

President Suzuki, Chancellor Munitz, Members of the Board of Trustees, Members of the Faculty, Members of the Graduating Class, Ladies and Gentlemen,

How very grateful I am for this extraordinary distinction with which you have honored me today.

Dear Graduates, you who have survived the rigors of tortuous faculty and parental demands, I salute you!

On this proud and pivotal moment in your lives, let me first share with you a story which actually happened to me recently, for it encapsulates the very essence of my message to you today.

As I stood in line at a copy center, a little child, probably no older than five, kept staring at me without letup, and she finally called her mother's attention to me, saying "Mommie, what is she?" The mother, a young African American, smilingly replied without missing a beat: "Why she's a being, honey!" Instantly my uneasiness was transformed into a buoyancy akin to wonder. For this wise mother, in imparting to her child a special sensitivity, had instructed me as well.

For in that transcendent moment she had made me feel as though we were all the same--not divided by race or color or class or by any of the barriers that people have a way of building in this ever more pluralistic society. I marveled at this loving mother's molding of a still-impressionable mind towards something approaching altruism. And I ended up being reminded of the renowned humanist and Nobel Laureate, Dr. Albert Schweitzer, who had once reflected with enormous wisdom: "Until we extend the circle of our compassion to all living things, man will not himself find peace."

Surely, at this moment of heightened hostility among races, ours is a nation in desperate need of great role models like Dr. Schweitzer. And like that sensitive young mother.

It is with a bit of reluctance that I now deal with a topic earlier suggested for my address to you today: What motivated me to write Years of Infamy?

As I look back, I would first have to credit both the Vietnam War (when the use of technological savagery on the lives, habitats and eco-system of a small Asian nation was shocking the entire civilized world, and the Civil Rights Movement (when each day was filled with rage and racial violence) for the transition that took place within me. From an apolitical innocent I became a traumatized citizen. I was enraged by a democracy's flagrant disregard for elemental human rights, especially as they related to ethnicity and skin color, and by America's shocking disregard for a reverence for life which we had long been taught to hold sacred.

What startled me into disbelief during the heat of the anti-war and civil rights agitation was the preposterous lie spewed forth by the then Attorney General Ramsey Clark when asked on television if the protestors would be put in concentration camps. His astonishing reply, that "we have never had, do not now have and will not ever have concentration camps here" was the catalyst. His blatant untruth convinced me that uncovering the probable lies of our long revered wartime President Franklin Delano Roosevelt would surely lead me to the truth as to why we innocents had been consigned to prison camps.

Indeed, at the FDR Library, later at the National Archives and other repositories, a treasure trove was there for the digging.

For an untrained researcher it was agonizing to decide how to proceed, when certain of my suspicions proved true: That textbooks, for example, were perpetuating a myth in scapegoating the fear hysteria of the West Coast, when the hysteria was actually in the White House!

When it dawned on me that it was just four days after the fall of Singapore (after 130,000 Allied troops and civilians fell to the Japanese) that the President had signed and issued the order for our internment, what other



conclusion could be drawn than that we had been part and parcel of a hostage-reprisal reserve then being urged by a besieged General MacArthur in the Philippines?

Indeed, no other conclusion could be drawn, in view of the fact that America's "Prisoner Number One" captured at Pearl Harbor was, as of mid-February, our only prisoner of war!

It became starkly evident that as the Allied cause in the Pacific plummeted, the search for hostages was becoming an ever widening hemispheric program, including the islands of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. In the guise of "hemispheric security," Central and Latin American countries were among the first to be invited to send "potentially dangerous individuals" (meaning the rich and more influential persons of Japanese heritage) to swell America's hostage reserve. It profoundly maimed and mutilated the civil and human rights of victims, rupturing family ties, separating fathers, mothers and children, ~~often~~ <sup>sometimes</sup> forever.

The Republic of Peru found it a splendid opportunity for "cleansing" itself of its Japanese element and supplied eighty percent of those who were literally kidnapped. Men were picked up off the streets or seized in their homes by the local police, then turned over to American authorities and shipped to <sup>U.S.</sup> ~~United~~ States concentration camps. It was an Orwellian nightmare, as all were first turned into "illegal aliens" before landing on American soil by the confiscation of their papers and passports. In the meantime, the rise of inter-American solidarity reached its zenith as homes, businesses, farms, even family treasures, were confiscated.

So nefarious was the inter-American custodial operation that when Peru refused reentry of its unwanted ethnics after the war, the State Department declared those no longer needed as ransom to be "illegally" in the United States. It thereby allowed authorities to simply dump the one-time kidnap victims on a

defeated, war-pulverized, starving Japan. Only because of the legal intervention of an outraged San Francisco lawyer, the now fabled Wayne Collins, were deportations halted and the final contingent of some 360 deportees permitted to remain in the United States.

But the most wretched treatment of those Peruvian innocents was yet to come. Shockingly, still surviving family members, whose lives had been so cataclysmically disarranged, were not even mentioned in the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, an Act intended to provide token redress and our nation's apology for injustices endured by all who had suffered wartime captivity, only because of their ancestry.

You will now pardon me if I offer my conjecture that our Washington power brokers, still dominated by elitists with a Eurocentric world vision (possibly disdainful of the lower two-thirds of the Americas), lack the empathy to put human faces on people whom America had once treated as no more than blocks of wood--just bodies to be bartered. They lack the depth of feeling to deal compassionately with our one-time hostages in a spirit of justice which the Civil Liberties Act of 1988 was meant to embody. For these are people who have few friends and advocates. And their votes don't count. As in the case of Native Americans. Native Hawaiians. Bikini Islanders. And so it goes.

Though the Peruvian story is but a microcosm of ills that now afflict the world, remember that all this did happen. Do not sanctify ignorance by your silence. Arouse others to these harrowing truths. For only by exposing such abysmal acts of terrorism as our nation once engaged in can we hope to reach the hearts and minds of our leaders and lawmakers who, even now, could act to redress this egregious wrong. No longer should they be allowed to ignore the voiceless and their valid cries for justice!

Finally, graduates, my congratulations again to all of you for bringing honor to yourself and to your family. May it ever be so.

Just remember always the lesson I spoke about earlier, the lesson imparted by that sensitive young mother, and that of the great Albert Schweitzer, who urged us, and all with whom we share this planet, to extend our circle of compassion to all fellow beings and to all mankind.