

Varmt tack för inbjudan – warm thanks for inviting me.

Kära vänner. Dear friends. Jag talar på engelska. I will speak in English.

Or, in American. I was 19 when I left Sweden for the US, and I lived in the States for 18 years. I remember how happy and excited I was to go to America. You must be so happy too. Congratulations on your scholarships to the US and Canada.

And I hope you will all forgive me if I now speak mostly about the United States – simply because I don't know Canada. Whether you go to the States or Canada, your year in America will change your lives. New friends, new networks, new domain expertise.

But all that you can get in Germany, the UK, Australia or China. You can get it here in Stockholm. If KTH, Handels, Karolinska and Stockholms Universitetet was one university – if the Royal Institute of Technology, the Karolinska Institute of Medicine, Stockholm School of Economics, and Stockholm university were merged, it would rank nearly as high in publications and citations as Yale University – if my memory serves me right, it would rank around number 9 in the world.

So why America? Surely any good university, any foreign country, will do? Well, no. America will uniquely change you. You will become even more than you are today, optimistic, energized, positive. You will believe, even more than you do today, that change for good is possible, and that you can help change the world. Despite recent US politics – the US remains Europe’s oldest ally, friend and protector. It also remains the innovation hot spot for social, scientific and technological modernity. And the US and Canada alike remain uniquely vibrant, enthusiastic and kind countries, with unsurpassed ecosystems of civil society – warmly welcoming innovation, talent and youth – warmly welcoming – you.

American and Canadian universities and institutions take great care to make newcomers welcome, and Europeans have a great deal to learn from the Americans’ sophisticated, elaborate, and thought-through community building.

After high school, my daughter was lucky enough to be accepted at both Yale and Cambridge. Cambridge sent her a computer print-out telling her when to turn up. Yale sent her a teddy bear, a mini-college-flag, a

personal letter of welcome, Bola-Bola boosterish brochures and made sure fellow students rang her up to welcome her.

We often say America is a young country. But in reality, The United States is an old country, indeed the world's last surviving Enlightenment Republic. Most European states are much younger: France is on its 5th republic, Italy unified in 1871, German history is so complex that my husband Peter Baldwin teaches a course at NYU called "Germany 1871 to 1989: from unification to unification". Even Sweden's constitution is only from 2011, and that one replaced the one of 1974. By contrast, the US, at least north of the Mason Dixon line, is a mould of stability, with many civic institutions long predating even the Declaration of Independence in 1776. My own alma mater, Harvard, was founded 140 years before, in 1636.

And even America's most ancient and elite universities have long since flung their doors wide open to global and these days even, need-blind admission.

I have a sweet memory of old professor John Coolidge at Harvard – a Boston Brahmin par excellence, and born in 1913. He once told me that when he started teaching

at Harvard “we were all Harvard men,” meaning the lecturers and professors had gone to the college. But then he added, “except, of course, for the refugees”. The Willkommenskultur the Germans now admirably are formulating, is longstanding in the States.

So you will be warmly welcome in America – Canada and the US both. But the Americans will also expect a lot from you. Neither Canada nor the United States is a place for passive observers. When I took my son over for his freshman year, a border policeman at Boston’s airport asked him: “So, son. What do you bring to Harvard?” Ben, who went to school in England, looked confused and said “my Latin grammar.”

But that, of course, was not what that nice old man meant. He meant: “How will you contribute, to Harvard, to America, to the world? How will you help build a progressive, innovative community?”

My son’s eyes lit up – America turned to him! He was needed and respected. At that moment, a teenager became an American devotee just like his mother, grandfather, and great grandfather had, when we crossed the Atlantic for our university studies. You will too!

America is closer now, than it was in 1919, when my grandfather Ruben landed in New York, after a twelve-day ship journey from Copenhagen. America is closer now, than it was in 1948, when my father Hans was on one of those propeller planes that just about managed to limp from Shannon in western Ireland to Newfoundland. And America is closer now, than it was in 1980, when I came over on one of those near-empty SAS planes. Monopoly ticket prices were so high then no one could really afford the journey, and I slept comfortably across five seats in the unpopular smokers' section at the back of the plane.

For Ruben, Hans, and me alike, airmail letters were the only way to keep in touch. When you left, you left. Hans called home once, on Christmas Eve 1948: it took five telefonissor, telephone operators, to patch through the call from Berkeley to Skurup in Skåne. I called home for 5-10 minutes every Sunday: that telephone call cost the same as my weekly rent.

But when you go to Canada or America, your digital cloud can follow you. You can remain immersed in your electronic homelands: Skype, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, emails, digital radio and newsfeeds. My

advice to you is: don't. Don't let your mind drag behind you. Start off your journey by turning off your cloud, and turning off your first reactions, too. Let go, don't judge. Immerse yourselves. Become a temporary American.

You need to go native, because only then, when you come home, will you have gained that constructively critical, analytical edge – that cognitive dissonance that marks the bicultural inventor, scholar, innovator and entrepreneur. Your eyes will clear, and you will never again be hemmablind, blindly accepting, or even not perceiving, the status quo.

Remember the old saying: travel is to culture what sex is to evolution: it is the source of change. And to travel to the New World is not only to leap frog into an alternative near-future. It is also to go to a place where, again, you will be warmly welcomed. Nowhere else is the stranger made more at home.

My grandfather Ruben's falling-in-love moment with American happened in 1919, when he was doing his masters in economics at Columbia. That year, the Swedish navy visited New York, and the Tammany Hall mayor brought along a few Swedes when he went

on board the ship to welcome the Swedish navy officers – all, of course, aristocrats. Ruben never forgot the mayor’s innocently enthusiastic welcome speech. “No country,” he said, “provides better lumberjacks or better maid servants”. Ruben, who came from a poor village hugely enjoyed how sour the nobleman looked at this friendly praise.

And that is America. Because despite America’s self-inflicted sufferings and imperfections, it still at heart holds these truths to be self-evident, that all people are created equal. Despite all its failures, that remains. America’s moral lodestar.

And so I know when you young people now go there, you will be made warmly welcome. And you will be expected to bring, not your Latin grammars, but your willingness to serve humanity.

Do your best, and best of luck!

Thank you.