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Speech File
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ADDRESS of the American Ambassador, George S. Messersmith
at the Commencement Exercises of the American School
in Mexico City, June 25, 1942, 8 p.m.

It is a source of very real pleasure to me to be present at these graduating exercises of the American School. The splendid work which this school has done, the high scholastic standing which it has attained here in Mexico and the United States, its leadership in the community, and the constructive role which it has continuously played in fostering cordial and friendly relations between our Mexican friends and our countrymen, are more than adequate ground for the pride which we have in this institution, and for the satisfaction which you now leaving the school can have in its diploma.

You who this evening are completing your work in this institution are being awarded a diploma which represents conscientious and arduous effort on your part. I congratulate you on the successful completion of your courses.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the officers and teachers of the school on the completion of another fruitful year in its almost half a century of existence. It must be a source of very real satisfaction to the Board of Directors and teachers and students and to the Mexican and American friends of the school that we are able to meet for these commencement exercises in this fine new auditorium.

You who are graduated this evening and completing the first phase of your preparation for your life's work are
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doing so at a dramatic moment. In spite of the great war in the midst of which we find ourselves, this is no time for pessimism, but rather for optimism, as to the future. Great forces are opposing each other in all parts of the world. Essentially this struggle is one of people like ourselves who desire above all to remain free; a struggle against bigoted men who would enslave free peoples in their shameless and drunken endeavor to grasp world power and domination. Lamentable as it may be, and is, that free peoples should be obliged to engage again in such a gigantic struggle to maintain all for which our ancestors had sacrificed so much, the outlook and attitude for you who are leaving this institution this evening is and must be one of optimism rather than of pessimism. That this war with all its sacrifices of blood and treasure will assure that you who leave here this evening shall have the same opportunities for individual development and freedom that those who have left in preceeding years have had, is in a way symbolic of what we are fighting for today. We are engaged in this great struggle that personal freedom and opportunity to lead a decent life shall be conserved for all of us, and the generations to come.

This is a bitter struggle which must be waged until the power of the enemy is completely annihilated, and the odious ideas for which the enemy stands completely eliminated from men's thoughts and actuation. It is well for us to remember that the great contending forces are not opposing

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each other for the first time. Our history for many centuries, and that of most peoples, has been the record of struggle for greater personal freedoms. During those periods of history when man permitted his spirit to be dominated by tyranny, the process of liberation of the individual received a tragic set-back. It is a curious thing that although we had come to consider human liberty as an inalienable right inherent in our very existence, sober thought should have recalled to us that men have always had to fight to obtain and retain their liberty from restraints imposed by their fellow-men. We recall the Christian struggle for freedom of the spirit which consumed men's passions and lives for centuries. The upsurge of progress in art, music, and philosophy that followed these decades of confusion, so plain to you from your study of history, affords ample evidence of the fact that freedom is a requisite of progress.

There is another period in history which clearly marks the most significant forward steps in individual freedom. You are all familiar with the events of the latter half of the eighteenth century, during which we fought our war of independence and for the principle that free people must have a voice in their own government. You know the story of the French Revolution, during which men asserted their right to political freedom. These two great revolutions made it possible for the century to follow to be a steady record of a

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further removal of fetters from the spirit and actions of man. They prepared the way and laid the basis for the industrial progress that has marked the last hundred years and more. Movements for national freedom crystallized in Europe and elsewhere and men everywhere obtained a larger share in the determination of their lives and destinies. In the other Republics of this New World, as in Mexico, the struggle for independence was a long and arduous one. It is worth recalling this evening that Hidalgo, the great Mexican patriot, was among the first leaders in the then Spanish controlled and exploited countries of the New World to have a full vision of independence in the true sense of emancipation and liberation. Morelos, Iturbide, Juárez, Madero, all carried forward the banner of liberty and freedom in Mexico for the space of a hundred bloody and turbulent years.

Although in many cases self-imposed fetters remained on the spirit, we had reason to believe that in the New World and to a large extent in the Old, political freedom, democratic institutions, and a recognition of equality between sovereign States, were ideas for which so much blood and treasure had been shed that they were as immutably established as the great mountains. We believed that whatever else we might have to fight for because of the selfishness, egoism and weakness that are inherent in the human spirit among our better qualities, this independence, sovereignty and equality would not again be threatened. And yet today we are engaged in the most gigantic war of all history.

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We in the democracies, the believers in individual freedom, are fighting an enemy who seeks to impose on us and on the world a "New Order" in which there is no freedom; in which man, devoid of personal dignity, is a mere instrument of the State; in which there is no room for religion except the worship of a human God whose word is law and whose human judgment is imposed as infallible. Our enemies believe in a dominant nation and race which all others must worship and serve; that men have no equality under the law; and that there is no law except that of brute force. Their "New Order" is the old order from which we had freed ourselves through long and bloody struggles.

The process by which our enemies have gained such power which they have momentarily wielded is that of gradually and relentlessly undermining the faiths by which men live. Those of us who know the German people know they have always rejected personal freedom and initiative as we know and practice them, largely because they fear their responsibilities. For this reason the German is prepared docilely to accept force and to resort to force as the prime arbiter of destinies.

In this great struggle we are opposing to this ruthless enemy not only the force of our combined armed might but also our faith as freed men passed down through the ages, that man is essentially noble; that his soul does possess dignity; that his personality is inviolable; and that man without freedom is more degraded than the slave in the galley.

It is in this faith of ours that lies our great strength. For us personal freedom reposes in the mind and spirit of the individual as much as in the law. We know that as long as we can educate youth to seek the truth, freedom is secure. You leaving this school this evening have learned the real meaning of democracy in the axiom: "Seek ye the truth and the truth shall make you free." When we have learned the truth it becomes a conviction and it is convictions for which we are prepared to fight and make sacrifices. We cannot compromise with convictions or with truth any more than we can live in a world that is half slave and half free.

Just recently I read some significant words which your former Consul General, James Stewart, recently returned from Switzerland, pronounced in the United States: He said:

"The ideal graduate of Nazi schools today is a good obedient Nazi who has no responsibility to his parents or to his church; and therein we have the German definition of freedom of youth. Freedom from moral restraint, freedom from having to think about conduct. Physical training is placed above mental training; mechanical skill above the intellect; and blind loyalty to the Party above everything else."

With a system which inculcates these ideas into youth, there can be no compromise, for under such a system life would hold nothing for youth or age.

To those who thought and who clung to the idea that in major matters of the spirit or in political practice involving human freedom there could be safe compromise,

Munich

Munich came as the great and devastating disillusion. Munich was the last of a series of compromises made in an endeavor to satisfy the greedy and insatiable attitude of a people so definitely bound on world conquest and domination. We know today that nothing was got from this effort except further proof of the enemy's purpose to divide and to isolate and to weaken democracy after democracy by lulling each in turn into a sense of false security with promises made with no intention to keep them. We in the democracies should have seen long before Munich the definite threat to our principles and to our independence, for each of us as individuals felt only scorn for the totalitarian States and their ideas and methods. As nations, however, we did little except to rationalize ourselves into believing that by compromise we had achieved peace in our time. Whatever may have been the disastrous results of Munich, the circumstances of that compromise will remain forever for mankind a sure proof that with certain principles there can be no compromise. We must fortify our sense of national pride and honor and strengthen our collective determination to maintain our principles by implacably combatting and removing injustice, wherever we may find it, without compromise.

A free people can be no more base or no more righteous than the collective individual it represents. In spite of all the mystery with which some of us still

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persist in investing in our own minds the conduct of the relationships between States, there is nothing secret or mysterious about them. There is nothing very complicated in the relationships between States if we conduct them with due regard for the individual. Avarice, hatred, greed, bigotry, lawlessness, selfishness--all of these basic passions inherent in man and in nations do not become dangerous until they are magnified so that they are the will of a people and find expression in their policy either with respect to their own people or to other peoples.

Under our democratic system freedom from restraint - except those restraints which we find it advisable to impose upon ourselves through our own free will for the common good - permits the best in man to assert itself. We do not have to resort to tricks and to subterfuge to achieve that personal liberty which under the system we cherish and are battling to maintain is ours by inheritance. Under our democratic system, the more freedom there is in a nation the more strongly the characteristics of mercy, justice, equality, and decency which are likewise inherent in each of us, will assert themselves and take on a national character and guide us in our relationships with each other and with other States. And the more liberty we allow ourselves the more we must be prepared to recognize the inherent right of others to those freedoms. We cannot claim certain freedoms for ourselves which we deny to others. We must use the weapon

of liberty to defend it in times of peace as well as in war.

On Memorial Day this year at the National Cemetery at Arlington, Undersecretary of State Welles made an address from which I wish to quote the following paragraphs because of their significance. He said:

The immediate answer is self-evident. We must utterly and finally crush the evil men, and the iniquitous systems which they have devised, that are today menacing our existence, and that of free men and women throughout the earth. There can be no compromise. There can be no respite until the victory is won. We are faced by desperate and powerful antagonists. To win the fight requires every ounce of driving energy, every resource and initiative, every sacrifice and every instinct of devotion which each and every American citizen possesses. None of us can afford to think of ourselves, none of us can dare to do less than his full part in the common effort. Our liberty, our Christian faith, our life as a free people are at stake. Those who indulge themselves in false optimism, those who believe that the peoples who are fighting with us for our common cause should relieve us of our due share of sacrifice, those who are reluctant to give their all in this struggle for the survival on the earth of what is fine and decent, must be regarded as enemies of the American people.

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If this war is in fact a war for the liberation of peoples it must assure the sovereign equality of peoples throughout the world, as well as in the world of the Americas. Our victory must bring in its train the liberation of all peoples. Discrimination between peoples because of their race, creed or color must be abolished. The age of imperialism is ended. The right of a people to their freedom must be recognized, as the civilized world long since recognized the right of an individual to his personal freedom. The principles of the Atlantic Charter must be guaranteed to the world as a whole -- in all oceans and in all continents.

We

We are all deeply preoccupied with this great struggle in which we in our country, our friends in Mexico and in the Americas, and in the democracies of the rest of the world are engaged. We are searching our minds by night as well as by day as to what we can do to contribute our part to the victory. There is nothing which engages our thoughts more and we are prepared to do our utmost. We never doubt the victory, because we know the victory must be won irrespective of the most bitter sacrifices we may be called upon to make. There are moments when we ask ourselves whether, even after the victory is won, we shall know how to build the better world for which we are battling and the way for which we shall have prepared by the victory. I think one may have every confidence that we shall do so. I have no pessimism either as to the victory or as to our ability to build a better world. In this confidence we must all go forward, and to you who are leaving this institution this evening I wish to repeat what I said at the outset of these remarks -- that there is no reason to face the future except with optimism. But at its best, life brings its burdens, and even in that better world which we shall build life will have its burdens and you will have yours. It will be your duty to assume responsibilities which now face you and which will face you in the future, in the new world which we shall build.

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In this task the training you have received in this institution should serve as a firm and as a sure foundation.