To the Graduating Class of 1943

As you leave the University, it would give me great joy to assure you that when this war ends colleges and universities will resume in full the present disrupted program of liberal education. The facts are that for several years European colleges and universities have discarded the social sciences and humanistic studies, and now we in the United States are either diluting them or omitting them entirely from the war training programs. Graduate work also, including research in fields that do not make a direct contribution to the war, has been practically abandoned for the duration.

Recently I read the story of the closing of William and Mary College from 1881 to 1887. It had been left in physical ruin by the Civil War, and by 1881 faced financial ruin. But during the seven years it was closed, President Ewell rang the chapel bell every morning, despite the fact that there were no students, no faculty, and almost no buildings. The story should bring encouragement to those who are determined that the intellectual and cultural tradition shall be kept alive in this critical period of our history.

Many of the more thoughtful European leaders attribute the rise of totalitarianism in Europe to "the passionate confidence of the post-war European universities in technology." If we think in terms of the long future, we cannot fail to see how expensive it will be to defeat our enemies if in so doing we weaken or destroy the tradition of liberal
education which has been so basic to the growth of American democracy. I can at least assure you that the voice of this university will be heard on the side of the liberal tradition in American higher education. We will keep the bell ringing on this campus.

As you leave the campus, I wish I could assure you that at the close of this war democracy will be more deeply rooted in our own nation than ever before, and more widely extended to other nations and peoples of the earth. I wish I could assure you also that democracy, being one of the great hopes and promises of mankind, will be interpreted adequately for each succeeding generation. But we have to realize that democracy, instead of having a continuously successful future assured to it, is in danger from without and also from within.

To survive amid the clash of dictatorial and imperialistic plans for the future, democracy must be prepared with plans for social, economic, cultural and political life that will challenge the interest and win the support and allegiance of the advancing masses of humanity. It will surely be an empty military victory if, in winning it, we open more roads for the marching of future dictators rather than for the marching of the future common men of the earth. My hope for the future is in the advance of democracy on all fronts.

As you leave us, I wish I could assure you that the higher values of Western civilization will live after the war and
become stronger than ever before. Among these values which
we prize so highly is our own American way of life, which
has grown up with those cherished freedoms whose roots are
found deep in the history and literature of Great Britain.
We believe we are fighting to preserve freedom and free in-
stitutions, and yet in the battle we know that we run the
risk of sacrificing important spiritual values upon which the
freedoms and free institutions of our Western civilization
must rely for their continued existence. We must not forget
that other civilizations have died following brilliant successes
of their victorious armies and navies.

In Britain and in America lies the hope of the future
of our Western civilization, and the strength of that hope
lies in the measure of our devotion to the ideals of liberal
education and democracy, during and following this war. It
is my hope that our Western culture and civilization will not
only survive but will accept that enlargement of spirit and
purpose which will qualify it for service to a future world
order embracing Orient as well as Occident.

As you leave the University, I wish I could tell you
that after this war there will be established a community of
states operating under law and cooperating along social, cul-
tural, economic and political lines; a community of nations
abandoning force and war, and devoting their energies to good
will and peace. There is the danger, however, that the war may be won and the peace be lost again, as in 1919, because of the continuation of the old anarchy in international relations. Nevertheless, we entertain the hope that following this war we may see the creation of a new world order based upon law and justice, cooperating for the good of all instead of fighting for narrow and selfish national ends.

Of course, I cannot guarantee that we shall see in our day, or that you will see in your day, the full realization of such high hopes as I have suggested, but I know that youth is not afraid to hope, or even to dream, and that only in the strength of such high hopes, accompanied by the faith of youth in the future, are really great things for mankind ever to be achieved. In saying goodbye to you, I urge you to entertain such hopes and to embrace such a faith as the basis for your life during the war and in the days of peace beyond the war.

May 3, 1943