

**Address by Dr. Mark Poindexter,  
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at  
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It has become common at events like this one to say that the world is becoming more interconnected all the time. This is, in many ways, true, but it is also misleading if it causes us to think it is a new phenomenon for what happens in one part of the world to have profound effects elsewhere.

This planet has been globalized, internationalized, for a very long time. Even before written history there were vast migrations of human populations. In the written history of our world, we have many examples of trade, tribute, spheres of influence, wars and conquests. Think of Egyptian, Greek and Roman hegemony in the Mediterranean region, the Aztec and Incan Empires in the Americas, of the Mongol and Moghul conquests in Asia and, of course, the European colonization of much of the rest of the world.

Interdependent systems of agriculture, trade, and the forced migrations and forced labor of Africans were central in the development of the Americas, which also saw the near annihilation of the indigenous inhabitants of two continents and the islands of the Caribbean. In the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington D.C. there is a solemn reminder listing the names of all of the tribes no longer in existence, largely the result of past centuries of globalization. We should certainly not say that today's internationalization has affects more profound than the disappearance of the Arawak of Hispaniola and their replacement by African slaves forcibly transported across the Middle Passage.

While some of the transglobal interaction of previous centuries was voluntary-- certain types of trade, non-forced religious conversion, the dissemination of ideas, especially among elites who could travel and read-- we must admit that much of it was imposed, painful and was inspired and sustained by systems of exploitation.

It was less than a century and a half ago at the Berlin Conference that the powers of Europe carved up the map of Africa, leading to its political and economic subjugation and in some areas wholesale slaughter of local populations or their deaths working for others' gain. Sometimes using trade as a stalking horse, foreign powers brought most of East Asia and the subcontinent of India into a sphere of influence or under their outright control. As recently as the last century, the decisions in Washington, London, Paris, Brussels, Madrid, Lisbon and for awhile Berlin, had profound consequences in the Caribbean, South and Central America, Africa, India, China and elsewhere. The world of the colonial period was quite interdependent, quite globalized. So what is different today?

Aside from what at times may be little more than nominal political independence, is **anything** different? I think the answer is **yes**-- there are difference between the current internationalization and the old. While we **still** have exploitation and even genocide in the world -- the old systems of domination, exploitation and what has been called the development or underdevelopment have at least lost their respectability. And power, especially economic power, in the world today, while it has not shifted completely, is no longer unipolar or bipolar, but multipolar-- with former subjugated nations playing major roles in shaping the world of the 21st century. There may be familiar motifs of earlier centuries intertwined in it, but it is not exactly the same old song.

I'm going to draw now on ideas and comments from others and from a variety of places. One of my favorite films is an Egyptian-French co-production shot in Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and France and set in 12th Century Spain, what was then called Al Andalus. The film, *Al Massir* or *Destiny*, explores many themes, including intellectual freedom and diversity. One of the memorable lines spoken in the film and repeated for emphasis in text at the end of the film is: "**Les idées ont des ailes**" -- ideas have wings. This has not changed, but the speed at which ideas can fly has been greatly increased since the 12<sup>th</sup> century by the printing press and subsequent inventions, most recently satellites and the Internet. In today's world, I think, we are seeing a **convergence** of ideas-- ideas that are related to the democratic tradition of liberty, equality, fraternity-- **but which takes those ideas beyond the mentality that at one time failed to apply them universally or to explore their implications in a global context.**

In the political discourse of much of the world today, the ideas of liberty, equality, fraternity are joined by **diversity, development, education, enfranchisement and empowerment.** Taken together, all of these words have a lot to do with who is here today and why we are here.

I'm going to draw now on the thoughts and words of four people-- two of them, President Franklin Roosevelt and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru--belong to our recent history and two others, President Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh-- at this moment lead the two most populous nations in the world.

For me, one of the most articulate and moving attempts to extend the concept of freedom beyond a narrow scope that tended to economically disenfranchise many came in the 1941 State of the Union Message, where the President Roosevelt spoke of four freedoms. The first two-- freedom of speech and expression-- are in the constitution itself. The two others are **freedom from want** and **freedom from fear.** In his 1941 speech Roosevelt spoke of economic, as well as political freedom. The idea was not new to Roosevelt's public speaking. As early as 1920-- a boom time in the U.S.-- Roosevelt said in his Vice-Presidential campaign: "We oppose treating human beings as commodities." In 1931, as Governor of New York, he declared: "Modern society, acting through its government, owes the definite obligation to prevent the starvation or dire want of any of its fellow men and women who try to maintain themselves but cannot."

In 1936, then President Roosevelt said: “Liberty requires opportunity to make a living... a living which gives Man not only enough to live by, but something to live for.” A year later in another oft-quoted speech Roosevelt called on his country to demonstrate to the world “national wealth can be translated into a spreading volume of human comforts hitherto unknown and the lowest standard of living raised above the level of mere subsistence.... The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance who have much, it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.” He also said in that speech that he believed “the overwhelming majority of the peoples and nations of the world ...want to live in peace.”

That was 1937 and, as we all know, the world got, instead of peace, a devastating war. But one of the outcomes of that war was the founding of the United Nations, whose charter in many ways embodies what Roosevelt was seeking. Now let’s flash forward 60 years and we find Hu Jintao, President of the People’s Republic of China standing before the United Nations, where he says:

“Mutual respect and treating each other as equals have become an important consensus of the international community.... Peace, cooperation and development represent the theme of our times. The trend toward a multipolar world is continuing... productivity around the world has increased rapidly..... Globalization should benefit all countries...instead of leading to a more polarized world where the poor become poorer and the rich richer.”

President Hu called for “universal education,” for a “spirit of inclusiveness” and for respect for “diversity,” which he called “an important driving force behind all human progress.” President Hu endorsed the same concept that guides our diversity efforts here at CMU, that our differences offer us the opportunity to “learn from one another and grow strong together.”

In another more recent speech, President Hu said that China must “ensure that its growing wealth is shared fairly among its citizens” and that the keys to bringing benefits to China’s masses, many of whom heretofore have not shared in the country’s economic growth, are “education and employment.”

This tying together of education, employment and national development is also present in the perspective of Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. His outlook has much to do with why many of you are here today. As he put it quite directly a year ago: “India of the 21st century will be built in classroom.” Prime Minister Singh, who began his own professional life as a teacher, referred to the university as “a great arena that offers us space and freedom” but he also sounded a word of caution, harkening back to these words of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1947: “If universities discharge their duty adequately, then it is well with our nation and our people. But if the temple of learning itself becomes a home for bigotry and petty objectives then how will the nation prosper and a people grow in stature?”

India has certainly grown in many ways, but as its current Prime Minister has pointed out, not all have had the opportunities for learning that they deserve and that the country

needs. To use his words: "India cannot realize its full development potential if the hitherto marginalized sections of society do not become active partners in the process of development."

You who are attending university now are benefiting from access to education which for a variety of reasons is still not available to the vast majority of the world's population. I would like to call upon the students here today-- whether you are from the United States or China or India or anywhere else in the world-- to adopt for yourselves the vision articulated by those I have quoted and to see your education not only as personal achievement, but as a part of a larger goal to help others to get to where you are and to join you on the road to where you are going.

The four freedoms, inclusion, diversity, universal access to higher education, and empowerment so that all the earth's population is treated as citizens, rather than as commodities, consumers or means to someone else's ends --these seem like lofty goals, but what are the alternatives? Past centuries give us all too clear examples of what it means to achieve international interdependency which is not based upon these or similar goals, but upon economic opportunism for few.

As Norman Corwin put it in a radio production 64 years ago: let us show that "brotherhood is not so wild a dream as those who profit from postponing it would pretend." Today we probably say "brotherhood and sisterhood are not so wild a dream" and the change in phrasing -- I think -- indicates we are making at least some progress.