiantly did John Hancock affix his signature in script so large that King George might read it "without his spectacles." Said he because of this the reward now upon my head of £500 may be doubled.

After seven years of toil, blood and expenditure of treasure, emerged the thirteen colonies, their independence acknowledged by the Mother Country, their treasuries empty, their debts considerable, and their internal and inter-colony disputes and difficulties apparently beyond solution. But here again was manifested that spirit in men, great as it had been in the willing-

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ness to die for their country, even greater in their willingness to live for it. And from their earnest, self-sacrificing devotion was brought about a unity under that other great document, the Constitution of the United States.

Once before, in comparatively recent times, there was a threat to our liberties by that same philosophy, though under different leadership and on foreign field we helped to stay for a while this threat.

It was a War to end Wars. Great men sought to put into effect a system whereby the various nations of the World would meet at a common council table that their problems might be solved, their grievances redressed, and harmony and good will prevail. Where the difficulty was such as to demand a judicial determination then there was to be a World Court, to which, under the fairest conditions, both nations were to come, each to present its case. The decisions of this parliament of nations and this great court were to be upheld by all the Nations.

It was a plan which, I believe, if adhered to, would have made impossible what has come to pass. I spent a while in Geneva some years ago and saw being erected that handsome structure which was to ultimately house the representatives of the nations, and at The Hague I was present when the World Court, sitting in the Peace Palace, rendered its decision in the case brought by Norway against Denmark, in which was involved the ownership of Greenland. The Court consisted of nine, I believe, regular judges who came from different parts of the world, and several additional judges who sat at each end of the long bench. It was opened by an English clerk, with the simple formula familiar in all English-speaking jurisdictions, "Court is now open." The decree was read, in French, by the Japanese chief justice. It was a solemn proceeding. Similar proceedings are so potent to the peace of the World. Content to abide by the just decision of this Court, not a drop of blood was spilled nor a tear shed. There were no refugees, no homes destroyed, no starvation, no suffering, and there was a satisfaction in feeling that after consideration had been given to every contention, the result was in accordance with justice as far as the same was humanly possible.

Under such a system there wouldn't have been any serious difficulty in the practical carrying out of the Fourteen Points, the harmonizing of differences, and, with the security it would guarantee, a vast impetus would be given to the development of the arts of peace.

It is not often that the Dream of the Centuries came so near to actual accomplishment. That such dream did come so near accomplishment was because of us. That it was shattered was largely due to us.

Though I know there were men of different opinion, who succeeded in imposing their will upon the nation, I am firmly convinced that had we aided fully by representation in the League of Nations and the World Court and doing our full duty in clearing up afterward the unsettled conditions, our example would have led to every other nation entering the League and made it and the World Court strong centers of that moral and spiritual force which would have dominated the affairs of men everywhere, preserving to them individual rights and safety, and permitting them to *attain*, not merely *pursue*, happiness.

But a petty selfishness, an exaggerated emphasis upon our local well-being apart from the general good, a misconception of the words of Washington, who received gladly the aid of the French in times of stress, a selfishness which was in such sharp contrast to our willingness to give our all only a few short months before, kept us out of both. Unbalanced, with only a por-

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tion of the nations of the World taking part, the fate of these two great instrumentalities for peace was certain. Nation after nation withdrew and with their withdrawal the influence of the League and the Court diminished to the vanishing point.

There was the Treaty of Locarno, and the signatories to this Treaty were the nations now involved and others not yet swept into the Inferno, but we have numberless pictures of broken treaties, and this was no exception to the number.

The treatment of the conquered nations was anything but that which would have brought about a better or kindlier feeling toward the victors. Though self-evident that they could not comply with some of the terms and would not with others, no sufficient effort was made to relieve the former and enforce the latter.

The consequences of these failures of the nations to join the League and the Court, were evident. Ethiopia followed Manchukuo and then China. By thrift, self-denial, a "gun-instead-of-butter policy," a daring seizure of every opportunity occasioned by the weakness of the smaller nation, one of the so-called "conquered" nations placed itself in the position to and did seize territory and peoples at its will overturning not only the governments of such territories, but also the ways of living of its peoples. The totalitarian states, over whom reigned dictators with powers greater than any king, had arrived.

And all this time, the democratic nations, knowing from past experience how lightly was to be regarded the word of their former foe, permitted itself to be satisfied with paper assurances, when acts contrary to such assurances were being carried out, until the time came when they were powerless to enforce the treaty, even if they had cared to do so.

There has ever been in the heart of the American people a desire for peace and this desire we believe to be that of the great masses of the world. To this end disarmament conferences, economic conferences, and various meetings of representatives of different nations have been held. But all the time when certain others were speaking fairly, they were preparing against this day while we stood idly by until we are in our present condition of unpreparedness to meet the only argument which is considered by force—force itself.

However misguided and illusioned we may have been, however complacent may have been our reception of the benefits of our free institutions, however conscientious may have been our prosecution of our ideas for peace, we have been rudely awakened to the fact that mechanized man is about to destroy us and that liberty we have so thoughtlessly enjoyed.

I worked as a young man for a lawyer of the old school. Colonel Cockrell, who was not only an able lawyer, but a man of sound common sense. "Nothing," said he, "ever stops. We are either going up or going down. Don't think too much of the past. Just find out what is the next best step and go ahead."

Well I am talking to a select group. You and your teachers, from the knowledge which you have, belong to that group to which the masses, who have not been so blessed, have a right to turn in their hour of need for leadership.

What have you to give them to strengthen their morale and make them satisfied to bear the suffering and self-sacrifice that they may be called upon to bear and to bear it with a high faith and courage which will make them able to unite and defeat not only offensive acts, but likewise offensive ideas?

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You know, as said by Judge Burch, of the Supreme Court of Kansas: "Man has risen through stages of savagery, and then through stages of barbarity to a stage worthy to be called civilized. The process has been one of gradual, unhurried growth and development through patient ages of time, interrupted, however, by retrogressions, periods of arrested development, and frequent extinction of whole races of men."

You also know that great steps in the onward and upward march of civilization have not been taken rapidly, however speedily recent events have shown steps could be taken in the other direction. Thought has been added to thought, experiment to experiment, until finally, success has come. Education of the right sort has been necessary to achieve such success.

Because of the combination of the spiritual and material values of democracy, I like the remarks of Lord Baldwin in his address last August to the Congress of Democracy convening in New York:

"No student of history can have any doubt but that democracy is far the most difficult form of government that has ever existed. In a totalitarian State the citizen has only to do as he is told; he has not to think, to make a choice; no direct responsibility rests on him. The machine is effective so long as he obeys. The success of a democracy depends upon every one realizing his or her responsibility to it; thinking of his duties and forgetting for a time his rights. If he recognizes no duties toward the form of government to which he is ready enough to pay lip service and to shout for, the day may come when he will lose his rights by dangers from without or within. That calls for education and character; education in problems domestic and foreign so as to have material wherewith to form a judgment, and character to concentrate on the essential and to look beyond the immediate effect of particular action on the fortunes of the favorite politician. "A democrat should work for and be prepared to die for his democratic ideals, as the Nazis and Communists are for theirs. And he will never work for it, much less die for it, unless he is convinced that democracy is capable of making a country worthy of his ideals, and if that democrat be of British stock, making a country worthy of his spiritual ideals. He may not recognize easily those ideals, he certainly cannot easily express them, but the Bible reading of his ancestors has left so deep a mark upon him that subconsciously he can never embrace a cause that grips his whole being unless he feels in his bones that it is morally right.

"Believing this, I would always stress the spiritual rather than the political foundations of democracy. It is a recognition of the dignity of man and of his individuality, and that dignity and individuality are his as a child of God. There is the unbridgeable gulf between the democracy and the isms that are for the time being in control of so large a part of Europe. If that be our conviction, with what different eyes we regard our work! Each individual man becomes a human soul with his life to live, and you feel that no work is too hard, no drudgery too dull, if you can do your little bit to make your country a place in which the environment will help him to that end.

"Differences and honest differences as to how that end is to be accomplished there will be, but with the common purpose there should be a deep national unity. That is a unity of divine purpose, springing from the people themselves, not imposed, and therefore in time of strain infinitely more binding.

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"People thus inspired will be more disposed to recognize their duties. Every free human institution, if it is to be preserved, needs its watch dogs, and no institution more than a democratic government."

We must see to it that this nation truly exemplifies the highest ideals. The constant effort of the citizen should be to the end that for all men there should be that government which will, insure their safety, security and liberty, within the law. Do not let the great words of our Bill of Rights be mere words, but live them daily.

Here is a definition appearing in the General Report of the Seminar on "What is Democracy?" Congress on Education for Democracy, held in New York, in August, 1939: "Democracy is a way of life and social organization which above all others is sensitive to the dignity and worth of the individual human personality, affirming the fundamental moral and political equality of all men and recognizing no barriers of race, religion, or circumstance."

In order to be vigilant in the preservation of liberty, there must be impressed upon the consciousness of the masses a realization that liberty and freedom are not only privileges which are to be desired, but that they are privileges which may be forever lost. But in our zeal to preserve the fruits of liberty, we must not resort to the methods of a Totalitarian State.

There are now forces at work in this country seeking to render the people dissatisfied with our Constitution and with our system of government. These forces are now waging a war against our country not with bullets, but with propaganda. This insidious alien propaganda seeks to instill in the citizenry a belief in the doctrines of Fascism and Communism which are very antitheses of the doctrines of Democracy.

If we are to preserve our free institutions, these forces must not be allowed to get a foothold in our country. Every conquest of a nation by force has been preceded by a flood of insidious propaganda designed to weaken the government internally, and by creating dissatisfaction and disunion among its people, to lower its resistance when force is applied. The bloodless conquest of Austria and Czecho-Slovakia could never have been possible had it not been preceded by a barrage of systematically planned and carefully applied propaganda.

How can we best prevent the growth of organizations and creeds seeking to undermine our form of government? Passing laws against them will not complete the job. Nearly always the real purpose of these organizations is hidden behind a screen upon which is written principles and purposes which are truly American. The true objectives are attempted to be concealed from all but those who are thought to be receptive, until such time as chances for success will not be jeopardized by a revelation of the true purpose.

In Germany, I understand, it is a criminal offense to tune in a radio on other than German radio stations. We could pass laws forbidding people to listen to speeches or read literature designed to breed discontent with our form of government, but in doing so we would be adopting the methods of dictators and destroying that which we desire so much to preserve—liberty and freedom.

Essentially the problem is one of education. The United States is the most wonderful land in all the World. We have a government in which the fewest possible restraints are placed upon the individual. He is given every protection from injustice at the hand of the government

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or at the hand of his fellow-man. The individual is given the opportunity to enjoy the widest possible personal freedom. No other form of government can do as much for Americans as a Democratic government, and this realization must be indelibly written into the consciousness of the American people. If the agents of foreign lands attempt to show us why their government is better than ours, the people to whom such arguments are addressed, should be able to retaliate with convincing arguments as to why the American form of government is better for us than that now existing in any other country. I use the word "us" advisedly because the method which is best suited for the people of other lands is their problem, and not ours. It is not our place to say that a government such as ours is the best for all the countries of Europe. The freedom which has been the birthright of citizens of this country has not been enjoyed by Europe's millions. In many European countries the people have for centuries been ruled by autocracies and oligarchies, under which the common people were oppressed and denied the right of self government and self expression. Freedom such as ours they have never known or learned to expect, and it may be, as has often been said, that they would not know how to enjoy such freedom were it given them. But the people who settled this country were people who desired freedom above all else. Had this not been so, they would not have left the land of their forefathers to settle in a barren and unexplored country.

Those people of our country who have had the good fortune to have traveled abroad and observed the people of foreign lands and the temperament and viewpoint of those people, should take the time and trouble to tell others of what they observed there. We should all learn as much as we possibly can concerning the form of government of other nations. *When the truth is known, the cause of Democracy has been won.* When the truth is fully known by the people of this country, there will have been built up within them an immunity to propoganda and a natural resistance to, and hatred of, Communism, Fascism and all the other alien "isms," which immunity cannot be affected by an avalanche of catch phrases from the mouth of a silver-tongued orator preaching the doctrines of the dictators. When the fundamental principles of Democracy are so understood and loved by our people that the organized work of foreign agents has no more effect than water on a duck's back, then, and then only, will Democracy be safe.

Teach the people the true meaning and intent of that way of life which means the distribution of the greatest good to the greatest number of people, of that government which is one of the people, by the people and for the people. From history recall to them the acts of the founders. Let them understand that under such a form of government, notwithstanding failures in the past, the power is with them to make democracy work. Rouse them from their indifference and lethargy and make them actively useful in the passage and enforcement of righteous laws, providing for a fair distribution of the burdens and of the privileges. Endeavor to remove the cause of injustices, no matter how small. Seek to bring about harmony in the neighborhood. Forego in an endeavor to reach a conclusion your pride of opinion and look at the question from your neighbor's point of view. Reason with him in friendly fashion. Show him his error, if he is in error, patiently.

Vigilantly guard all that comes within your power which serves to defend your country and let no fear or maudlin sentiment prevent you from speedily reporting any suspicious circumstances or character to the proper authorities.

The forces of evil are abroad to create class feeling, prejudice, fear, and disunion among

the people and to injure and destroy materially our means of defense. The saboteur is in the plant, or aboard the ship, or among you. He is not clothed in the habiliments of the devil and he cannot from outside appearances be distinguished from the mass of his fellows, but he is the forerunner, the advance guard of the destroyer of our liberties, and he would leave the pillars of the temple of liberty in the condition that the termite leaves the wood which it enters, in such a state of weakness as to destroy the building.

We have so recently had in the Youth Congress an exhibition of that lack of knowledge of the very thing which would alone make possible the social welfare features of their recommendations. First, we must have peace—a peace which is honorable. Then we must seek to make that peace lasting. When we have peace, we may develop and strengthen such peace by international economic adjustments. At home, while not abandoning now the advances we have made in social welfare, we can further develop these to the end that there may be no ground for just complaint.

What is important now, is that we must defend to the uttermost those institutions which will make possible that welfare which is best for all the people.

There is something in which we have failed, although we are constantly reminded of it from the pulpit and by passing events; that is, giving to the spiritual its just and proper due. To be spiritually minded is life, to be carnally minded is death. So spoke St. Paul and so have spoken louder than any words events which have proven this to be true. After reaching greater height materially than ever before in the World's history, we are on the brink of the precipice about to plunge into the valley of chaos. Our material Frankenstein is about to destroy us.

Shall a policy of indifference, a refusal to realize our obligations and responsibilities destroy us?

Or, rather, shall we turn again, face facts as they are, and, in true penitence, pray Our Father that He will forgive our trespasses, grant that we may overcome our spiritual inertia, and through the Spirit become alive again and able to perform our obligations and responsibilities to Him, to our country, and to our fellowman.

Said the prophet Micah many centuries ago (Micah 6: 6-8) :

“Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?

“Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? “HE HATH SHOWED THEE, O MAN, WHAT IS GOOD; AND WHAT DOTHTHE LORD REQUIRE OF THEE, BUT TO DO *JUSTLY* AND TO LOVE *MERCY*, AND TO WALK *HUMBLY* WITH THY GOD.”

This and the Royal Law to love the Lord Thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself, the following of the precepts of the Savior of Mankind who, when on earth went about doing good, would bring about that righteousness with which would come the peace of God, which passeth all understanding.

Men scoff and say that religion, by which I mean that doctrine which teaches men to observe these things, is an opium, as do some of the Communists, or that it is too soft as did the

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Emperor Julian and the followers of the German Dictator, who are better satisfied with Wars and Woden, and even we sorrowfully admit that we fall far short of practising Christian principles.

Over our Capitol flies the flag of our Country. The Capitol is located on a hill and the flag over the dome is high above the heads of those who are in Tallahassee on business or pleasure. It can be seen from afar. Sometimes its background is the deep blue of the cloudless sky and again that background is the dark and ominous thunder cloud. It seems more brilliant and arresting under the latter than the former. Bravely it floats a symbol of all that is best in our country. It bids us take courage, remembering the past and how we have lived through storms as violent as that which overshadows us, and charges us to have that faith which John Adams had to see through all the gloom, rays of ravishing light and glory.

For steadfast in our purpose with a loyalty and devotion commensurate to the danger, we will go forward into a new world, a glorious world, where not only ourselves but all men everywhere will see the light and following it will attain that security, freedom, and happiness, which will only be surpassed by that place in which, having done our duty here, we expect to spend eternity.

