

FLETCHER 75th ANNIVERSARY– FRIDAY, OCTOBER 24, 2008

DAHLIA SHAHAM - STUDENT ADDRESS

Thank you Ambassador Scharioth, Dean Bosworth, distinguished faculty and honorable alumni, students and guests. I am honored to have been given the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Fletcher student body on this important occasion.

The question I want to discuss is this: Is the Fletcher community of today living up to the expectations that the founders of the school set forth back in 1933? Particularly - Are we the student body that the school founders had in mind?

If we simply look at the name of the school - The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy – our answer may very well be No. Few of us are, or aspire to be, lawyers or diplomats. The curriculum we pursue is also far from limited to those two disciplines, with courses such as Microfinance, Humanitarian policy and public health, or cultural values and development. Our Social e-list, which is probably the best evidence of our interests and concerns, is lined with notices ranging from project finance in the Persian Gulf, through 'one laptop per child' policy to Sarah Palin Halloween costumes. Probably not quite what the founders had in mind.

Clearly, however, the answer to the question cannot be satisfied by such a superficial assessment. To get a better sense of the original vision of the Fletcher School I turned to the address given by James T. Shotwell,¹ at the opening ceremony on October 27 1933. I found his address to be a wonderful source of historical perspective and inspiration, and high quality midterm procrastination material too.

In his address, Shotwell states that so long as The Fletcher School remains true to its initial vision, it will be (quote)" a symbol of the newer outlook upon international affairs, and a challenge to the old order." (end quote)

I noticed that Shotwell is not speaking of a school that advocates a 'New order' but rather nurtures a "newer outlook". This careful choice of words highlights the precision of his vision. Any 'order' that was once considered 'new' is bound to become 'old'. Shotwell explicitly states that his vision is not one of revolution, that there is no 'new order' he wishes to establish. Instead, Shotwell's vision of Fletcher was one of continued relevance. It is a vision that requires the school to constantly reshape itself, to constantly challenge common perceptions, and to remain at the cutting edge of international relations scholarship and practice.

¹ James T. Shotwell (1874 – 1965), the renowned international legal scholar, is mostly remembered for his instrumental role in the establishment of the International Labor Organization in 1919 and the inclusion of the Declaration of Human Rights in the UN Charter

Going back to my original question, I feel that I can safely say that we, the new members of the Fletcher community, indeed represent the original vision of its founders.

We chose Fletcher because we felt that if we truly want to understand the undercurrents of international relations, we cannot limit ourselves to one specific disciplinary boundary of law, economics, business or sociology.

We chose Fletcher because we want to be surrounded by people who are different from us, because we know that true innovation cannot grow out of unanimous consensus.

From personal experience I can say that it has been a rewarding choice. I came to Fletcher from Israel quite jaded from the old paradigms surrounding the conflict in the Middle East, and from the vicious cycle of violence and despair that they create. I came here hoping to find a new outlook and I found a lot more than that –

I found friends from Lebanon, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia who are just as unwilling as I am to cooperate with prejudice. I found a multidisciplinary faculty who were willing and able to guide me through paths of economic, financial and legal analysis that are rarely applied to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Most importantly, I found a community of free thinkers, not only in Fletcher, but in the greater Tufts community as well, through my exposure to the Institute for Global Leadership. Ours is a community that nurtures creativity instead of slamming it down with doubt. For many of us who come from areas of protracted conflict and failed politics, this wealth of perspectives is literally a breath of fresh air.

For these reasons I believe that the founders of this school, and those who carried out their vision throughout the past 75 years, intended for us to be the diverse group of people that we are today. I think James Shotwell would have been delighted to learn about our eclectic backgrounds and interests. He may have not been thrilled with our tendency to distract each other with random YouTube videos, but he would probably not have been too surprised either.

After all, the ability to be fascinated by seemingly unrelated issues, comes with the territory of being what most, if not all of us, are: Proud Generalists. We don't try to avoid complexity for fear that we may veer off course. We enjoy wondering off the beaten track, and drawing relations between past, present and future.

It might frustrate us that our resumes are anything but linear, or that it takes us ten minutes to answer the question: what kind of job are you looking for?

But these difficulties and frustrations are temporary. In the grander scheme of things, I believe that our generalist tendencies are a great asset in the constantly shifting field of international relations.

For proof of this, all you have to do is look at the phenomenal path chosen by his Excellency, Ambassador Scharioth, who honors us with his presence here today. His academic background

combines sociology and psychology with international finance and economics. He pursued his Doctoral dissertation at Fletcher comparing Judicial review of property legislation in India, the US and Germany, and went on to become the head of defense and security policy division in the German foreign ministry. I am positive that the broad scope of his interests and education was instrumental to the quality of his work.

Aside from being an inspiration to us as students, I think Ambassador Scharioth's example also validates the original vision that led to the establishment of Fletcher.

The founders of our school accurately predicted that the world will become increasingly interconnected. It is important to remember that they placed their bets on this trend, at a time when everyone around them was eulogizing the failed attempt to establish an international legal order. It took generations before their foresight was widely recognized.

This too is an inherent part of the Fletcher vision. The constant effort to provide a new outlook on international relations is an uphill battle against what Shotwell so eloquently called "the concentrated strength of prejudices and the subtly undermining forces of doubt".

It is a battle that is hard to win if you succumb to cynicism. Shotwell unapologetically spoke on behalf of the "peace movement", arguing that a just "world community" can emerge from technological advancement.

I have noticed that amongst ourselves we tend to shy away from such expressions of great hope. We often qualify our statements for fear of sounding naïve.

I suggest that instead of wasting words and time on diluting our optimism, we should instead draw inspiration from Shotwell's audacity. His refusal to succumb to the prejudices and doubts of his time, which were some of the greatest that civilization has ever known, resulted in this great community which we are all part of today.

We all joined this community because we believed that the world keeps changing, and that it can be changed for the better. It is a community that I, personally, am proud to be a member of and hope that it will continue to grow and follow the vision on which it was based.

Thank you.