

“Dreaming of New Worlds and Opening Doors of Innovation”

Winter Commencement 2010

Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie

President

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Assembly Hall

Saturday, December 18, 2010

1. THE NATIONAL IMPORTANCE OF INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING

In 1910, Theodore Roosevelt addressed an audience at the Sorbonne in Paris. He said, “It is a mistake for any nation to merely copy another; but it is even a greater mistake, it is a proof of weakness in any nation, not to be anxious to learn from one another and willing and able to adapt that learning to . . . new national conditions”¹

These words, uttered just over a century ago, could have been said yesterday. They reveal the bond between education and change and the vital importance of international understanding.

As graduates, all of you have been anxious to learn about yourselves and your world, anxious to excel, and, today, on this day of your commencement, anxious to finish. Today, you are moving on to new worlds of challenge and a future that holds the promise of continual change.

¹ Roosevelt, Theodore. “The Man in the Arena: Citizenship in a Republic.” Speech at the Sorbonne. Paris, France. 23 Apr. 1910. Page 3. <<http://www.theodore-roosevelt.com/images/research/speeches/maninthearena.pdf>>

2. DOORS OF OPPORTUNITY

The changes we have seen in the past decade alone are staggering to contemplate: the mapping of the human genome, challenges of increasing complexity to our environment, and the cracking of the very foundations of our economic systems. All of these changes raise complicated moral and ethical questions about our relationships to each other and to the world that we all share.

But they also open the doors of creativity and innovation, and you are walking through those doors as you boldly confront the challenges of our times. As leaders of tomorrow, you bear a weighty burden of responsibility, but you have the freedom to offer a new way of thinking, to be the architects of new economic structures, the creators of new policy, the singers, teachers, and scientists of the next generation.

3. GLOBAL CONNECTIONS FOR THE COMMON GOOD

And you are not alone. This world of change brings people together from every corner of the globe, from different economic and social backgrounds, from different religions and different cultures. The only way to build global networks and connections is by working together not despite our differences but because of them.

As Shirley Ann Jackson, the president of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, has said, “The movement toward global integration is rooted in human motivations as old as history—the urge to explore, to discover, to trade, to gain new knowledge, and to experience new cultures.”²

It is a world that requires all of us to adjust, to renew, to create, to innovate, to work together so that we might live better lives.

² Jackson, Shirley Ann. “Empires of the Mind.” *The Presidency* (Winter 2007): 14-9. Page 14. <http://www.aacu.org/leap/documents/W07_Jackson.pdf>

I can think of no better examples of the great possibilities of such global collaboration and innovation than our honored guests, Her Royal Highness Princess Sirindhorn and Admiral Robinson. Both have served their people tirelessly, have reached out to people around the globe with humanitarian and lifesaving efforts, and have adapted to an ever-changing world.

4. THE POWER OF A LIBERAL EDUCATION

As graduates of one of America's greatest universities, you too have been adapting to and preparing for this world of change. For many of you, that preparation has included the strong foundation of a liberal education. It is called liberal not because it has a particular political affinity but because it is wide-ranging and opens you to possibilities that you may never have otherwise imagined.

Such an education in the depth and breadth of human knowledge ranges from the classics in history and literature to the workings of modern government; from the rules of mathematics and logic to the basic laws of physics and biology; from world languages to international affairs. And this is precisely the type of education that our complex, interconnected world requires.

In its depth and breadth, a liberal education fosters wisdom, respect, and humility, which grows when we begin to measure ourselves against the most accomplished of our ancestors about whom we have learned.

It will enable you to remain flexible and creative, open to unexpected directions of thought and action. It will enable you to work collaboratively with people from diverse backgrounds, responding with speed and knowledge to changing circumstances. It will enable you to think analytically, synthesizing information from many different areas to generate solutions to unforeseen and challenging problems. It will encourage you to

pursue every avenue to continue your education in both formal and informal settings so you can remain ready for and responsive to the change that surrounds you.

And such an education is the ideal preparation for the advanced professional and academic training that a number of you have undertaken here at Indiana University, where you have become part of the research enterprise.

5. CELEBRATING THE CLASS OF 2010

Your many achievements at Indiana University are testimony to all that you have learned during your years of study. Your class—the class of 2010—includes graduates from 51 different countries, from 40 different states, and from 83 different Indiana counties. Our oldest graduate is 61, our youngest 20, and we have 1 set of twins graduating today.

This accomplished class includes members of the Columbus Indiana Philharmonic, a first place winner of the International Horn Society Solo Competition, and a member of Ladies First, IU's premiere female a cappella group.

It includes interns on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, at the Washington Program for the Anti-Defamation League, and at the U.S. Embassy in Vienna.

It includes Wells Scholars, Phi Beta Kappas, and Scholars in Global Citizenship.

It includes students who have travelled around the world for their studies, including one who travelled to Eldoret, Kenya, with the School of Journalism, another who spent time studying evolution in the Galapagos Islands and biodiversity in Ecuador, and yet another who served as a teaching assistant for the SPEA Pamplona program.

And this is a mere snapshot of the many graduates who have studied around the world.

6. CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, let me return again to President Theodore Roosevelt and his remarks at the Sorbonne. About that historic venue, President Roosevelt said, “[It] was the most famous university of mediaeval Europe at a time when no one dreamed that there was a New World to discover.”³

All of us can take those simple words as an inspiration and a challenge. As you look towards your own futures, dream of those new worlds that you will discover. Imagine the doors of innovation and creativity through which you will step. And listen for the sounds of opportunity, possibility, and hope, which will help us build a better world.

³ Roosevelt, Theodore. “The Man in the Arena: Citizenship in a Republic.” Speech at the Sorbonne. Paris, France. 23 Apr. 1910. Page 2. <<http://www.theodore-roosevelt.com/images/research/speeches/maninthearena.pdf>>