

GLOBAL READINESS

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Opening Address
PIER Summer Institutes (Programs in International Educational Resources)
Yale University, New Haven
July 11, 2005

My subject is global readiness – making this country ready to play its proper role on the world scene, making it ready to deal with crises but also to seize opportunities, making it ready to see the world at large as its province, not as something to be feared but something to be a member of. Originally I had planned to talk about national needs, about the desperate shortage of competent linguists in the military and the federal government, about the need for more attention to the larger world in classrooms hedged about by No Child Left Behind, about the importance of learning about other cultures and languages even among the youngest of students, about the need for a national strategy aimed at preparing us for a global environment ever more uncertain and ever more volatile, about the sheer difficulty of achieving that goal with the present Congress. But I decided, just this once, to look beyond such particulars and to ask some questions about general principles. My decision was occasioned in part by the recent events in London. Sadly, the last time I talked at a PIER event was in the aftermath of the World Trade Center bombings. Rather than repeat what I said then, I want to return to fundamentals. You will not agree with all that I have to say, but my goal is to stir your thoughts, and perhaps to imbue your discussions here with an awareness of why such discussions and indeed such Summer Institutes are important.

I start, like the preacher (though it is hardly my intention to deliver a sermon), with a text. It is a text familiar to us all.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. --That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

I start with this statement in part because we are in the season when we normally reflect on our own origins as a nation (and I claim connection as a naturalized citizen), in part because of a firm conviction that the Declaration of Independence contains in its opening paragraphs a philosophy of government that offers a valid and courageous basis for the conduct of our affairs as a nation and even for the interdependence of nations beyond our boundaries.

Note that the declaration of independence does not state that all men (and by the use of the term “men” our founding fathers sought to translate the Latin word “homo” not the Latin word “vir”) are equal, but that they are *created* equal. It is not the Marxian dictum “From each according to his ability: to each according to his need.” But it does imply a belief in a creative force or a First Mover (itself possibly problematic to some). By its very silence on the matter it suggests that competition among men in society is inevitable, though government can serve to control it, and equality of opportunity and a belief in the importance of the individual, created as he is by that Prime Mover, are paramount. And it is a Declaration of *Independence*: it is primarily a statement about what the Thirteen Colonies are *not*. They are not British, not subject to George III, not beholden to anyone but themselves and their Maker. This independence derives from five premises, set out in this first paragraph of the Declaration – and the first of these premises is that all men are created equal.

The world view presented by the revolutionaries contested the notion of divine right, appealing to the rights of the individual. It harked back to the assertion of the importance of the individual – a fundamental aspect of the teachings of Jesus, often obscured in a Christian tradition controlled by the rulers rather than the ruled, but reemerging in the Florentine fifteenth century, augmented by a Platonic tradition largely kept alive by Islamic scholars. In England at that same time, the notion of constitutional guarantees, of limitations on the power of the sovereign, was running up against growing Tudor absolutism, destroying the likes of Thomas More in the process and leading, ultimately, to civil war in the seventeenth century. Around that civil war, Christians perpetrated horrors against Christians, in the name of Christianity, but ideas of Christian liberty, promoted by Milton, or of the candle of the spirit contained in all of us, stressed by Quakers like Fox and Penn but also by mainstream Christians, lent strength to notions of individual rights, reinforced in turn by the emergence of principles for the management of national sovereignty in the work of the jurists Grotius and Selden, the former in the Netherlands and the latter in England. They in turn drew extensively on the Jewish tradition: Selden was a Hebraic scholar and read and studied Hebrew; Grotius quoted Jewish scholarship, and of course the Old Testament, frequently.

In the ferment of the 17th century, the notion that the consent of the governed was required for the establishment of a government was asserted in the context of the Restoration and again in the Glorious Revolution of 1688. These ideas led directly to the American Revolution: the Declaration of Independence was a deeply English document. It beat the British at their own philosophical game by espousing constitutional notions derived from the Glorious Revolution and the writings of such thinkers as John Locke.

In fact, as we reflect on the history of freedom, its successes have often derived from outwitting the preservers of the status quo by applying their own principles more effectively than they could apply them themselves. That was what happened in Philadelphia in 1776.

But stating a principle and carrying it out are different things: the principle of equality was enshrined in the Declaration but it was slow in emerging. The former colonies that broke free of British rule in 1776 were not slow to assert their economic and military power, but authority remained in the hands of an extended oligarchy (Harrington, over a hundred years earlier, had suggested that a coincidence of economic and political power brings stability, and an imbalance promotes instability). Yet the Constitution and the Bill of Rights emerged on the basis of these early ideals, including that of equality. Indeed, the history of the United States is a history of the gradual expansion of the principle that all men are created equal – not a linear expansion, for the reversals were frequent, but an expansion none the less. Slaves were kept out of the consensus initially; the rights of women were limited. But resistance to slavery grew, fed in part by a strong abolitionist tradition in Britain, that antedated American independence and took in such conservative notables as the great Samuel Johnson and later animated the efforts of Wilberforce and Clarkson.

The backsliding that followed the Civil War and the period of Reconstruction took over a century to correct, if it has in fact been fully corrected, but the principle enshrined in the Declaration prevailed. The same is true of the rights of women, enfranchised in part by economic forces, in part by the energy of those who insisted on the principles contained in the Declaration.

Now, unstated in the Declaration, but implied none the less, is an awareness of the tradition out of which it comes. It presents itself as a *consensus* among right-thinking people, which suggests that those right-thinking people know enough to think aright. They knew their Locke and their Harrington; they knew the Bible; they knew the great jurists of the past, like Grotius and Selden. Thus the Declaration implies that it is not enough to believe: we need to know why we believe, and we need to come to that belief freely, as a result of our own unfettered thought. Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness lie unprotected in an ignorant society, and if the reason why these principles matter is forgotten, they are the more easily abolished. So hand in hand with the principles goes the need to understand them. In other words, hand in hand with government goes education. Jefferson understood that; Franklin understood it, even as Franklin also believed passionately in the need for practical education as well.

In the west the educational tradition has its roots in religion, but the merging of religious principles with classical ideals and with the simple need for educated people to run newly literate societies, has led to the progressive expansion and deepening both of educational ideals and of the reach of education. Here, too, we have had backsliding, for example the failure to educate the children of our inner cities and the rural poor, but the upward trajectory is surely not in doubt. As with the rights of those descended from slaves (and the many others caught up in that same philosophy of exclusion) and as with the rights of

women, there will always be economic and political pressure to exclude those who are newly included, but such pressures create counter-pressures, and they can use the Declaration of Independence as a starting-point for resistance. Today we see education as the companion of freedom; education is essential if we are to promote and maintain equality and liberty.

But the Declaration of Independence states, among its allegedly self-evident truths, that “all men are created equal.” It does not state that only those people born within the American jurisdiction of Great Britain are created equal, or only those born within certain latitudes and longitudes are created equal, but that *everyone* is created equal, and “endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights.” Of course, this was a declaration of independence made by a particular group of people to a particular end – independence from Great Britain, independence from a specific government engaged in what the colonists described as tyranny and whose tyrannical acts they specifically enumerated. But the principle on which they grounded their arguments was something that they regarded as a universal principle, derived from the principle of *humanity*.

Now the Thirteen Colonies were not setting themselves up as arbiters of humankind, and so the rights to which they laid claim were enshrined in due course in a particular constitution, for a particular people. In due course laws were enacted that referred only to that particular people. But the fact remains that the Declaration makes no such distinction: indeed the American legal tradition is firmly anchored in a set of *universal* principles.

Such claims to universality have a different valency in today’s world than they perhaps had at the time, when large principles were invoked for specific ends, in specific countries. Inspired in part by the Americans, the French in 1789 fought their own revolution on similarly universal principles, derived above all from Enlightenment philosophy. Other nations were to follow. But the gradual expansion of connections among the nations, leading in due course to the globalization of today, has inevitably led to a merging and reassessment of the ideals that made these nations in the first place. The first stirrings of international intergovernmental organization date from the second half of the nineteenth century with the founding of the Universal Postal Union. The founding of the League of Nations after World War I moved the search for common *globalized* underpinnings for civil society a stage further, and the Charter of the United Nations, rooted in the allied struggle in World War II, went further still.

And thus it was that Eleanor Roosevelt and others began their work on a Universal Declaration of Human Rights. She and those who worked with her on the Universal Declaration took the principles enshrined in the great constitutions of the world – our own included, and also the French Declaration of the Rights of Man, the principles surrounding that rather amorphous affair the British Constitution, and principles contained in constitutions all across the world, fashioned in part on these models, and extended them to all humankind. Although she and her colleagues rode the euphoria following World War II in which just for a moment people recognized that it was only through international cooperation freely given that a great enemy had been defeated, Mrs.

Roosevelt and her fellow-drafters met resistance – notably from the Soviet Union, whose constitution was singularly at odds with its actual practice, and from the United States, which, zealous to preserve its independence, had always demonstrated a certain reluctance to embrace the principles and the conditions on which that independence rests. It had shown as much in its rejection of the League of Nations. As a result, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was never put before the US Congress for a formal vote, though it laid the groundwork for the codification of more detailed principles governing civil, political and economic rights that go beyond the Universal Declaration and have gained a measure of authority in international law. Sadly, it is a document almost unknown in this country – perhaps the greatest single statement about the unity of the human race, yet little studied in our schools and largely neglected by our leaders.

But there is always backsliding following great successes. Witness the sad history of race relations in the late nineteenth century and on into our own. Yet few would argue against the proposition that the situation today is better than it was years ago. And if the freedom of women is constantly under threat, still women have made massive progress over the past century. Backsliding also accompanied the period following the Universal Declaration. None the less, the Declaration has been used by successive American governments and governments of other nations to justify their insistence on the application of the human rights that it describes, and also to justify their intervention on behalf of human rights. These American governments have sometimes been selective in their insistence that governments adhere to human rights, but there was a time when they barely insisted at all.

What I am suggesting here is that globalization, which we are apt to see as above all a purely practical affair – the opening up of markets across the world, the free flow of capital, the free movement of cultural products (and on this last we may have differing views) – is also deeply ideological. Unfortunately our ability to formulate principles for international living has been outstripped by those entrepreneurs wishing to exploit new-found markets, and by the advance of the technology that has made the present stage of globalization possible. We are in an age of robber barons, justifying their activities with a philosophical potpourri of ad hoc principles and scraps stolen out of Enlightenment thought and the Judeo-Christian tradition. In this age of philosophical spin, truth has become divisible, and the espousal of values troublingly self-serving.

One of the great challenges facing us in this new world is the development of a philosophical consensus that builds on the tradition of the Declaration of Independence, that builds on the work of Eleanor Roosevelt and René Cassin and those who went before them. It is likely to be not a purely secular consensus but a consensus drawing on religious traditions as well. In fact the age-old problem of religious difference, which just for a moment we thought we had solved, threatens to derail much of the progress that we have made. It is fundamentally important that education, and that we as educators, keep the debate alive, and that we teach our charges about the traditions from which the prevailing principles of international order – international law, international organizations, international agreements – derive.

Note that I speak not of international education, not of global education, but simply of education. One of the consequences of growing globalization is that we can no longer distinguish between what is international and what is domestic. Although our educational systems are based on national norms, with national standards, national expectations, and national planning (and, in the United States, extreme decentralization within these broader practices), their activities and their subject matter are converging as the world converges.

But, interestingly, this very process of convergence lays bare our differences. Extreme homogeneity, as social psychologists will tell us, leads to alienation: difference matters, because it helps to define identity. So we must search not just for commonalities but also for ways of managing difference. And, again, this is both a domestic issue and an international issue: migration diversifies our societies even as it causes us to search for common principles, and cultures cross borders even as they reinforce themselves through ease of travel and through electronic connections. More and more we are learning to assume multiple identities – a state of affairs deeply troubling to some.

Thirty years ago, we were complaining that students knew nothing of the world, and urging that they be taught more. We stressed that the world was becoming rapidly integrated, that world problems knew no boundaries, and that opportunities could be seized only by global cooperation. That lesson was only partially heard, though there was definitely an upswing in classroom attention to the larger world. Student travel increased, especially in colleges, where study abroad became more available (though it still touches very few). Greater attention was given to languages, though here, too, we lag behind our demonstrated needs. A resolve on the part of some to open the classroom to the world ran into a reluctance to deal with that world and a desire to shut it out. That reluctance was driven and continues to be driven, I believe, by a fear of change, and a fear of what we neither know nor understand. Today we are fighting a War on Terror, but the terror is above all in our own hearts.

Yet the condition that we predicted thirty years ago has come to pass: we are globalized. But it is a globalization, all too often, of acquisition – of the body – not a globalization of the mind, a globalization of the practical, not of the spirit. When we speak of democracy, for example, we often mean little more than freedom to trade, or freedom of employability by the multinational corporation best able to compete. The old notion that economic prosperity for some will ultimately lead to economic prosperity for all – automatically and inevitably, without the application of thought or judgment or principles or ideas, but with the inevitability of sun following rain, spring following winter, water flowing downhill – this notion is but a half-truth. Were it always true, we would not need to know much about the rest of the world at all: we could simply deploy capital to our advantage and their disadvantage and somehow everyone would prosper. But to build a better world we need better understanding, a globalization of the spirit to accompany a globalization of material possessions.

But the overarching proposition, that all men are created equal, remains largely accepted in theory if not in practice. Perhaps the widening gap between the wealthy and the poor

suggests that the gap between theory and practice is also growing. I believe that over the longer run we will retreat from this dissonance of theory and practice because the weight of tradition will reassert itself and because we will find principles to manage global complexities. But it is sometimes hard to maintain a belief in the proposition that *all* men are created equal when one's government is working hard to create new inequalities and is turning its back on the great consensus.

The United States, responding to the recent rise of terrorism with a War on Terror (which in my view is neither a war nor directed primarily at terrorist acts – but rather a military occupation and the systematic exploitation of fear for political gain) has dis severed the general principle expressed in the Declaration of Independence from its particular application in American society. Our government believes that the freedoms enjoyed by Americans, though rooted in the universal principles of the Declaration of Independence, belong exclusively to Americans, or primarily to Americans, or to Americans first when these freedoms appear to be under threat by other people. And so the Geneva Convention was recently found not to apply to people called enemy combatants. Guantanamo Bay was defined as a piece of leased property, not *really* American and in any case leased from the Great Satan himself, and therefore (a) not subject to the United States Constitution or to American law and (b) really not subject to any law at all. Although the Supreme Court found such an argument specious, the executive branch of government has largely ignored its findings. In the heat of the moment, and in a regressive response to hurt, the Declaration of Independence has been reinterpreted: life for us, liberty for us, the pursuit of happiness for us, not because we are members of humanity but because we are American. And not because this is a moral and ethical, indeed religious truth that we are seeking to preserve for the world in our claim that all men are created equal, but because law is just a collection of rules, which we can twist or manipulate or find loopholes in as long as no one stops us. We care as much about the law as we care about IRS regulations. Thus torture, which we abhor, is practiced freely against foreigners, or outsourced to complaisant allies; due process is aborted; international agreements are trampled upon; and in the name of noble ends, like democracy and freedom, we have resorted to despicable means. Where is our judiciary, where is our Congress, as this process goes on? The first intimidated and the second bought.

Perhaps I sound like the Founding Fathers denouncing George III with their catalogue of iniquities. I recommend a close examination of the grounds of the Declaration of Independence: some of them seem mightily relevant today.

Our newspapers print horrific pictures of prisoners held in inhuman conditions, of Charles Graner (still wearing his plastic gloves) giving the thumbs-up over the dead and mutilated body of one of his captives, of dogs turned on terrified prisoners. Perhaps you read in the New York Times a few days ago a piece by Arlie Hochschild, which asked the question (the very question causes the heart to freeze) “How many children are imprisoned by the U.S. military?” The answer is “a great many.”

A Pentagon investigation last year [Hochschild writes] ... reported that in January 2004, a leashed but unmuzzled military guard dog was allowed into a cell holding

two children. The intention was for the dog to “‘go nuts on the kids,’ barking and scaring them.” The children were screaming and the smaller one tried to hide behind the larger, the report said, as a soldier allowed the dog to get within about one foot of them.... Brig. Gen. Janis Karpinski, formerly in charge of Abu Ghraib, told ... about visiting a weeping 11-year-old detainee in the prison’s notorious Cellblock 1B, which housed prisoners designated high risk. “He told me he was almost 12,” General Karpinski recalled, and that “he really wanted to see his mother, could he please call his mother.”

Children like this 11 year old held at Abu Ghraib [Hochschild goes on] have been denied the right to see their parents, a lawyer, or anyone else. They were not told why they were detained, let alone for how long. A Pentagon spokesman told [Seymour] Hersh that juveniles received some special care, but added, “Age is not a determining factor in detention.” The United States has found, the spokesman said, that “age does not necessarily diminish threat potential.”

“Age is not a determining factor in detention” – cold words chillingly delivered. With stories like this, it is no wonder that the United States, alone in the world, except for Somalia (which has no proper government to ratify it) has failed to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Such atrocities, as many have pointed out, fly in the face of the very principles that we seek to apply in our foreign relations – not only our belief in the importance of human rights but also our belief in democracy. Even as our government declares its espousal of such beliefs, it is evacuating the high ground. Even as it preaches free governments freely chosen, it shoots and tortures its way to such ends. “Governments are instituted among Men,” the Declaration of Independence states, “deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.” Democracy is both freely given and freely received, and it is therefore best instituted by those who understand freedom and the rule of law, aided by those who adhere faithfully to its principles. It cannot be imposed through the barrel of a gun because it comes from within us, not from outside.

Indeed it comes above all from education. If our leaders do not understand the constitutional and ethical tradition from which their liberties are derived, and if their agents in the military do not understand, the failure is, at least in part, a failure of the educational establishment to explain that tradition – a tradition that is based, ultimately, not on law but on custom, not on statute but on moral truth. A nation that is willing, in a time of emergency, to turn its back on its fellow human-being – because that fellow human is not American, or not Christian, or not white, or not English-speaking – is a nation that has forgotten, or been allowed to forget, that its very existence derives from the idea that human beings are created in God’s own image, and that to violate one’s neighbor is a violation of the Almighty. It is also a violation of oneself, because we see in others, as in a mirror, the image of ourselves.

Yes this is a difficult time. We are hedged in by the Basics, by No Child Left Behind, by the firm conviction that teachers do not know what they are doing, are not to be trusted, may even be corrupting the young. Broadening minds may be the last thing on people’s

agenda at a time of intense fear. Once we were afraid that young people would be corrupted by communism; now we are afraid that their very lives are in danger even here at home.

Yet the action that our government is fighting is a rearguard action. The retreat from human rights is a temporary aberration. Principles of human decency, once won, are seldom reversed for long. Nor are principles of universality easily abandoned.

We are faced today with two needs: to defend ourselves against the irrational, and to understand that irrational impulse so that we may change the conditions that cause it to arise. We must be ready to deal with violence aimed at our way of life, and we must be ready to change the conditions that produce it. Right now, we are worrying only about the first (dealing with violence), with no attention to the second (changing the conditions that produce it). The second is crucially important: we must understand our fellow human beings far better than we do now – on their terms, using their assumptions. We must understand the roots of their culture and society, put ourselves in their shoes, inhabit their skins. Such an exercise in advance of the present Iraqi war might have led to very different conclusions from those that we adopted at the time of our invasion: at that time we saw Iraq as a kind of occupied Ohio – Remove Saddam Hussein and before long the Iraqis will be electing their own school boards and choosing their own dog-catchers.

It turned out to be more complicated than that. Indeed, it is always more complicated than that. But our leaders failed to understand. Why did they fail? What was it that went wrong? My fear is that they lost their way, lost their hold on truth, because they were not taught, all those years ago, that truth is indivisible and that it is hard to find. As John Donne wrote, “On a high hill, rugged and steep, Truth stands, and he that will find it About and about must goe, And what the hill’s steepness resists, win so.” Nearer to our time, another wise person once said that “Our children are messages that we send to a world we will never see.” Let us hope that the messages that we send as educators include an awareness of how difficult a task it is to find truth and how infinitely rewarding it is when we succeed. For my own part I am optimistic that truth and decency will prevail, but, like the wisdom of our Founding Fathers, it may take a long time to flower and spread over the world.