

Speech Sweden-America Foundation 180425

Your Excellency, dear friends and fellows

I had the good fortune to enter the US for the first time in my life by boat, arriving in NY and seeing the Statue of Liberty emerging in the morning mist. A powerful symbol with its raised arm holding the torch and its famous poem (a Petrarchan sonnet actually) ending:

“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she

With silent lips. “Give me your

tired, your poor,

Your huddled masses yearning to

breathe free,

The wretched refuse of your teem-

ing shore.

Send these, the homeless, tempest-

tost to me,

I lift my lamp beside the golden

door!”

There is a message of hope in these lines which moved me when I read them in my teens. But I am being carried away. I should state first that I am honoured and pleased to be invited as a keynote speaker at this event. We have all who are in this room a relation to North America and for many of us that started – or better still, is about to start – with a scholarship to the US or to Canada.

If I can convey to those of you who are about to embark upon your journey, a bit of my own enthusiasm and what it meant to me to get this opportunity, and describe how it shaped my life, I would be very happy.

I must warn you that I grew up in a home – or rather two, as my parents were divorced – where pro-American feelings were a recurring part of the discussions over the dinner table. This was largely due, of course, to the fact that Western Europe was liberated from the Nazi tyranny by the Americans and the British.

The US is often derided for imperialist ambitions but rarely has there been a more hesitant conqueror. In 1941 when Hitler and Stalin ruled large parts of the world, there were only 11 free nations left, and the US possessed an army the size of Bulgaria's. As you know the US entered the war only after being attacked at Pearl Harbor. Post 1945 the US was of course the indispensable nation which guaranteed the freedom of Western Europe, including that of Sweden.

There was also a lot of soft power: American music (Louis Armstrong, Benny Goodman and others – it strikes me that a risk with inviting 79 year-olds as speakers is that their music will be rather outdated - this was anyway before the Beatles changed everything), films, cars, jeans, Coca Cola, etc., etc.

So for me it was natural to turn to the formidable Mrs Adèle Heilborn at SweAmFo (this institution has a long tradition of being run by formidable women) and enquire about the chances of getting a scholarship. I did receive an exchange scholarship with DePauw University, Greencastle, Indiana. Let me tell you: that is in the heart of the Midwest. Nowadays it is often disparagingly referred to as a fly-over state, but for me my year at DePauw was a life changing experience.

I actually started by applying to Harvard, but without much success. But then Harvard has always been somewhat aloof, as is illustrated by the anecdote of a person calling the Administration of the university asking to speak to its head,

only to receive the astonishing reply that “the President is in Washington, to meet Mr Taft”.

In preparing for this speech I leafed through our modest predecessor to today’s Facebook – at DePauw it was called the Mirage – and the memories come flooding back. Some year-book themes are eternal, such as the quest for knowledge, others have changed. Thus the lead picture from graduation day is presented as follows: “Graduation marks the culmination of four years of college and the beginning of a new type of life, whether in a job or in marriage”.

The advertisements have also changed as cigarettes are no longer promoted. In those days Big Tobacco sought to enslave us by giving out free samples. DePauw had a Methodist heritage so there were no ads for liquor, even then. This did not mean, if I remember correctly, that campus was totally dry...

Politically it was the Ike age. The president was a cautious general – literally – who steered clear of the Vietnamese quagmire. His habit of playing golf was the subject of many jokes. Some things never change, do they? He ended his tenure with a remarkable speech cautioning against the influence of the military-industrial complex, an expression I believe he coined.

America was still racially segregated. It was ten years before MLK had his dream. In September 1957 governor Faubus brought in the National Guard to prevent a small Afro-American girl from entering high school in Little Rock, Arkansas. This brought about a confrontation with president Eisenhower and eventually Faubus was forced to retreat. These events occurred at the beginning of the fall semester and I remember, how in the common room we watched the news bulletins on TV, mixed with my first acquaintance with another very American phenomenon: the baseball World Series. In the Midwest we rooted for the Milwaukee Braves, who in the end beat the NY Yankees 4 games to 3. Hank Aarons catch sealed the fate of the Yankees, and I became a lifelong fan.

On October 4, we woke up to the news that the Russians had successfully launched a satellite: Sputnik. Our local newspaper, the Chicago Tribune, “the world’s greatest newspaper” as they styled themselves, was not pleased. In the following months there were several unsuccessful efforts to launch an American satellite. It did not help that the Army, the Navy and the Air Force all had their own projects and did not cooperate. A year later this led to the establishment of NASA.

I had been invited to stay at Sigma Chi, a fraternity with its roots in the South, but in our chapter we were pro the idea of coloured members. I remember how proud we all were, to march out of the National convention of Sigma Chi, which was that year held in Indianapolis, under the leadership of our chairman, Kit Reiner, when the meeting adopted a reactionary stance.

DePauw was, and still is, a small but highly regarded, co-ed school with only some 2,000 students. It was not pretentious and I loved the liberal arts atmosphere which the school cultivated. We had good teachers who encouraged us to question what was taught, and I learned that things are seldom black or white. I took a course in Economics and got hooked on that subject by our teacher Mrs Editha Hadcock, bless her, with the help of Paul Samuelson’s classic introductory book, now in its 19th edition, but then in its third edition.

I took to the easy-going life-style at campus like a fish to water, and also benefitted from the famous American hospitality. I was invited to my new friends’ homes at Thanksgiving and other holidays.

Another big plus: I was for the first time in my life on my own, outside all forms of parental guidance. With today’s technology this advantage is probably less pronounced. In my day there was only one short phone call, for Christmas (and then nothing intelligent was said.)

All too soon, the day for returning arrived. I remember my best friend, Russ, and myself parting at O'Hare airport quoting Oscar Wilde: laughter is not at all a bad beginning of a friendship, and it is by far the best ending of one. I have lost touch with him but many other friendships remain.

My next sojourn in the US was longer. I served as an international civil servant from January 1972 until March 1975, being an economist at the IMF in Washington. These turned out to be the Watergate years. "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times".

I remember that when we had our housewarming party somebody smashed the glass-door and we joked that we had visitors from the Committee to Re-elect the President, (acronym CREEP). As you know the scandal escalated, involving more and more people. The Senate set up a bipartisan Watergate Committee. It was fascinating to watch the "gavel-to-gavel coverage" on TV. You could combine your interest in politics with a less attractive trait: one's more hyenalike instincts. The key witness was a young White House counsel, John Dean – to my mind a rat, but a rat with very good memory, who testified in return for being granted immunity.

A Special prosecutor, Archibald Cox, was appointed. When Cox, refused to follow the president's direct order and abstain from subpoenaing the tapes of Nixon's meetings with his aides, the president sought to have him fired. Nixon turned first to the Attorney General, Elliot Richardson, and ordered him to fire Cox. Richardson refused and instead resigned. Nixon then ordered the Deputy AG, William Ruckelshaus, to do fire Cox. Ruckelshaus, too, resigned rather than carrying out the order. Nixon turned to Nr 3 at Justice Department, Robert Bork, who finally complied.

All this took place within a few hours on Saturday night, October 20, 1973. It is known as the Saturday night massacre – it does not get any worse than that; I hope Cox and his aides held a tumultuous and highly emotional press conference. Cox declared that the stakes could not be higher: the President must not be above the law, those very laws upon which a free society must rest. There followed a tremendous uproar in Congress, in the media, and in public opinion; the White House was deluged with angry telegrams and phone calls. Nixon was forced to relent and re-open the office of the Special prosecutor, albeit with a new head, Leon Jaworski.

And the rest you know.

If you want to relive those events the movie *All the President's men* can be found on the internet. Or you can see Merril Streep as Katherine Graham in the movie about the Pentagon papers, which I believe is still showing in the theatres.

I have visited the US many times afterwards: as Undersecretary for Finance and in business. And I always love it!

- Washington and New York are the Rome of our times. As you may have surmised I am something of a political animal and US politics is always – and I mean without exceptions - fascinating. And not only that: because of the pivotal role of the US, whatever happens in Washington is of course highly relevant for us.
- In Sweden there is, it has been said, only room for one viewpoint at a time. For me arriving in the US is like opening the window. Fresh air streams in and I sense the diversity when I happily zap between umpteenth TV channels, leaf through the newspapers and magazines, follow the debate and browse in the bookstores.

And it is my firm belief that this is a **key advantage** – the freedom of speech, the testing of ideas in free debate – which the US has when competing with authoritarian regimes; of which there are quite a few around the globe

- Finally, of course, I simply enjoy being among Americans, arguably the most friendly people in the world. The friendliness is sometimes said to be superficial but I do not agree with that. Anyway, I subscribe to the theory that when people stop expressing nice thoughts, they also cease to have them.

One of the courses I took at DePauw was in Speech. And I remember the motto: stand up to be seen, speak up to be heard and shut up to be appreciated.

Thank you for listening.