Inaugural Cindy Pritzker Lecture on Urban Life and Issues

by Vartan Gregorian

1/17/06

Let me begin by thanking Jayne Thompson for the warm introduction and Mary Dempsey, Commissioner of the Chicago Public Library for all her wonderful work. I also bear greetings to Mrs. Richard Daley and of course, to Cindy Pritzker and members of the Pritzker family. I have many friends in the audience tonight, but I am not going to name any of them. However, I must recognize at least one of my friends, Newt Minow, because today is his 80th birthday. Happy Birthday, Newt.

It is my great honor to deliver the inaugural Cindy Pritzker Lecture on Urban Life and Issues. I have the highest regard and affection for Cindy Pritzker as a committed philanthropist, as a proud and dedicated citizen of Chicago, as a remarkable human being and, I may add, as a friend.

It is fitting that we are gathered here, in this extraordinary public building, the Harold Washington Library Center, which has appeared in *The Guinness World Records* as one of the largest public library buildings in the world. With over ten floors, more than seventy miles of shelves for books and other materials and seating for over 2,000 readers, this library is a wonderful example of how, in the United States, civic life is often centered around providing citizens with access to knowledge, education, culture, and a host of other benefits and services that help to uplift the spirit and, in the process, ease the struggles of daily life. These public-interest programs and activities are often supported not by governments alone but by a network of individuals and organizations from the private sector who generously provide their time, money and sometimes even old-fashioned elbow grease in order to improve and enrich the lives of men, women, and children in their community and in their nation.

This goal of contributing to the common good seems to be inbred in the American character. One of the first to chronicle this fact was the young French aristocrat Alexis

de Tocqueville who, in 1835, recorded his perceptions and experiences of traveling through the United States in his celebrated book *Democracy in America.* In it, he wrote of the extensive network of voluntary associations, mutual aid societies and citizen philanthropists—both rich and poor—that were helping to build the institutions of American civil society. This was a radical idea in Tocqueville's 19th century Europe, where the State was almost synonymous with society.

Tocqueville explained how citizens' associations played a critical role in preserving and strengthening the modern world's first nation that did not have a ruling class. He coined the word "individualism" to describe the self-reliant character of Americans, who reveled in their freedom from paternalism and aristocratic rule. While noting that this unrestrained freedom might well have turned into anarchy, he also observed that the excesses and negative aspects of individualism were held in check by citizens' benevolent associations, which were organized to influence politics and address societal concerns.

Tocqueville also pointed out that this new nation, the United States, was that rarest of places, one that actually belonged to its citizens, and this sense of ownership fostered a communal, barn-raising spirit. "Americans of all ages, all conditions and all dispositions constantly form associations," he marveled. Citizens, he observed, seemed to have an "enlightened regard for themselves," which spurred them to "willingly sacrifice a portion of their time and property to the welfare of the state." At its best, Tocqueville believed that "enlightened self-interest" would help citizens distinguish between integrity and compromise, justice and injustice, personal gain and public interest, means and ends, good and evil. By 1854, there was so much philanthropic activity in America that Henry David Thoreau wrote, "As for doing good, that is one of the professions which are full."

This tradition of contributing to the progress and well-being of America's citizenry and communities continues through the efforts of about 1.4 million nonprofit organizations that exist today in the United States, not including the multitude of religious institutions that are also at work across the country. The nonprofit sector provides a significant share

of the nation's low-income housing, a substantial amount of its higher education and research institutions and is a critical component of K-12 education, as well. Our nonprofits provide at least half of our nation's health care, a significant part of its human services and almost all of the arts. Nonprofits address the needs of under-served and disadvantaged populations by providing billions of dollars in services and programs. This sector tackles complex social problems that other sectors are either unwilling or unable or ill-equipped to address. In all of these areas, philanthropies help nonprofit organizations develop innovative programs. It has been said that philanthropies and their nonprofit partners are one of the most critical components of the research and development arm of our society.

We certainly see the evidence of this vibrant civic spirit and public generosity here in Chicago, which is one of my favorite American cities. I love its self-confidence, its pride and its sense of power, which is rooted not only in economic might but also in its rich history and culture. This is, after all, the home of two of my favorite—and great—academic institutions, the University of Chicago and, though it is really outside the city limits, of Northwestern University. Chicago is also home to the Encyclopedia Britannica, to the world-renowned Field Museum and Art Institute of Chicago, the Lincoln Park cultural institutions including the wonderful zoo, and to countless other civic and cultural treasures including opera and dance companies, scores of theaters, art galleries, symphonies, and so much more. It is home to the American Library Association, one of the greatest organizations in the world. I, personally, feel gratified because in 1991 it was my privilege to participate in relaunching one of Chicago's great institutions by helping to dedicate the Harold Washington Library Center, which was the highlight of the rebirth and revitalization of Chicago's public libraries.

Today, wherever you look in Chicago there is clear evidence of the great philanthropic spirit at work here, and of the Chicagoans who have loved their hometown so dearly that they have made major investments in supporting the city's invaluable social and cultural organizations and institutions. In this philanthropic firmament there are glorious names such as the Crown family, Marshall Field, Julius Rosenwald, the Donnelly family, Robert

R. McCormick, and John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur, whose namesake foundation has contributed so much to arts, culture and social betterment for the citizens of Chicago, as well as throughout our country and internationally, as well. And of course—last but hardly least!—the Pritzker family, whose members first arrived here in 1881, as penniless immigrants from Russia. Having truly realized the American dream of success, the Pritzkers have made philanthropy the hallmark of their family, helping their city—and hence, our nation—to provide the same opportunities for education, advancement and economic achievement that were of benefit to them. Indeed, I must confess that perhaps some small part of their generosity is my fault! I say that because once, years ago, I found myself on the Concorde—and don't worry, the cost was on President Mitterand's bill, not The New York Public Library!—sitting, by coincidence, next to Cindy's late husband, Jay Pritzker. Jay told me please, don't come back to Chicago anymore because every time I showed up here, his wife asked him to make a major contribution to the Library or another worthy cause. He said each of my visits cost him a million dollars.

But let me now turn to the subject of my lecture. It is not an easy thing to discuss the most critical issues facing urban America—and thus, Chicago—because the problems of our cities really represent challenges to our nation as a whole: education, housing, health care, poverty, decaying infrastructure, etc. This evening, however, I'd like to highlight four areas of great concern to me, and I hope to you, as well.

Libraries

Since we are gathered here today in a library, let me begin by stressing the centrality of public libraries to our society and our nation. And let me say from the outset that libraries are not fading away. They are important and will continue to be important. Indeed, today, the American Library Association reports that we have more than 16,000 free public libraries, or more sources for books and computers than McDonald's has franchises for Happy Meals—which surely proves the adage that man and woman does not live by bread alone!

The advent of technology—especially the Internet, which now overspreads the globe like an electronic canopy—has meant that each of us, for the first time in history, has the means to access our own virtual Libraries of Alexandria. It's fantastic that we can search this treasure house, pluck out what we want—or at least, what we *think* we want—and, with great satisfaction, plunk what we find into a computer file that we can deposit into an electronic folder. This will hopefully give us the ability at long last to escape the fearful condition of modern life that T.S. Eliot described in his commentary on Dante's *Inferno*, when he wrote, "Hell is a place where nothing connects with nothing."

But we cannot praise the new pathways to knowledge and information that are opening up to us without also bearing in mind that all this open access is actually not completely free. Let us not forget that our public institutions require our support in order to serve our society. Their existence has a price: they need space, they need light and power, they need well-maintained buildings, a trained staff, and significant amounts of equipment and supplies along with a wealth of other resources, both human and material—and they require the civic will and responsibility to first create them and then keep them open and operating at a high level and on a dependable basis. We need public commitment to common purposes and to excellence. Public institutions and public services are not destined, by their very nature, to be mediocre or lousy. Democracy and excellence are not mutually exclusive. We have to face the danger of devolving into a society bifurcated into "haves" and "have nots," with those who have little becoming dependent on those who have much. In such a society, a privileged minority can control access to critical resources such as education, healthcare, knowledge and information, and economic opportunity as well as to political participation. The social and political consequences of allowing our society to fall into such a sate would be far-reaching. It would mean becoming the opposite of the kind of democracy that our founding fathers envisioned for us and for the generations who will follow. In the nation we have built, access to knowledge is a ***right,*** not a privilege, and that right must be both cherished and constantly nourished.

As J. Robert Oppenheimer once wrote, "The open society, the unrestricted access to knowledge, the unplanned and uninhibited association of men for its furtherance—these are what may make a vast, complex, ever growing, ever changing, ever more specialized and expert technological world, nevertheless a world of human community."[1]

One institution that is most representative of our open society is the library. We must, therefore, acknowledge that libraries are indispensable, no matter what form they take. Libraries have and always will contain our nation's heritage, the heritage of humanity, the record of its triumphs and failures, the record of mankind's intellectual, scientific and artistic achievements. They are the diaries of the human race. They contain humanity's collective memory. They are not repositories of human endeavor alone—they are instruments of civilization. They provide tools for learning, understanding and progress. They are a source of information, a source of knowledge, a source of wisdom, and hence they are a source of action. They are a laboratory of human endeavor. They are a window to the future. They are a source of hope. They are a source of self-renewal. They are the symbol of our community with mankind. They represent the link between the solitary individual and mankind, which is our community. The library is the university of universities, for it contains the source and the unity of knowledge. It constitutes a commonwealth of learning. It is a great asset to building community and neighborhood. I can affirm the fact that no city, and indeed, no university in the world has ever risen to greatness without a corresponding great library, a depository of knowledge and culture—such as the one, here in Chicago, where we are meeting today.

Public Schools

Now, let me address the second issue I am concerned about—though not in descending order—and that is the state of our public schools. Since the 1800s, when Horace Mann,[2] the great educational leader who was known as "the father of the American common school"—and a Brown graduate, if I may say so—widely promoted the notion that education was the engine of democracy, we have built our society on the bedrock belief

[1] "Science and the Common Understanding," BBC Reith Lectures, 1953.
[2] 1796-1859.

that all children must to be educated. We have certainly come a long way since then, but that doesn't mean the ***quality*** of the education provided in our public schools is uniformly excellent—or even anywhere near that level.

In fact, many of you may remember 1983, when Americans were shocked by morning headlines telling them that the National Commission on Excellence in Education had just released its report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform,* which contained a now-famous warning that still carries a powerful emotional charge: "...the educational foundation of our society is presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people. [Further], if an unfriendly power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today we might well have viewed it as an act of war. . ." The Commission pointed out that our educational system was turning out students so ill-prepared to participate in the new knowledge-based, technology-driven economy that corporate America could not be blamed if it filed a class action suit against the nation's schools for providing them with workers who were not equipped to take on today's jobs.

Now, bear in mind that those remarks were made over two decades ago. Today, while ninety percent of America's children—hence, ninety percent of our country's future workforce and talent, a total of nearly 48 million students[3]—attend public schools[4], the question is still up for grabs about whether we are doing any better at educating them to a high standard. Unfortunately, seven-out-of-ten fourth graders, for example, cannot read or do math at grade level.[5] Almost one-in-ten teens ages 16 to 19 is a school dropout[6]—a fact that we also know helps to swell the ranks of the unemployed, since for dropouts, the unemployment rate is 8 percent, compared to 2.5 percent for those with a college degree.[7]

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[3] National Center for Education Statistics, 2001-2002 school year, http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2003/snf_report03/#1
[4] *The State of America's Children, 2004,* Children's Defense Fund.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Remarks by Michael H. Moskow, President and CEO, Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago; The Fourth Annual Newman Lecture, The Chicago Community Trust, The Mid-Day Club, Chicago, IL, May 24, 2005.

Certainly, we are not providing uniformly high quality education to all children, equally, across the board. For example, most states significantly shortchange poor and minority children when it comes to funding the schools they attend. Nationally, we spend about $900-$1,000 less per pupil on students educated in our nation's poorest school districts than those educated in the wealthiest. This disparity in the allocation of educational resources will only continue to deplete the ability of schools to provide all children with a high-quality education in the near future, or even plan to do so over the long term.

Private philanthropy can help in some respects, but cannot come anywhere near providing the kind of support that is required to keep America's public school system up and running. Total taxpayer investment in K-12 education in the United States for the 2004-05 school year, for example, was estimated to be $536 billion[8]—all of private funding from foundations, individuals and other sources would only amount to a tiny fraction of that figure. Private support can contribute to the development of educational models, strategies for reform, innovative demonstration programs, charter schools and other provide other types of assistance, but private funding can never supplant long-term public investment in our schools. Nor should it ever be viewed in such a light. The schools are the people's business and their responsibility. The long-term welfare of schools requires a compact between parents and local, city, county, state and federal authorities.

All of us, parents, teachers, businessmen and women, politicians, and community leaders, along with unions, cultural institutions and higher education, as well as the philanthropic sector, have a major responsibility towards and ownership of our public schools, hence, their welfare and performance. Because what is really at stake in our schools is our future.

The importance of our public school system and the role it plays in our society goes far beyond classroom instruction. In the United States, our public schools have always been the center of democratic acculturation, where youngsters—and parents—of different races, ethnicities, religions and national origin encounter each other, often for the first

[8] U.S. Department of Education, http://www.ed.gov/about/overview/fed/10facts/index.html

time. Today, immigrant families are arriving in America from every corner of the globe, presenting a stunning complexity of challenges to our nation and to our public schools. For example, there has been a whopping 14 percent increase in student enrollment over the past 15 years, due in large part to growing immigration rates. This diversity is reflected in the fact that 20 percent of school-age children in 1999 had at least one foreign-born parent; 5 percent of students were not born in the United States. About 65 percent of Hispanic school-age children have a foreign-born parent, as do 88 percent of Asian and Pacific Islander children.[9] Racial and ethnic diversity is also on the rise, and trend that will continue. "Students ages 6 to 17 will become even more diverse in future years," a recent Census Bureau report predicts.[10]

Therefore, throughout the U.S. but especially in our urban centers where diversity is generally the norm rather than the exception, the health of K-12 education, as I've noted before, is everyone's responsibility—from the top city leaders to every parent in the community, to every teacher. The future of every citizen of every city, state and of the nation as a whole will be impacted by how well our public schools educate tomorrow's leaders, workers, artists, scientists and thinkers. It may be a cliché, but nevertheless it is true that good schools make good neighborhoods; good neighborhoods make good communities; and good communities become the backbone of our society. In her seminal study of urban American life, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*,[11] Jane Jacobs said, "The point of cities is multiplicity of choice." Today, let us choose to make the public schools in our cities and our nation exemplars of the best America can be; let us choose to give them the best resources and all the support we can provide so they can offer all our children the highest level of learning. We must do this starting today and know that we must do even better tomorrow. We have no choice: the alternatives are too bleak.

[9] Kathleen Vail: "The Changing Face of Education," December 2001 issue of *Education Vital Signs*, a supplement to *American School Board Journal.*
[10] ibid.
[11] Modern Library, 1961.

Higher Education

Now I would like to discuss the next challenge, which will probably not surprise you: it is the role of higher education in the development of our society. For more than two centuries, American institutions of higher education have been the mainstay of our nation's progress, helping make it an economic, cultural, scientific, technological and political power. The American university is, incomparably, the most democratic in the world. It is popular in the best sense of the term, admitting and educating unprecedented numbers of men and women of every race and social class. Students from every imaginable background—and here I speak from personal experience—have found a place in this nation's incredible variety of colleges and universities, public or private, large or small, secular or sectarian. Today, there are almost 4,200 colleges and universities in our country, including some 1,700 public and private two-year institutions. Evidence of the growing centrality of higher education to American life can be seen in a few startling statistics: in the 20th century, total enrollment in institutions of higher education grew from just 4 percent of the college-age population in 1900 to more than 65 percent in the 1990s. Within two years of high school graduation, three-out-of-four students go on for some higher education—and they're getting some of the highest quality education available anywhere on the globe. In recent remarks, noted Chicagoan, Michael H. Moskow, president and CEO of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, cited a *Times of London* report on the world's 200 top institutions of higher learning which said that U.S. colleges and universities claimed 62 spots, including 7 of the top 10.[12]

But while bragging about or celebrating our institutions of higher education, we must also recognize their deficiencies. One of the areas where colleges and universities have fallen woefully short is in the overall quality of the education they provide to our nation's future teachers. At many universities, schools of education are marginalized as second-class citizens or second-rate degree mills. With their relatively low-maintenance operations and large student bodies, the schools are often derided as the "cash cows" of the

[12] The Fourth Annual Newman Lecture, The Chicago Community Trust, The Mid-Day Club, Chicago, IL, May 24, 2005.

universities.[13] Treating schools of education as mere profit centers is detrimental to the quality of the schools and, of course, ends up penalizing the students. Let's not forget that many students borrow money for tuition, work night shifts and summer jobs and make other sacrifices in order to graduate from schools of education. It's not ***right*** that they enroll in major universities, even prestigious ones, and receive inadequate preparation in their schools of education. Students deserve better. They must graduate as professionals. They should not be defrauded.

Perhaps most shocking of all to me is that even inside many schools of education, the training of classroom teachers, until recently, has been routinely considered low-prestige, entry-level work—a responsibility given to the most junior faculty members, part-time professors and teaching assistants. Reflecting this bias, a recent study revealed that one-in-six education professors has never taught in a K-12 school and that most others have not been K-12 teachers for more than 15 years. In this same study, two-out-of-three education professors acknowledged that their programs "often fail to prepare teachers for the challenges of teaching in the ***real world***."[14]

Many teachers say they teach for the love of it,[15] and I believe this to be true, because they certainly can't be doing it for the pay! Consider the relatively few dollars set aside for what most of us believe to be one of society's most important professions: since 1973, the average teacher's salary has increased by only 70 cents a day, after accounting for inflation. Teachers' standard of living today is the lowest it has been in 40 years.[16] In 2004, the average teacher's salary failed to keep pace with inflation for the first time since 1999.[17] And there is more bad news: many states are trying to substantially reduce or eliminate pension and healthcare benefits for teachers. Teaching is actually one of the

[13] John Merrow, *Choosing Excellence: "Good Enough" Schools Are Not Good Enough* (The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2001).
[14] Steve Farkas, Jean Johnson, Ann Duffett, *Different Drummers: How Teachers of Teachers View Public Education.* (New York: Public Agenda, 1997).
[15] National Center for Educational Statistics, *Study on Teacher Quality: A Report On the Preparation and Qualifications of Public School Teachers*, 1999.
[16] American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, *Survey & Analysis of Teacher Salary Trends 1999.*
[17] ibid.

few occupations where the money gets worse the longer you stay in the field. Today's teachers start out earning $31,700, on average, or about $8,700 less per year than their fellow college graduates are earning. When these young people look ahead, they see that veteran teachers now earn about $46,000, on average, or more than $30,000 less than their peers with master's degrees who work in other fields.[18]

Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to remind our colleges and universities, as well as the business sector and community and political leaders—not just teachers' unions—that they must all take a leadership role in improving the social and economic status of teachers. This change must take place at the same time that our institutions of higher education dedicate themselves to enriching and elevating the quality of teacher training and education. Nothing can be more important, as each day, our nation becomes increasingly tied into a globalizing economy that requires confident, highly skilled and knowledgeable people to lead, work, and govern. In that respect, we are not falling behind, but the rest of the world is catching up—even surpassing us, because they have learned from our example that education must undergird the development and progress of any society that hopes to compete in today's world.

The critical importance of education as a foundation of progress extends from the infrastructure of the K-12 grades to the superstructure of higher education. Here in Illinois, in the land of Lincoln, both the commitment to invest in education and to promote service to the community have become guiding principles. But this was not always the case: in the 19th century, higher education was actually available to only a small proportion of America's population until, with the endorsement of Abraham Lincoln, Congress enacted the Land Grant College Act in 1862. This legislation—the first Morrill Act—was passed, astonishingly, in the middle of the Civil War, making it clear how strongly both the president and Congress felt about the importance of education, as well as about the future of the nation. The Act, in effect, put universities where the people were. It not only provided much greater access to higher education, it

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[18] *Education Week*, "Quality Counts 2000: Who Should Teach," January 2000.

also promoted specialized training and spurred the development of both theoretical knowledge and its practical application. After the war, when the Industrial Revolution was in full swing, the Morrill Act helped to provide the research and the educated workforce that were desperately needed in agriculture, mining and manufacturing. In 1863, while the Civil War still raged on, Lincoln also signed the legislation that created the National Academy of Sciences and later authorized the creation of a committee to study the efficacy of instituting the metric system in the U.S., again highlighting the president's certainty that even in the midst of the bloodiest conflict in our nation's history, the government and the people needed to plan for the education of the next generation, as well as those who would follow after. War was not seen as an excuse for inaction. This is a legacy that we must not fail to both honor and enrich.

American Pluralism

Now, last but not least, let me briefly highlight American pluralism. Part of what makes Chicago a great American city, and America a great nation, is that both embody pluralism in their spirit, history, population and outlook. Walk down Chicago's streets, meander through its neighborhoods and you will come upon an extraordinary tapestry of ethnic, racial and religious diversity. Chicago, like much of America, is home to immigrants from every corner of the earth, representing every culture, and speaking almost every language in the world. Let me give you an example: data collected in October 1998 for the Public School Bilingual Census revealed a total of 118 languages spoken by students in Illinois schools. Ninety-nine—or 84 percent—of those languages are represented in the Chicago Public Schools.[19] Thus, while America is a microcosm of humanity, Chicago certainly is a microcosm of America.

Though we have reason to be proud of our remarkable diversity, I am concerned that we not come to see ourselves as a confederation of religious and ethnic groups but remain deeply committed to the idea that we are ***one nation.*** For those immigrants who have chosen America as their new country, it is vital to recognize and understand that America

[19] Illinois State Board of Education: http://www.isbe.state.il.us/bilingual/htmls/bilcen989.html.

is not simply a land of economic opportunity. It is a dynamic, evolving nation with an extraordinary history encompassing visionary ideas, courageous acts, and an unwavering commitment to human freedom that continues to resonate today. America was built by immigrants who became ***citizens***. Their various cultures have strengthened every fiber of our national life; their customs and traditions have enriched its fabric; and today's immigrants must understand that they are part of that process. They have inherited the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights. These documents are not dusty pieces of paper—they are the vibrant, living touchstones upon which, even today, we base our system of governance, our laws, rights, protections, aspirations and dreams for ourselves and our nation, and each new generation—of both citizens and immigrants—should know what they are, and what they stand for. As Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor has said: "Knowledge about the ideas embodied in the Constitution and the ways in which it shapes our lives is not passed down from generation to generation through the gene pool. It must be learned anew by each generation. It's not enough simply to read or even memorize parts of the Constitution. Rather, we should try to understand the ideas that gave it life and give it strength still today."[20]

We must do our utmost to maintain the equilibrium we have established among all the different racial, ethnic and religious groups in this nation. We must strive to keep the delicate balance between diversity and unity. America has always been a land of differences, a many-colored, many-textured quilt representing a microcosm of humanity. As a nation, we have been created from a plethora of diasporas. This diversity has certainly been a source of strength and creativity for our nation, which we should be proud of and celebrate. We should also be grateful that America embraces the idea of preserving the language, identity and customs of different groups. One example of the cosmopolitan nature of our national life that I'd like to point out—because it is a distinctive feature of your city—is that ethnic presses abound, and they are thriving. In Chicago alone, there are approximately 250 ethnic and community publications[21] that

[20] Remarks at the National Constitution Center, Liberty Medal Award, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, July 4, 2003

[21] *Telling Our Stories, Changing Our World: Why Chicago Needs an Association of Independent and Ethnic Presses*, by Jacqueline Lalley with Karen Hawkins, Independent Press Association-Chicago, 2003.

keep people abreast of what is going on in their own communities and serve as bridges to sister communities elsewhere in the world. These horizontal connections that reach across our nation and extend outwards, to embrace the whole world, are welcome. Indeed, this diversity, if properly understood and harnessed, will give us a competitive edge in the global economy. However, we must be sure that in the middle of all this extraordinary variety of cultures, conversations and traditions, we don't lose the notion and the ideal of seeing ourselves as a cohesive ***e plurubus unum.*** "Out of many, one"—our national motto.

For if we cannot see beyond the boundaries of our own separate communities, how then will we avoid continuing to play out within our own borders the ethnic and religious conflicts that have originated elsewhere? I hope we can revisit—and revitalize—that sense of being a true ***commonweal*****:** a nation founded on law and united by compact or tacit agreement of the people for the common good[22] and toward a common destiny

Not by Tolerance Alone

Given the complexity and global interconnections of today's world, tolerance alone—which implies simply enduring or even ignoring differences rather than any attempt to understand or accept them—is not going to be a strong enough glue to bind our society together or help us navigate whatever troubled waters may lie ahead of us both domestically and internationally. This is especially important now, when America finds itself having become perhaps the greatest economic, political and military power in history, engaged in global issues that will surely impact our own future as well as that of the rest of the world. With that much responsibility on our collective shoulders, we are obligated to do more than tolerate those Americans who we view as different as well as those who live in different countries and societies and whose primary allegiance is to seemingly alien customs, religions, beliefs and political systems. We must, in fact, learn to ***understand*** these "others." In our country, there will always be "others" because there will always be immigrants. It's the way our country works.

[22] Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Eleventh Edition, 2003.

But today we face a wave of immigration that perhaps, as a nation, we were not prepared for. Perhaps we were equally unprepared as individuals. The immigrant groups that most of us were probably aware of as we grew up and are surely acquainted with now are those who came during the last great wave of immigration in the 20th century that included the millions of Europeans and others who sought refuge in the United States during the global upheaval caused by World War II. But as we move forward into the 21st century, new immigrants are arriving: they come from India, Japan, Pakistan, Korea, Bangladesh and China as well as from Africa, Russia and the post-Soviet states and elsewhere, while Europeans and many other groups continue to emigrate here, as well.

Many in the current wave of immigrants are Asians. Many are Muslims. Tonight, I would like to focus on Muslims as an important religious group who have come to our country from 80 different nations. They come from every corner of Africa, from Indonesia, Pakistan, Malaysia, Iran, Turkey and many other places, as well. They speak many languages, many dialects, belong to many different sects and trace their origins to many different tribes. In regard to their religion, to begin with, Islam is much like Christianity: a mosaic of many sects, as diverse as humanity itself. And the followers of Islam are not only to be found among Arabic peoples—far from it: only 15 percent of the world's 1.2 billion Muslims are Arabs. In the United States, though estimates vary widely, Muslims currently represent 1 or 2 percent of the United States population, and some say there are already more Muslims in America than Jews or Episcopalians. However, instead of seeing our growing Muslim population as a potential source of conflict, it is important to consider what ties Muslims to our nation's Judeo-Christian cultural and religious traditions.

For example, contrary to what many believe, Allah was not a new god introduced to the world through the Qur'an 14 centuries ago but simply the Arabic word for God—the God of Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. According to Muslim tradition, the Prophet Muhammad brought a message of continuity with Judaism and Christianity to the polytheistic tribes of Arabia. In fact, the Qur'an says that Islam "is a cult of your father, Abraham. He was the one who named you Muslims." And as in Judaism and

Christianity, Abraham—*Ibrahim*—occupies a central place in Islam. Abraham is at the root of all three religions: just as Jews trace their lineage to Abraham and his wife, Sarah, through their son, Isaac, the Arabs trace their genealogy to Abraham and Hagar—Sarah's Egyptian maid—through their son, Ishmael.[23]

Moses is also considered by Muslims to be a great prophet. His confrontation with the Egyptian pharaoh, his miracles in the desert and his ascension to the mountain to receive God's commandments are all acknowledged in the Qur'an. For Muslims, Jesus—*Isa*—is another great prophet and messenger of God, the promised Messiah who brought "the Word of God and Spirit from Him." Jesus is considered the son of the "sinless" Virgin Mary, *Maryam*, who is mentioned more often in the Qur'an than in the Bible.[24] Muslims also believe that Jesus preached the Word of God and worked miracles.

Let us remember also that Islam and Islamic civilization has been with us for 1,400 years. Hence, those who follow the Islamic faith have, for centuries, been interacting with Christians and non-Christians all over the globe—in the Mediterranean world, South Asia and Europe, for example, not to mention the Far East and other regions, as well. Those of you who have visited such places as North Africa, Spain, the Middle East, Iran and Turkey have seen the glories and multifaceted contributions of Islam to the development of our modern civilization and the close links between the Islamic and Western world. Muslims, notably, have played a major role in the advance of science, literature, medicine, philosophy, mathematics, architecture and many other fields. Indeed, Muslims brought us the concept of zero, first expressed by the Arabic word *sifr.* The words "algebra" and "chemistry" (alchemy) also have their origins in Arabic as, perhaps surprisingly, does the word "alcohol."

Still, we cannot depend on a shared history or our religious connections alone to bind American Muslims to American Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Mormons, Sikhs, Hindus

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[23] Genesis 16–25; *Answering Islam: A Christian-Muslim Dialog,* http://www.answering-islam.org/BibleCom/gen16-3.html .

[24] George B. Grose and Benjamin J. Hubbard, eds., *The Abraham Connection: A Jew, Christian and Muslim in Dialogue* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Cross Cultural Publications, Inc., 1994).

and others—but we've walked this road before. There have always been ways to help other religious groups, other ethnic minorities and nationalities blend into our national life. How to accomplish that task is not a new lesson we need to learn. In the past, we've dealt with the consequences of erecting the kind of racial barriers that have been the disgrace of our society so we must not now replace them with religious ghettos—and we don't have to. We know how to fight against corrosive forms of racism, xenophobia and religious fanaticism. We have fought against anti-Semitism and against anti-Catholicism; we have stood up against anti-Irish movements, anti-African American movements, anti-Polish, anti-Ukranian, anti-Hispanic movements, and on and on. We must continue to do so—and we will. Indeed, just yesterday we celebrated the life and legacy of Martin Luther King who wanted us to "live in a nation where [individuals] will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."[25] If we want ours to be such a nation, we must find ways to integrate all new immigrants, be they Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Sikhs or Hindus or followers of any other religion or from any ethnic group. We must find ways to incorporate all new immigrants into the American mainstream and promote their participation in every aspect of our social, political and cultural infrastructure. And we must base these efforts on our willingness to understand those who follow Islam, not because of legal injunctions to avoid possible conflict.

By the same token, we must expect all new immigrants to realize and acknowledge that by emigrating to this country, they are not presenting us with a new challenge, but an ongoing one. After all, millions of their predecessors have come before them seeking refuge, asylum, a safe haven from autocrats and freedom from crushing ideologies. And each group—whether fleeing from tyrants and tyranny leaning to the left or to the right—has done its part to contribute to the great pluralistic experiment that is America. The great American experiment is ongoing and I continue to have great hope for its results, as, I expect, do we all.

[25] "I Have a Dream," speech by Martin Luther King, delivered at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C., August 28, 1963

The Challenges Ahead

So how do we go forward with confidence that our participatory democracy can—as it has for more than two centuries now—continue to progress, grow stronger, and incorporate new groups even while faced with challenging domestic issues and a global scene that constantly presents new dangers along with new opportunities? To begin with, I believe that the years ahead will require committed and visionary leadership at all levels of civic and national life as well as the political will to implement strategies that will demonstrably benefit ***all*** our citizens and ensure the well-being of our nation, which is, and will continue to be, a place where religious worship is guaranteed but the rule of law is paramount, and the separation of church and state is an honored principle.

The United States of America is a dynamic and evolving country, absorbing and incorporating segments of all humanity. Herman Melville expressed this concept eloquently, when he wrote, "America has been settled by people of all nations…We are not a narrow tribe of men . . . No, our blood is that of the blood of the Amazon, made up of a thousand noble currents, all pouring into one. We are not a nation so much as a world."[26] In that connection, let me reiterate that it behooves all immigrants—as well as American citizens—to understand that America is not just a land of economic opportunity. It is a land where an extraordinary and daring idea is being tested: that indeed, out of many can come one. Here, in America, we are trying to form a nation that transcends its limits and where the people transcend their differences in order to share a common purpose and common ideals. Here, in America, we are trying to resolve the many challenges inherent in our nation's birthright, which include freedom, dignity, autonomy, and the rights of individuals as well as the interests of the wider community. And here, in America, we must all understand that participating in our civic life, the rich and vibrant life of our nation, is not just a right but also an obligation. It means that all relative newcomers, such as me, must understand the history of the nation, it's struggles, its continuing search for its soul, its attempts to remain true to its core values, to reconcile the unique and the universal, the individual and the community. And perhaps most important of all, it means being a citizen. By becoming citizens we are emancipated. Let

[26] *Redburn*, Modern Library Classics, 2002.

me remind you that when St. Paul was arrested by the Romans on his way to Jerusalem to preach, he told them that he was a Roman citizen and should be treated as such. Citizenship is both an honor and a duty and we must acknowledge both.

It may be corny, nowadays, to talk about the public good, but let me take the chance of being corny and finish up where I started—with Alexis de Tocqueville and his idea that America is a nation that belongs to its citizens who were also possessed of an "enlightened self-interest." I take his wise words to mean that our while our democracy requires much from us, it also provides the freedom for us to pursue our own goals and individual dreams. But whatever we do in order to make the most of our own lives and the lives of our friends and families, we must never forget that we are all in the business of building the future. In that connection, in addition to being good citizens, we must all be good ancestors. This windy city and this beloved nation of ours were built for us by our ancestors, and now it is time for us to earn the right to be the good ancestors of the generations to come. For them, for our children and our children's children, let us all work together to make the great tapestry that is our shared America even stronger and more beautiful than it has ever been before.

Thank you very much.