TO THE CLASS OF 1939

Your commencement day is historic because it falls upon the
day we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the
University. The distinction of being the Semicentennial Class is
yours, and your historian may well begin his task today with
records which will constitute the high lights of history fifty
years hence. In 1989 when the University has reached the century
mark, members of your class will doubtless head the list of old
graduates returning for that celebration, and I sincerely hope
that many of you will be present on that historic occasion.

Our hope in the future of the University may best find ex-
pression today in the statement of our faith in you. The work
of Regents and faculty, the support of the State, together with
the aid of the Federal Government, all find justification in the
belief that your graduation will be followed by years of service
to the State and to the Nation which will fully compensate for
all the labor and cost which your education has entailed. This
attitude toward higher education has been the assured conviction
of our American democracy for more than a hundred years, and I do
not believe that increased expenditures for the more recently
undertaken governmental functions, important as they are, will
for long obscure from our view the fundamental importance and
necessity of higher education for youth.

Your graduation occurs at a time when our country needs a
sane and thoughtful renewal of faith in democracy and its
institutions. This renewal of faith is being encouraged now by
some who seek to contrast our American way of life with life in
nations dominated by totalitarian ideals. The frequent emphasis upon this contrast, with our democracy being given all the superiorities, may have temporary value, but I am fearful lest, in the long run, its tendency to arouse international ill-will offset most, if not all, of the advantages to be gained by re-emphasizing the virtues of our form of political organization. We need more men and women who know the history of democracy's growth, who know the basic spiritual needs of man which freedom and liberty alone supply; who, realizing fully the shortcomings and weaknesses of democracy, realize also that in multitudinous ways democracy has succeeded in America and is succeeding today. This positive and constructive faith, plus the determination through freedom of discussion and a free ballot to make democracy succeed now and in the future, by means of constructive, fundamental, and gradual changes in our economic and social order—this, I am convinced, is the greatest need of our day. And I believe also that you, the members of this class, will exemplify such faith in democracy, recognizing the right of your fellow citizens to disagree with you, and entertaining no bitterness of feeling to citizens of other nations who at present support governmental forms for which you have no sympathy. This type of tolerance has been, and I trust will continue to be, the most basic principle in the American way of life. That which is most to be feared today is not the particular failures or successes of New Deal experimentation or of any other type of experimentation which may come, but rather the possibility that through un-American intolerance all experimentation will be terminated. The heart of democracy will have stopped when there is an end to experimentation, and I sincerely believe the college-trained men and women may contribute much to the
support of tolerance, freedom of discussion and wise experimentation, all so essential to the success of the greatest of all human experiments—that of democracy itself.

And if we are in need of thoughtful, tolerant, and well-trained minds to guide in the internal affairs of our country, how much more do we need such minds in dealing with foreign affairs. The cave man of antiquity, after untold thousands of years of effort, got out of the cave into the open spaces of earth, built homes and laid the foundations of human civilization. But the spirits of men today seem to be enclosed in what may be called the cave of unreasoning nationalism. Seemingly insurmountable walls separate our nations; walls of economic and military competition, rendering impossible the escape of mankind from behind them, and out into the freer world of international cooperation and international peace.

Democracy and all the higher hopes of humanity may be, and, I believe, are being, threatened with destruction because of the false idol of extreme and competitive nationalism. A former ruler, speaking from a world war battlefield, calls upon present rulers of nations to find another way of international life, but the rulers reply in substance that they have no other plan save that of age-old alliances, counter alliances, and competitive armaments, though millions of men and women in all nations hear, understand, and sympathize with the plea for peace. Democratic states, no less than states now controlled by dictators, need a leadership unafraid to try new methods of international control—to experiment, if you please—if we are ever to escape from the present domination of an outgrown and impossible nationalism. Here is a task for
pioneers for whom there is as yet no sure chart of specific formula, but only two aids to carry them through: the conviction that our present way of international life is fraught with rapidly approaching disaster to mankind, and the determination, if possible, to find a better way. I entertain the hope that many of you will become pioneers in this historic effort which mankind must undertake to find saner and better ways of international life.

In presenting these larger obligations for your consideration, I do not wish to overlook the more immediate practical and personal tasks which now confront each one of you. With patience, thoughtfulness and sincerity, may you find your way along the road of life, none too easy these days for most of us. You will find that a firm faith in your own powers, supported by a full devotion to your highest convictions about life and its meaning, will always be your best guide under all circumstances and conditions which confront you. Of far greater importance than new methods in education, about which we hear a great deal today, is the age-old effort to produce men and women of intelligence, tolerance, honesty and good will. If you have these qualities you'll find that they fit in every situation which you will have to meet in life. Men and women of intelligence, tolerance, honesty and good will, will never be misfits—not in the world of today nor in the world of tomorrow.

I extend to each member of the class of 1939 my very best wishes, and bid each one of you an affectionate farewell.