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*Education in a Shrinking World and a Global Marketplace*

Remarks by David Pierpont Gardner  
April 23, 1993, before  
a Breakfast Meeting of the Coalition for Utah's Future/Project 2000  
Salt Lake City, UT

This is a very special pleasure to join you this morning to see so many good friends, to express my interest in and support of you and your efforts, and to share some thoughts with you on education in the modern world. I commend your efforts and am pleased that two foundations with which I am associated resolved to encourage your work and assist your purposes. I wish to begin my remarks this morning by referring to the Coalition's work, the assumptions you take for granted, and the relationship of all this to education in a shrinking world and global marketplace.

For Coalition 2000 to be effective requires one to have faith in a set of basic assumptions, namely:

- 1) That people of goodwill tend to be reasonable and disposed to obtain a balancing of interests between legitimate, competing private and public claims;
- 2) That most disputes are amenable to resolution or, at least, to being managed within acceptable bounds of civility and behavior;
- 3) That most people comprehend cause and effect, the connectedness of events and ideas, and the interplay and dynamic of belief and interests in contention and conflict;
- 4) That most people are capable of expressing themselves and their thoughts so as to communicate the intended message orally or in writing;
- 5) That most people are able to disaggregate a problem, assess its several parts, consider them individually and collectively, including their manifold configurations, and arrive at a confident conclusion or at least a reasoned view of what one believes and why; and

- 6) That most people in this country share, in general, a common value system such that concepts of honest dealing, fairness, reason and tolerance of diversity are understood and animate one's ethical sensibilities and morality--one's social, political and commercial discourse.

I could go on, but you get the general drift.

Why do we feel confident in making these and related assumptions about ourselves and others? We do so because of a common, or at least a proximate, cultural heritage, a set of laws arising from this heritage as enacted by the people's elected representatives, a carefully developed and nurtured set of civic and communal sensibilities, the teachings of our parents and other mentors, the example of others in whom we vest our confidence and respect, and the admonitions of our churches and schools, among others. Thus, as a nation, we have believed that the core values of our society, the laws and customs that give them structure and form, a mostly common religious heritage, a comprehensive public school system and a representative and responsive government were sufficient to secure the body politic, the common good, a commonly accepted ethical and moral standard and the unspoken set of views and beliefs about ourselves, our society and one another that forms the basis for our inter-personal relationships, professional and commercial.

I believe that as a nation we still possess this dynamic set of commonly held views that form the basis of the social contract among and between us and between our government and the people. But I also believe that the social contract is increasingly at risk as our society changes, and its heterogeneity increases and as we come increasingly into contact with and must allow for other world cultures, other values and beliefs that do not fully accord with our own or are even in explicit contradiction to our more rooted and cherished beliefs; and I do not mean only in the international sense of the idea but also within the context of our domestic life and polity as well.

I am fully aware that these points are, for the most part, altogether obvious, apparent in our daily dealings, and certainly at work in your Coalition. For example, would your Coalition work if the assumptions stated at the outset of my remarks could not be relied upon, were not operative, or were being explicitly compromised or otherwise weakened, indeed, even disregarded. Not only would your Coalition not work, but neither would the larger society. Thus, it seems altogether reasonable to consider the place of education in the securing of these values and assumptions for our nation and our place within the family of nations.

Ten years ago this month, the National Commission on Excellence in Education issued its report entitled "A Nation at Risk." The report dealt with problems in our schools and the prospect for constructive change. It divided its findings, conclusions and recommendations into five areas dealing seriatim, with the following topics:

- ♦ The content of the curriculum: what students learn;
- ♦ Time: length of the school day and school year and the effective use of that time in school;
- ♦ Expectations: standards and what are regarded as average, good or exceptional performance and how we acknowledge it in school;
- ♦ Teaching: who is going into teaching, how are they being educated and trained for their profession, how are they being compensated, and so forth; and
- ♦ The division of labor or responsibility for addressing and dealing with these matters among and between local districts and state and federal governments.

While much has happened since then, it is not my purpose this morning to summarize our report or what has happened because of it. What I do wish to note, however, is that if we were preparing it today, more emphasis would be given to the role and place of education in a society that has grown rather dramatically more heterogeneous in the last ten years, to the relationship of education to the economic vitality of our country, and its prospect for competing in today's world, and to the educational issues that arise from a society that is not only more ethnically and racially diverse but more culturally diverse as well -- all such trends, of course, having profound implications for the social contract to which I have referred and for the continuing viability of our country.

I also believe that we would wish to acknowledge and comment further upon the kinds of learning and education that occur outside the school and the impact that these forces are so profoundly having on not only schooling, but the future of our society, its cohesion and essential strength, and the values and attitudes we as a people bring into play in every aspect of our lives including our own families. I refer here to the impact of television and the media on our children, our youth, and ourselves; the effect of advertising on our lifestyle and patterns of consumption; of our criminal justice system as it judges the significance of criminal and civil misconduct and places values on and attaches consequences to different kinds of behavior; of our governmental and political systems as measured by the ethics of public officials seeking to balance their personal interests and public obligations in a system increasingly driven by money and self-promotion; of our colleges and universities as they seek to ration admissions among and between the country's many interested ethnic, and socio-economic and racial communities, decide what research to pursue and what to teach; and of the American family as the push and pull of work and broader economic realities conspire to pull families apart rather than drawing them together, leaving the children to rely less on their parents and more on others for their values, social norms, and patterns of behavior that so shape their lives and conduct.

We cannot any longer count on our children, on average and over time, receiving an education that is as instructive in the common beliefs and values of our society as was once the case, or receiving such guidance from our churches or other institutions to which prior generations repaired for moral guidance or, indeed, receiving such help from the family unit which is in such current disrepair and acute dysfunctionality. In short, we can count less on the prospect of persons in our society sharing the basic set of assumptions to which I made reference at the outset of my remarks, than we have in the past.

If this assumption is even marginally plausible, then it has dramatic implications for the ability of our country to function as a cohesive and socially viable entity not to speak of our government's capacity to reconcile domestic differences in pursuit of the common good, as well as its obligation to secure the nations military and economic position within the international community.

And, in my view, we will need to look to the schools, the home, and our churches for the solution, if there is to be one. Please note that I did not include government here, not because it doesn't count or has nothing to contribute, but because acting alone it can do very little unless the most fundamental institutions of our society are strong and functioning well.

The same is true for the influence of business and other private sector institutions, not-for-profit and for-profit alike, whose collective influence can be telling in many ways, but not so long as the American home and family, its churches, and its schools remain not only weakened but in many respects under fundamental attack.

Thus far we have been considering these issues as though they implicate only our domestic life. They do not, for we are part of the family of nations and we had better remember it.

The United States has a long history of isolationism and suspicion of foreign influences. For generations we were preoccupied with the internal problems of settling a vast continent and creating a nation; our self-sufficiency in natural resources and our enormous internal markets made us uncommonly independent of the rest of the world. Besides, our country was bordered on the east and the west by two huge moats, which, for much of our history, were formidable barriers breachable only by long, dangerous, and tedious travel. We created and sustained this tradition of independence in the name of freedom from what our founding fathers called "entangling alliances."

But today, the world is not so easily kept at bay. Whether we like it or not, the United States as in the throes of a vast adjustment to a world in which our products no longer dominate world markets, but instead must compete vigorously with those other nations. Economic decisions made in Tokyo, London, or Paris reverberate in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. The National Commission on Excellence in Education pointed to the consequences of these new economic realities in its 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*: "The time is long past when America's destiny was assured simply by the abundance of natural resources and inexhaustible human enthusiasm, and by our relative isolation from the malignant problems of older civilizations. The world is indeed one global village. We live among determined, well-educated, and strongly motivated competitors. We compete with them for international standing and markets, not only with products but also with the ideas of our laboratories and neighborhood workshops. These developments signify a redistribution of trained capability throughout the globe. Knowledge, learning, information, and skilled intelligence are the new raw materials of international commerce and are today spreading throughout the world as vigorously as miracle drugs, synthetic fertilizers, and blue jeans did earlier."

Along side these dramatic shifts in our international relations, America is undergoing profound demographic changes--results of both differential birth rates among the nation's many ethnic and racial groups and the mass migration of peoples from the Pacific Rim and Latin countries to the United States. We are experiencing a wave of immigration that rivals that of the turn of the century. The United States has always been a diverse society, but that trend is accelerating dramatically.

We, therefore, have even more reason for helping to prepare American leadership to function competitively and knowledgeably in what will be a global environment in far greater measure than ever before.

Forty-five years ago, as the world struggled to rise from the ashes of World War II, the United States was the dominant force in the world. Most of Europe and the Soviet Union were in ruins. Japan, physically devastated, was an occupied nation. China was torn by civil war. The economies of the East and the West had been crippled by a war of unprecedented destruction, which had also rent the social and political fabric of their societies.

By contrast, the United States emerged from the war physically unscathed, and confident of its preeminent economic, political, and military power. American policy influenced every facet of world affairs and, in particular, the world's economy. American goods and American resourcefulness set the standards for world trade. For example, the United States accounted for approximately 40 percent of world Gross National Product at the end of World War II.

Today, however, the winds of change are blowing hard and reshaping the economic, political, and social dimensions of our world:



- ♦ Ideological commitments that have locked in Communist governments for decades are giving way to greater political openness, economic development, and the use of technology, all of which are essential to the prosperity and personal freedom people throughout the world are seeking. From Poland to China, the movement toward democratization and greater economic freedom is gaining momentum--albeit, as in the case of China, unevenly.
- ♦ The past decade has seen the emergence of the Pacific Rim as a potent force in the world's economy and the world's affairs. The rise of Japan and of the newly industrialized states of Asia has especially challenged our assumptions about American dominance of the global marketplace. Our postwar share of world GNP has shrunk from 40 percent in 1945 to 22 percent today. The recent economic integration of Western Europe will be another major force influencing America's economic position in world markets. And one can only speculate about the impact on the world's economy of the changes now taking place in Eastern Europe and the former USSR.
- ♦ Today the East and West are struggling less with each other than they are in common struggling with what the Arab philosopher Hichem Djait (HeeCHEM Jah-EET) has called the forces of "modernity"--the technological revolution, modern science, and the industrialization of labor--forces that should not be confused with Western civilization, as is often the case. These forces are changing the world not just at the margin but at the core. And one of the most striking qualities of this change is its international character. For example, the discrete national markets with which we have long been familiar define less and less the world's economic order. It is becoming increasingly difficult to buy American, to illustrate the point, even if one sets out aggressively to do so. Production of a car can involve workers in four or five countries before the final product rolls off the

assembly line in the U.S.

- Moreover, ideas blow across political boundaries, even into the most insulated of nations and societies, disquieting, troubling, indeed in some instances overturning even the most ideological and inflexible of established orders. Even the role and place of the military in this equation are coming under intense scrutiny. All of these forces--economic, political, ideological, religious, social, and cultural--are interrelated and global in their significance and effect.

Who will the leading nations be in this dramatically altered economic and political environment?  
According to investor Felix Rohatyn:

The real power in the world is coming to consist of surplus capital combined with national self-discipline, advanced technology and superior education. The leading nations of tomorrow, by those standards, are likely to be Japan and post-1992 Europe. The United States, once the unquestioned leader of the West, falls short in every one of these categories.

Surplus capital, national self-discipline, advanced technology, and superior education--an agenda for the future we would do well to heed. The United States has both advantages and disadvantages as it struggles to define its role and place in this changing scene.

The list of our problems will sound familiar: There is a growing gap between the rich and the poor in this country, and an ominous growth in the underclass--the unemployable poor caught in the vicious cycle of drugs, alienation, and the fragmentation of the family, especially in our inner cities. The past few decades have brought an erosion of our sense of community and of the place

and significance of local government, with a simultaneous gravitation of power and control to state and Federal governments. Ironically, at the same time our Federal government displays an incapacity--or is it an unwillingness?--to make tough decisions that appears to border on paralysis.

We have a school system in deep trouble and chronically underfunded universities. And there is a certain malaise within the body politic attributable partly to the problems mentioned earlier in my remarks and partly to the knowledge that our nation is no longer the dominant player on the world scene, but is increasingly but one of several countries capable of influencing the course of nations.

On the other hand, we have some striking advantages as well. The nation possesses remarkably stable political, social, and economic systems; and if you wonder about that, just consider conditions in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America by way of example. And despite some very real problems, we have a society that not only adapts to change but actually encourages it. Our openness to new ways of doing things is a tremendous advantage in a world characterized by constant technological change, as is the nation's willingness to accept new talent and fresh ideas from throughout the world.

American universities are the finest in the world. The vigor of our basic research enterprise is truly remarkable, and its democratic and open spirit helps assure that the best flourish. Americans continue to capture most of the Nobel prizes year after year, surely an indication that we are doing something right--or at least we did so within the lifetime of the recipients!

I also count among our advantages the creativity and productivity of American business. Much is made these days of the short-term focus of American companies--too much, in my opinion. That view fails to take into account the extent to which American companies have recognized their

problems and restructured during the 1980s and early 1990s; in many respects business has been more energetic in responding to change than either universities or government.

These are some of the reasons why foreign investors, including the Japanese, are anxious to invest in the United States. Dollar-denominated assets are valued because they are the currency of a society with an enormous capacity for adaptability, hard work, creativity, an open attitude toward and a positive response to change.

Our nation has a freely elected government with a highly refined set of checks and balances among and between its several parts, an economic system that the world is coming to emulate (indeed, even improve upon), a vital and proud spirit, great inner strength and resilience, and hard working people. These are all assets of inestimable value. At the moment we are questioning ourselves, contending with the broad-ranging and damaging social problems in our great urban cities, assimilating more or less, a wave of immigration equal to the greatest wave of persons ever to come to this country in a given period of time, struggling with racism in its various forms and manifestations, striving to improve our schools, bemoaning the pressures and dysfunctions of the nuclear family, and, in general, having a hard time of it socially, governmentally, economically, and environmentally.

We must solve these problems ourselves. No one will solve them for us; and, it seems to me, that we need to start at home, in our schools and in our churches because only if these mainstays of our society are healthy will we be able to count on our economic and governmental systems to perform their crucial functions. Perhaps a "Utah Coalition 2000" concerned with the health of these institutions as the fundamental building blocks of our society might be formed just as your Coalition 2000 has so constructively and productively impacted the state's physical and biological environments.

In any event, and as with most things in life, it is best that we start here at home with our problems rather than looking elsewhere for answers or excuses. Utah, more than most places I know, could lead out: a stable population, a sense of community, manageable numbers, strong and healthy communal elements, and well-educated, capable, hardworking people.

Thank you for the chance to share these views and, especially at this early hour for according me your attention; and most importantly, for helping Coalition 2000 with its work.