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COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

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The Major Premise

Life is marked by a succession of crises, after each of which we must set about making new adjustments. Each of you must now face a new task. You go out not only as economic units, more or less effective, but as citizens in a democratic republic, whose political structure is an experiment still in the making, an experiment whose fullest success is hindered by want of adequate leadership. Your own individual citizenship is to have great influence. If you are slothful, neglectful, or unintelligent in your contact with the problems of politics, you connive at the destruction of the state. If you feel that the duty of citizenship is comprehended in the obligation to defend the state by arms in time of war, you will make an effective contribution toward bringing on the state of things which produce war. However the appeal may be most effectively made to you, whether through your intelligence, through your ethical standards, or through your pocketbooks, let me warn you that if you would insure your income and your life, if you would assure your happiness and comfort, you will give intelligent and courageous attention to the problems which confront us.
We are living in a shaken and disillusioned world. I wish I had the power to carry your minds back to those glowing days of moral and political enthusiasm, when men spoke with conviction of a war to end war, of a world safe for democracy, of the right of peoples to choose their own way of life through self-determination, of a world organized for peace and justice, for freedom and the right. Those were great and thrilling phrases, in great and thrilling days. But now they lie in ashes. Every great nation has heard its leaders declare that the war did not pay, that its costs exceeded its gains, that its tragedies blasted the hopes of happiness it roused, that its accompanying disorder opened the avenues to moral disintegration.

Foreign Minister Briand has said, “In modern war there is no victor. Defeat reaches out its heavy hand to the uttermost corners of the earth, and lays its burdens upon victor and vanquished alike.” And Winston Spencer Churchill wrote, “Victory was to be bought so dear as to be almost indistinguishable from defeat. It was not to give security even to the victors.”

In that jaded and disillusioned atmosphere, we have wandered without a policy. This absence of policy is wonderfully summed up by a national official, who remarked that the American policy should be one of isolation. The late war, he said, brought us no fruits, and we should therefore return to the policy we had pursued theretofore. He went on to say that if again a crisis should arise in Europe, and the world should be aflame, of course the United States would join again in the struggle. The difficulty with that statement as an exposition of policy is that it argues in a circle. We will abstain from effective influence upon policy until the moment of crisis and disaster. Then we will again pursue a course of action which is described as having been futile. Where is light and leading in such a proposal? It lacks any great unifying principle to give it either coherence or direction.

If we are to make an effective impact upon problems of citizenship, there must be some great hypothesis upon which we can build. There must be a major premise as the foundation for our reasoning. I want to suggest to you that this should be our major premise—that the modern world as we have inherited it, and as it is now being shaped, and as you have been trained to live in it, is founded upon the assumption of peace, and that unless that assumption can be supported, the civilization founded upon it, the work you are prepared to do, the lives you plan to live, must be profoundly altered, and may even be destroyed.

The world through most of its history has based its life upon the assumption of war. The very structure of its daily life revealed the fact. Men carried arms as a matter of habit. Its social organization was a defensive structure and social customs looked to protection against encompassing enemies. Its political structure was based upon the idea that war was inevi-
table, and often war was regarded as the principal duty of the state. The houses men built, the cities in which they lived, even whole countries, sometimes, were walled, and watchmen kept ceaseless vigil against the foe. Their industries, their commerce, their agriculture all reflected the overwhelming fact that life and war were inseparable.

The structure of society demonstrated the presumption of war. Our remote ancestors were organized by tribe or clan. Such were the primitive evidences that man must look to kith and kin for protection. The feudal system with its hierarchy of allegiances was designed for the protection of the individual and for effective aggressive action against the foe. The free man was the fighting man. Bearing arms was the test and badge of freedom. The fabric of its society was complicated, but it was crude. Knots marred its beauty, but added to its toughness. It was organized on the assumption of war, and was calculated to withstand the stresses and strains of conflict.

Take note of the changes in social structure. In the modern world, the fabric of society has been woven anew. Since the “emancipation” of woman in the last quarter century, the individual is the single strand. So the knots have disappeared, and there is a new fineness in the social fabric. Hierarchies and special privileges have slowly disappeared and the result is a new evenness of democratic texture. But as the tribal and feudal knots have gone, as society’s threads have been spun finer and finer, tighter and tighter, its fabric has become more fragile. This process, which adds to the beauty and charm of social life, can have no basis save the assumption that society need no longer be patterned in the expectation that it must stand the stress of war.

As with society, so with domestic politics. The major premise has been altered. As the genius of Sparta was martial, so the spirit of America is civil. As the medieval world based even its domestic politics upon war, the modern world bases its assumptions upon peace. Read the Declaration of Independence for its bold defense of the civil ideal. George III was denounced because he “affected to render the military independent of and superior to the civil power.” Look to the Virginia Bill of Rights and the first amendments of the Federal Constitution for classic emphasis upon the intention to found in this hemisphere a civil, not a military, state. Read the debates of the Convention of 1787—discussions as to separation of powers, and checks and balances—to see the settled and studied purpose to build a political structure with peace as its philosophy. Experience has demonstrated again and again that war destroys the essential balance of our constitution. It gives the executive more than its share of power. War puts stresses upon the bill of rights which defeat its essential purpose.

The genius of democracy itself is peace. Democracy represents the ideal of individual and
social self-control; it is based upon the readiness to command one's own fortunes and destinies. Its obedience is to the voice of common counsel. War requires obedience to external command, obedience without question or criticism, discipline without inquiry or reason, decision without deliberation. Democracy represents internal authority, war, external authority. For this reason, war is always a setback to democracy, it is a breeder of dictatorships, of chauvinists, of intolerance—to all of which the democratic ideal is antiethical. Our political structure, therefore, is based upon the assumption of peace, and the failure to support that assumption imperils the very essence of our political idea.

Industry has been reorganized upon a vulnerable basis. In the old order, industry was scattered among homes. Its machinery and tools were, for the most part homemade. They were difficult for an enemy to find and destroy, and if destroyed, could be repaired or remade in the home. Manufacture, under that system, was a slow process, and the product was often crude. But it was a tough industrial structure, and could stand war.

The industrial revolution changed all that. Machines have been concentrated in factories, easily destroyed. They are operated with power, of which the dynamiting of a dam or a railroad may readily deprive them. The machines themselves have been made complicated, and further refined, until they have become more sensitive and delicate than the human fingers, more rapid and complicated than the operative's thought itself. But every refinement has made for vulnerability. The instruments upon which we have become dependent are delicate in the extreme. Some require months and years to build, but their destruction is simple and instantaneous.

Does not the grouping of manufacturing in vulnerable positions, does not the use of marvellously organized but delicate machinery demonstrate that the structure of modern industry rests upon peace and order as its major premise? Aggregations of capital are so great that idleness of the plant produces great financial strain, often disaster, not only to the company, but to the employees and their creditors as well. The industrial revolution represents a transition from the assumption of war to the expectation and necessity of security.

The changes in our home life represent a like change of fundamental presumptions. We have built no Chinese wall to separate us from Canada or Mexico. Our cities are not walled against invaders. Our homes are not fortresses or castles, or even the blockhouses of our pioneer forefathers. We depend for our water upon distant sources of supply, reminiscent of the aqueducts which the Romans built in centers where peace was thought to be entirely assured. There is not even a hint of exaggeration in the assertion that in the planning and construction of the modern city, the homes and offices which compose it, absolutely no thought is given to
its defensibility. It is easy of attack through the air, and strategically located damage with modern weapons may be entirely disastrous. There is no rational basis upon which we can continue to construct ever larger and larger centers of destructible wealth, upon ever more and more vulnerable lines, save upon the assumption that war with its growing inclusiveness and its enlarging destructiveness cannot come near them.

In older days, commerce did not exist upon the modern basis. Goods were locally produced and consumed. There were trade routes in the medieval world, but chiefly for luxuries. The necessities of life were close contained, so that in time of war subsistence could be maintained. We went through that era in American life. The frontiersman fed himself, clothed himself, was little dependent upon others. The trapper, the hunter, the fur-trader found a difficult, but simple, outlet. So grew a theory of self-sufficiency, of general competence, of individual omniscience, which took possession of our politics when Andrew Jackson came to the White House. When the sections began to produce surpluses, Henry Clay and others sponsored the idea of an American system, with sections virtually complementary and interdependent. The bitterness of spirit toward Europe, the fear of European abuse of American commerce because Europe was warlike (it had been in all the childhood of the United States) were reflected in an emphasis upon a domestic organ-

ization of commerce, upon self-dependence rather than ties with Europe, upon drawing South America into our sphere of interest and influence for trade as well as politics, upon setting up this hemisphere apart from Europe, upon a new presumption of peace. From a sectional to a national market was but a step.

Now the market is a world market, and we bring the food we eat thousands of miles. We levy tribute on three continents for an ordinary day's food. The adjustment is so fine, transport is so prompt, the organization is so effective, that we seem further from want than ever before. For individual omniscience, we have substituted democratic interdependence. The principle of the division of labor has been applied in so great a variety of ways as to make interdependence the most conspicuous fact of modern life. But the assumption upon which this organization of commerce and industry is founded is not only local peace, but world-wide peace. While there is social, industrial, and political peace, starvation is further away from the individual than ever before in history. But if war comes, even the nation with greatest resources feels the effect of sugar rationing, "gasless Sundays," and many other hints of the dire distress brought upon people less fortunately located, or longer involved in the strife. The terrible dislocation of prices which has altered our whole standard of values further illustrates the point.

The lines of communication which are the
arteries of industry and commerce, while vital, are easily cut. They may appropriately be compared to the spider's web in intricacy and delicacy. The submarine, itself a feeble instrument and a vulnerable one, gave Britain, in the course of the World War, adequate reason to understand how tenuous are the strands which bind her to food supply and the raw materials for her factories.

Finance has gone through the same transition. Credit has become international. Public and private organizations in Europe owe over fifteen billions to public and private agencies in the United States. Nearly two billion dollars were loaned abroad last year. Some of these credits have more than a half century to run. The listing of foreign securities on the New York Stock Exchange involves cutting new channels for the exchange of credit and capital. The recent action of the Federal Reserve Board with reference to international trade acceptances opens the way for yet greater acceleration in the volume of international obligations. These things facilitate commerce and industry; they advance prosperity, but always upon the assumption of peace, always in the expectation that the bases of the credits shall survive and remain solvent. The sensitiveness of the foreign exchange market to rumors of misunderstanding or war demonstrates the importance of peace as the guaranty of stability in the tremendous financial structure. To send your capital abroad expecting it to be destroyed would be a folly.

The only theory which can explain the process is one which makes peace, and the security incident to peace, its major premise.

This unity of interest, this interplay of harmonious forces, and this new sensitiveness, of which I have been speaking, are reflected in the field of communication. When life was local, news was local. We sometimes get our reasoning backward and think that modern invention created the market for news. The integrated world created the market, which modern invention has furnished the means of supplying. The use of news naturally increased the demand, and stimulated new sources of supply. The fact that the Battle of New Orleans was fought two weeks after peace was agreed upon is evidence enough of the need for news in the old world with its faulty methods of communication. But today local intelligence has become general intelligence. If an ex-judge in Denver coins a phrase and a school girl in Kansas City seizes upon it, the consequences become the gossip of anation avid for news. In that sort of world the individual may readily become a cinder in the public eye, causing irritation entirely out of proportion to his size or value, befogging the world's vision and leading it, through momentary blindness, to accident and disaster. The chauvinism of a nation's leader, the tactlessness of a diplomatic officer, unwisdom on the part of a man in power, may become the source of irritation and strife. On the other hand, a great leader may have the
whole world for his forum, and the force of his ideas may be felt around the globe.

I have been emphasizing the tendency for national boundaries to disappear in the economic organization of the modern world, the growth of interdependence of man upon man, group upon group, region upon region, and the increase in integration and delicacy of adjustment. That process goes forward today at an ever accelerating rate, making interdependence ever more complete, integration ever more delicate, and the whole, therefore, ever more easily thrown out of order if subjected to the stress of war.

The rude workmen who set Stonehenge in place wrought a mighty work whose majesty time dignifies, but the finely chiseled marble of a Phidias, the delicately wrought traceries of a Cellini, or the gossamer strands of pointe lace, by their very beauty are the more perishable. Our civilization is so wrought, and you who have been given the "wisdom of the scribes which cometh by opportunity of leisure" must maintain the fabric of the earth.

The modern world awaits the impact of your trained citizenship. You cannot escape by saying, "There are so many, and I am but one." So sympathetically organized is life, and so powerful are the instruments given into our hands, that the effective force of the individual is infinitely greater than ever before. Though it be the machine age, men may still be masters of machines, if they have trained intelligence, and the will to use it. The ancient world could show us an Alexander and a Caesar. It could show us men who made a mark upon the whole known earth. But the Fords, and the Hills, and the Edisons, and the Bells, and the Garys, and the Wilsons, have exercised an unheard of influence in transportation, communication, manufacture, politics, life, and thought because the modern world has put at the command of the individual new instrumentalities which give him astonishing power. The capacity to build has thus been enormously increased; likewise, the capacity for ill. The criminal who operated in sparsely settled and rude communities affected his own integrity and the life of his victim, but the modern criminal, or demagogue, may cast a blight upon a wide segment of society.

We are the inheritors of this new world, created in the last two centuries, and built for us in this nation in the last century and a half. It carries with it the tremendous privileges of education, the wonderful opportunities for an agreeable and an effective economic and social life; but it lays upon us new individual responsibilities so to order our lives, so to shape our ideals, so to master our impulses as to maintain its fabric in peace.

Where, now, shall the trained citizen make his best contribution? The great task is to reshape our international politics to harmonize with the interdependence, the world community
of interest, the economic unity of mankind which has developed in the last two centuries. We have built a world upon one premise, and we govern it upon a contradictory premise. We cannot continue to organize the whole of life outside politics upon an international and interdependent basis, and insist in our politics upon perfect independence. Either we set our economics and politics into harmony, else we set up a disastrous dualism.

We may illustrate that point by comparison with the life of the individual. One of the greatest sources of moral authority in the world today is the desire for a personality at peace with itself. The stupid and inert person faces no urgent problem of self-control. Emotions do not surge within him. Thoughts do not crowd his mind. There are no forces contending for mastery, because there is no force at all. His case was aptly described by Browning, who spoke of, “finished and finite clods, untroubled by a spark.” It is as we begin to refine life, and to take notice of its moral, intellectual, social, esthetic, and economic implications, as we begin to enjoy its richness and wonder, that we become conscious of conflict, and the problem of resolving conflicts—that we may live at peace within a developed personality. To see life as a whole becomes, that is to say, more and more of a task and an achievement as we make it finer and more sensitive.

No one has expressed the idea with more pith and force than Plato who said, “The righteous man does not permit the several elements within him to meddle with one another, but he sets in order his own inner life, and is his own master, and at peace with himself.” The emphasis is a sound one. Life must be envisaged as one problem, the problem of putting together our several elements so that personality is integral. We must not have one mood and temper for gainful hours, and become Dr. Jekyll in the evening by the fireside; one social and ethical outlook in contact with employees and competitors, with another set of standards in the home. Such dualism destroys the integral life. The man is at war with himself. Though he have all technical skill, it may be rendered useless if in political, social, or religious ways, he is poorly adjusted. The extreme manifestation of the conflict of forces within a poorly integrated personality is suicide, which may fairly be described as war within oneself to the death.

It is so with nations. A slow moving world, a world without rapidity of motion or thought, where science is sleeping, where trade stands in stagnant pools, and life is local, does not face the problem of integrating politics into a great common enterprise.

As life is developed and refined, as its adjustments are made more delicate, the problems of preserving peace become at once more difficult and more pressing. It is a fair comparison to call international war a species of race suicide.
As with the individual, so with the group, it represents essential failure to integrate life, to view it as one problem. The disaster it produces is the most conspicuous fact of our generation, for we have had the greatest objective example in all human history. It has shaken the foundations of a religion based upon a proclamation of peace on earth, good will toward men. It has set back economic and scientific advance by untold years. It has increased the sum of human suffering and woe by an incalculable amount. And when it is all done, the victors proclaim that they lost along with the vanquished!

It is futile to believe that we can pile up armaments to protect the tissue fabric of modern life. To organize for peace and prepare for war merely emphasizes the disharmony of aim; it accentuates the struggle for control between contradictory forces. The post-war memoirs which have deluged us all agree upon this point; that preparedness became in itself a source of war, that armaments were a menace to peace. The outlawry of war does not achieve the end. There is no hope in putting forces in motion which lead inevitably to strife, and then setting up paper barriers. Nor does pacifism show us the way out.

The key to peace must be found in the reorganization of political life in harmony with the social and economic and scientific structure of the modern world—in harmony with the major premise of society's life. The tragic fact is that economics and science have far outrun politics. The changes science has wrought are no less than revolutionary. When men left the earth and took to the air, the act was revolutionary. But it was hailed with delight. When the ocean was conquered by flight the world rejoiced. The more radical the experiment, the more revolutionary the proposal, the more the world applauds. Change, experiment, progress—these are the watchwords of science and of its applications to business. But they remain anathema in politics. Men in laboratories have tested our preconceptions and notions, and have ruthlessly thrown them overboard. They have not only reshaped the physical world, they have profoundly altered the nature and content of our thinking. But the scientific method of tested thought has not been adequately applied to the structure and problems of international life. Benjamin Franklin noted this tardiness of political inventiveness a hundred and fifty years ago: "We make daily great improvement in natural (philosophy). There is one I hope to see in moral philosophy, --- the discovery of a plan which will induce and oblige nations to settle their disputes without first cutting one another's throats....When will mankind be convinced that all wars are follies, very expensive and very mischievous?"

Science has made its advances because of research — research which everywhere took advantage of what had been done anywhere else, research which at some stages often seemed to
have no practical bearing, but which, with the progress of other workers, came to have more of meaning than the discoverers could have imagined. The field of international politics needs now the rigid and unbending application of scientific method, even if it remodels or destroys some of our old thought patterns. A great Teacher of ancient times suggested that experience should be the acid test—"By their fruits ye shall know them." The fruits of our present international policy are death and disaster. We need to seek for the remedies with the ruthlessness of science.

It is worthy of emphasis that our forefathers had the courage to undertake experiments in the field of political organization, which were denounced at the time as radical and dangerous. The greatest gift to the science of peace is the American union. Fredrick J. Turner has said, "The American peace has been achieved by restraining sectional selfishness and assertiveness and by coming to agreements rather than to reciprocal denunciations or to blows...Statesmanship in this nation consists not only in representing the special interests of the leader's own section, but in finding a formula that will bring the different regions together in a common policy." It is true that for a time sectionalism overcame the sense of unity. We went through a period of maladjustment in the integration of our nation's personality, when one section concentrated its attention and built its social and economic structure upon an institution already out of date. Thereby was set up a dualism within the Union which all but destroyed it. But what southern leader today would wish that the South had won in the Civil War? The losses to both North and South would have been infinitely less without war, the readjustment politically and socially would have been vastly easier if war could have been avoided. That revealing experience has given to American statesmanship the essential restraint in the development of policies which it lacked before.

That seems to be the key—the giving up of the raw assertion of freedom in order to achieve its reality. The man in the jungle is free to do as he will, but he can do little beside battle for his food and shelter. It is when he comes out of that shadowy freedom and enters society, with its rules and restrictions upon individual action, that he wins the opportunity for peaceful and protected intercourse with his fellows, for a decent living and good food, for a home, for learning, for the enjoyment of art and music, and thus, by the sacrifice of his individual whims, he gains the reality of freedom.

So it is with states. What shall it profit a nation to have all sovereignty, when its people dwell in the valley of the shadow of death, whose borders are harassed, whose economic life is upset, whose currency is debased, whose morals are shocked by the hideous crisis of war? The price of peace has always been the sacrifice
of portions of sovereignty. No one should have learned that lesson better than these forty-eight states, who yielded up a portion of their sovereign rights in the interests of a union of peace and honor. Midwestern states are having a dispute over lake levels. We have given up the high privilege of going to war upon Illinois; we have given up the sovereign right of devastation and death, and by peaceful adjudication before nine elderly gentlemen at insignificant cost we are to determine the issue. Which of these methods has the substance of freedom, and which the empty husk? We have invested some of our sovereign capital in the common stock of the Union, and the dividends are freedom from war, emancipation from fear, the enjoyment of justice and order and prosperity. Shall we hold back from paying that price for peace on earth? Are the trappings and the suits of sovereignty more precious than the lives of our children? Are the forms and ceremonies of supremacy more to be desired than economic and political and esthetic and spiritual advance?

There is an essential incongruity in displaying one temper and structure of politics which make for peace between forty-eight sovereign, and independent, yet integrated states, and a wholly different temper and political system in dealing with nations divided from us by an imaginary line, or by the oceans which we traverse with ever greater and greater facility.

The nations of the earth have dimly recognized the need for closer co-operation. The modern system of diplomacy represents, in a rudimentary way, a recognition of the realities of interdependence. That system has grown through the years, but it has grown too slowly, and must be fundamentally revised as thought, and experiment, and experience show us the way. The American tradition of arbitration, established in the days of our weakness, was a recognition of that fact that war does not solve problems and does not pay. American origination and support of the idea of a World Court, before the other nations were ready to support it belongs in the same category.

I plead not for any specific remedy. I offer no panacea. I would not have you become the dupes of charlatans who offer nostrums for the cure of all political ills. My plea is that as you go out to take your places as citizens in this great republic, you shall preserve in your political attitudes that spirit of scientific inquiry, that eagerness for improvement, that readiness to make experiment, that facility in accepting demonstration which marks the life of modern science, and which makes modern industry so amazingly progressive. We must recognize the implications of our age, and arguing from the major premise that an interdependent and sympathetically organized world is founded upon the assumption of peace, go forward to the normal and logical conclusion that our nation's life and policies are to be built upon that major assumption.