

COMENCEMENT ADDRESS  
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BY  
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"INDIVIDUAL ACTION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE"

I consider it a great honor to have been invited to speak to you this afternoon on the occasion of commencement exercises of Elizabethtown College.

I feel much at home here today for several reasons. One is that I am a graduate of McPherson College, a sister institution. Another is that we have deep family ties here in Pennsylvania. The third is a continuing interest in supporting, wherever possible, the deep commitment made to teaching and learning by the smaller educational institutions which have contributed so much to American life.

We tend to think these days in terms of large organizations and institutions; we generalize from massive statistics and broad hypotheses. I would like to focus more today on the role of the individual and the part which he can play in changing social institutions for the betterment of all of us.

Let me start with a quotation from an American political leader: "Almost everywhere we look, the story is the same. In Latin America, in Africa, in Asia \* \* \* there is now renewed confidence in our country and our convictions."

Your first reaction might be to guess that this was a speech made by Richard Nixon, but you would be wrong. Even Mr. Nixon would not

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dare to be so reassuring about the esteem America enjoys in the eyes of other peoples.

These words were prepared for delivery in Dallas, Texas, in November 1963 by President John F. Kennedy. They should make it evident to all of us that we have travelled in these few years a long, long way--most of it downhill--since that highly flattering and self-confident description of our standing before world opinion.

As former Chief Justice Earl Warren said recently: "We are \* \* \* in a crisis. We have had many crises in prior years, but none within the memory of living Americans which compares with this one."

The traditional commencement address designed to inspire, to congratulate, and to bid bon voyage has no place in this year--the beginning of what may be the most fateful decade in our Nation's history. President Kennedy once remarked that this generation--your generation--has within its power to be the best generation of all time or it can be the last generation. He was, of course, referring to the tools we have to create a great society if we will but find the way and have the will to use them.

These are puzzling, difficult, and sobering days for all of us. They seem to defy explanation, description, or rational analysis. Each day we are confronted with new evidence--carried in the press, on the radio and television, and even in the theater and arts--that not all is well, to put it mildly. Protests, riots, growth of crime and drug addiction, and the thwarting of mores of society have become familiar and almost standard daily news items, providing a subject of endless debate among commentators, psychologists, psychiatrists, sociologists, and commencement speakers, end on end.

It would be simple if we could explain all of this because of our frustration with the war in Vietnam. Vietnam is certainly a major factor, but similar unrest among younger people has extended to Japan, Mexico, Canada, Europe, and elsewhere--countries which are only remotely, if at all, involved with Vietnam.

Some would say that the explanation lies with concern over a possible nuclear confrontation, a threat made more real because of the proposed deployment of the antiballistic missile. Yet, why should youth feel that it has a monopoly on this concern? Youth is joined in this audible concern by an estimated half of the United States Senate, led by men in their 60's--Fulbright of Arkansas, Mansfield of Montana, Symington of Missouri, and Cooper of Kentucky. And, what about the President and faculty of Elizabethtown College? And, what about your parents? And, what about the deep concern of the vast majority of the American people?

Still others would say that we are caught up in a generation gap and that the solution lies in placing students on advisory boards of universities, providing more opportunities for dialogue, and finding ways to deal with the unwieldiness of big government, big universities, and big business--and bigness in general which make democratic institutions slow to respond to change.

The ubiquitous atom knows no such thing as a generation gap. This point was well illustrated by the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy in his memoir of the Cuban missile crisis called "Thirteen Days." He recalls

that when President Kennedy called together a group of advisers at the start of that crisis, General Shoup, then Commandant of the Marine Corps, said: "You are in a pretty bad fix, Mr. President." President Kennedy-- who was then 45 years old--responded to the older man: "You are in it with me."

Perhaps some would blame today's wide unrest on the role of the news media--especially television--saying that the problem is that too much publicity is given to a fringe minority which, if ignored, would probably grow tired of what appears to a majority as senseless, juvenile acts designed to attract attention by rebellion against authority.

Former President James Perkins of Cornell, who was one of the first college presidents to experience the direct affects of student unrest firsthand--commented sometime ago that today's student "has grown up eyeball to eyeball with the world through TV." It is easier to focus on what is happening in Chicago, Berkeley, Tokyo, or Paris than what is going on in our own communities. It is easier to listen to the philosophy of Martin Luther King or Eugene McCarthy or Abbie Hoffman firsthand on television than to concentrate on the writings of Socrates, Rousseau, or Thomas Jefferson.

James A. Michener has recently published an important book entitled "Kent State - What Happened and Why" in which he refers to the role of television. He states that "an older person cannot be with a crop of

university students long without realizing he is dealing with a new type of individual \* \* \* born and reared in the shadow of the tube \* \* \*."

"'Taking things into our own hands' has become a way of life, and if it works well on television, it'll work just as well at Kent State."

And, don't minimize the influences that arise from the fact that we are more and more an urban society. This interreaction takes place when groups organize or come into conflict, frequently quite separate and apart from, and possibly having far more influence than, those influences of traditional institutions of family, church, bosses, or teachers.

Some or all of these explanations may be in order--I do not offer a clear-cut answer. But, of one thing we may be certain--there is no solution in pessimism or escapism from the realities of the world in which we live. Some of you may recall the commencement address a few years ago by Bob Hope in which he spoke to a graduating class in these terms: "My advice to those of you who are anxious to go out into the world is--reconsider and don't do it." Senator Robert F. Kennedy once made a plea that Americans must avoid "the danger of futility" and guard "against the belief that there is nothing one man or woman can do against the enormous array of the world's ills, against misery and ignorance, injustice, and violence \* \* \*."

A minority would argue that the only solution is to destroy the system which allowed these problems to develop--to destroy the established institutions of society in the blind belief that Phoenix-like, a new and better world will somehow spring from the ashes of the old.

More than one hundred years ago Abraham Lincoln, in his first inaugural address, gave his contemporaries his advice when he said:

"Before entering upon so grave a matter as the destruction of our national fabric, with all its benefits, its memories and its hopes, would it not be wise to ascertain precisely why we do it?"

"Will you /Lincoln asked of a nation that was also, if for different reasons, deeply divided/ hazard so desperate a step while there is any possibility that any portion of the ills you fly from have no real existence? Will you, while the certain ills you fly to are greater than all the real ones you fly from, risk the commission of so fearful a mistake?"

At another critical point in our history, in May 1944, a vast "I am an American Day" ceremony was held in Central Park in New York City. The thousands there included many new citizens--escapees from Nazi Germany and Communist Russia. The speaker was Justice Learned Hand, who served for 40 years on the Federal Bench and who came to be known throughout the world for his defense of the principles of freedom and of the rights of individual citizens.

Mr. Justice Hand's comments on that occasion need to be reread by all people, but most of all by those who are engaging in the open dissent so prevalent today. He said, in part:

"What do we mean when we say that first of all we seek liberty? I often wonder whether we do not rest our hopes too much upon constitutions, upon laws and upon courts. These are false hopes; believe me, these are false hopes. Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can save it; no constitution, no law, no court can even do much to help it. While it lies there it needs no constitution, no law, no court to save it. And what is this liberty which must lie in the hearts of men and women? It is not the ruthless, the unbridled will; it is not freedom to do as one likes. That is the denial of liberty, and leads straight to its overthrow. A society in which men recognize no check upon their freedom soon becomes a society where freedom is the possession of only a savage few; as we have learned to our sorrow."

It seems to me that the key must somehow rest not with protest, but with participation through organized society--Government and nongovernment-- if we are to have a reasonable chance of defining our objectives acceptably for the diverse interests of society. There is a corollary, and that is a willingness to accept responsibility and a self-discipline both of individuals and of groups to work toward constructive solutions.

Alexander Hamilton said in 1794 that "Government is that power by which individuals in society are kept from doing injury to each other, and are brought to cooperate to a common end." This is equally true-- especially true--today.

The greatest satisfactions in life, I am certain, come from a sense of participation. But, each of us has a choice to make--we can participate in protests and destructive action or we can participate in another way. Let me give you an example--

On May 10 at the University of Maryland, there were demonstrations. Some 300 of the demonstrators lowered the United States flag from a pole, turned it upside down, and raised it. From out of the crowd stepped two young men. They, too, lowered the flag, righted it, raised it again and stood by at the foot of the flagpole while the 298 demonstrators jeered and reviled them.

These two young men obviously have an outlook or a view of the United States that does not embrace turning the country, or its flag down-side up. Their thinking--their outlook--on these matters had made them quite ready to take their stand, and they did so. Then the force of their conviction carried the day. Outnumbered 150 to 1, they stood

their ground, obviously stronger than their opponents who apparently lacked the convictions of their own professed belief.

Had the two young men decided that they could do nothing about righting the flag; if their outlook on May 10 was that somebody else should make the correction, the mob would have been victorious. But they looked inward, toward themselves in this situation and doubtless thought: What can we do? Is that not a lesson for us all? Before we look "out there" to find the cause of what is wrong, had we better look to ourselves first? Are we doing as well as we can in any given situation in which we find ourselves? Are we hating the Government or society or even life itself because somehow or other we are not being treated as we think we should be? Are we, in short, failing to remove the beam from our own eye first before looking elsewhere to place blame?

Henry D. Thoreau is one of the most respected names in American literature. One of his biographers described him in these terms: "Thoreau, more than most any man, shows us the much and the little, how to maximize the minimum."

In sharp contrast is the story of Eddie, the noticeably slow-moving and inefficient clerk, in a small-town general store who wasn't in evidence one morning. A customer asked: "Where's Eddie? Isn't sick, is he?" "Nope, he isn't sick," replied the proprietor. "He's just not working here any more." "That so?" responded the curious villager. "Got anybody in mind to fill the vacancy?" "Nope," said the proprietor. "Eddie didn't leave any vacancy."

Thomas Paine, noted writer of two-hundred years ago, wrote for his generation on the "Rights of Man." Little did he know that the present independence of India is due in large measure to this little pamphlet. Mahatma Gandhi said that this writing was the foundation of his non-violent resistance movement.

The Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk on December 17, 1903, not very important persons in that day, sent a telegram to Dayton papers which read: "Flight successful--in air 59 seconds. Will be home for Christmas." The papers, missing the importance of the message, published a brief item saying, "Wright Brothers will be home for Christmas."

While visiting a neighbor, the son of a wealthy Englishman went swimming in the private pool. He began to have trouble and was in danger of drowning. He cried for help and his cries were answered by a gardener's son who came to the rescue and pulled him almost lifeless from the pool.

The wealthy boy's parents were extremely grateful and inquired what they might do for this young man to show their gratitude. They learned that he wanted very much to be a doctor, but there were no funds to pay for his education. These thankful parents arranged for this gardener's son to be entered in medical school and paid his expenses. The student had a good record and ultimately became one of the outstanding doctors of England. In fact, his fame spread around the world when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for medicine for his discovery of penicillin. By now, I know that you recognize that this gardener's son was Sir Alexander Fleming.

This remarkable story is not finished. This gardener's son, who rose to be a great physician, had another memorable experience. During World War II, the youth saved from drowning, now a grown man, was critically ill with pneumonia. Dr. Fleming was called and reached his bedside in time to save his life a second time. It's a good thing for England and the rest of the world that he did. The man who twice owed his life to Dr. Fleming was the Prime Minister of England, Sir Winston Churchill.

No one seriously contends that all men are created with equal abilities; conversely, no one can doubt that each of us has the right-- and the obligation--to develop his potential to its fullest. In short, as in the case of Thoreau, to maximize his minimums.

The problems of our society can only increase as we become more densely populated, more urbanized, more industrialized; and, along with these, go a need for mass transportation and better communication.

These, in turn, create powerful forces that tend to weaken the traditional roles of family, church, and town hall as constructive disciplinary units in society.

In 1940, not long after I completed college, the population of the United States was about 130 million people. We are now a Nation of 200 million. In the year 2000, we will have a population of nearly 340 million.

No one questions the impact of science and technology on our society. With 9 percent of the world's population and only 15 percent of the world's resources, we have achieved the highest standard of living in the world--measured in terms of income and material things. Five percent of our work force, for example, produces more food and fiber than we can now use or export.

Alfred North Whitehead, one of the great philosophers of our time, once remarked that science and technology as we know it could have originated only in the matrix of centuries of Christian civilization, since only a profound faith in the values of natural order could have provided the motivation for its dedicated and total commitment to the development of that order. But, the test for the future of science and technology must be whether it can be applied to solving some of the problems which it has created--pollution, massive concentration of population in urban areas, and so on.

So, the real gap and the main thesis of my remarks this afternoon is not so much the generation gap as it is a "value" gap or an "institutional" gap. We have not yet found the counterpart to the

Salk vaccine, the transistor, and the computer in our social institutions. We have learned how to transplant human hearts; we have not learned to transplant new social values into obsolete governmental machinery and rigid social institutions.

The liberty that Mr. Justice Hand describes will require better management of governments than anything the world has known in the past. If man can improve his circumstances through technological invention, it is logical to believe that he can--if he wishes and as he wishes--improve his capabilities in the art of government.

Your generation--and mine--must grasp the meaning of science and technology in the relations between Government and all the rest of society. World wars may have produced the environment which gave science and technology the spark they were waiting for; science and politics, national and international, now go together and neither can function without the other. That is the central fact of our time, and it can only have one meaning for the future.

This means that we must close the gap between the two cultures, as C. P. Snow describes them--the scientific and the humanistic. We can no more leave science to the scientists than we can leave Government to the politicians. We must comprehend the scientific environment. We must find ways to make science and public policy compatible, not merely as to national purpose, but particularly as to a working compatibility.

How else shall we make a contribution in the difficult fields of weapons control and disarmament? In problems of eliminating air and water pollution? In harnessing our energy sources for both human and industrial needs? In understanding the requirements of education and vocational motivation? In meeting the requirements of an exploding population at home and abroad? In providing the rising nations of the world with gifts of technology?

These are the questions that face you, now and in the years ahead. These, and questions like them, have been and continue to be questions of my lifetime. But, I believe that no problem is more directly related to the future of our democratic society than the necessity of attracting the best talent available for the public service. That is where you come in.

Having been in the public service 30 years, I know how necessary it is that the Federal Government be served by highly trained public servants. I don't want to suggest that Washington has or should attempt to monopolize talent. There must be able, devoted people at all governmental levels.

The problems and challenges of Government are legion. They require the talents of virtually all professional fields:

- Conducting medical research at the laboratories at the National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland;
- Controlling jet aircraft noise at NASA's Lewis Laboratory in Cleveland, Ohio;
- Supervising Peace Corps staff in a remote point in Africa;

- Conducting operations research for a mass transportation program for the corridor between Boston and Washington;
- Reviewing research grant applications for the National Science Foundation;
- Developing experimental education programs for under-privileged children;
- Providing nursing care in a veterans' hospital in Denver;
- Teaching in an Indian school in Montana; or
- Serving as a Forest Ranger in Idaho.

Just last week, in testimony for an important committee of the Congress on the work which our Office has done in recommending ways to improve the effectiveness of water pollution control efforts, I was pleased and proud to hear members of the committee, at the conclusion of the hearing, extend high compliments to a young man on our staff for the outstanding work which he had done. He is just over 30 years of age. He has earned far more satisfaction than the amount of his paycheck. He is contributing something which will help us all.

These same challenges and problems exist in State government and local government, and a growing number of not-for-profit, voluntary, and industrial organizations are concerned with programs formerly reserved exclusively to Government.

Over the next 4 years, the Federal Government will need thousands of additional specialists in health, technology, and education.

Each year over the next decade, our Nation will need 200,000 new public school teachers to keep up with the growing population.

Whether we are concerned with Federal Government, State government, local government, or participation in nongovernmental agencies, we must have highly trained people and dedicated people.

These should be people who will work to improve society, not destroy it; they should be committed to the change of institutions by making them better and more responsive to the needs of people served by Government.

There should be even more young people also who are willing to enter an active political life. The real power base and the real need is here. More younger people are showing up in State legislatures, in city halls, and in the Congress. I found a hopeful example only two weeks ago when I attended a conference in a western State devoted to manpower training and economic education--with special emphasis on disadvantaged youth. The Lieutenant Governor had just become 30 years old and the Governor himself was not much older.

Those who do not undertake careers in Government or go into politics will have increasing opportunities to participate as voters. The imminent action to amend the Constitution to extend the right to vote in all elections to every American citizen over 18 years of age holds great promise--great promise, that is, if younger people take the time and trouble to vote. It is a discouraging fact that less than 60 percent of all registered voters in America on the average

take part in national elections. The authors of a recent book entitled "The Real Majority" state that "The cold fact is that young people eligible to vote are far less likely to participate than their elders." I do not believe this. It is up to you to prove that I am right and that the authors of this book are wrong.

I am counting on the women particularly to make my prediction come true. The recent extensive and intensive dialogue in the role of women can better be expressed through the ballot box than by reading the works of Germaine Greer. Too long, I fear, women have observed the advice given by Thomas Jefferson to a Mrs. William Bingham in 1788: "Our good ladies, I trust, have been too wise to wrinkle their foreheads with politics. They are contented to soothe and calm the minds of their husbands returning ruffled from political debate."

The meaning of what I have been trying to say today is nowhere better expressed than by John Gardner, a member of the Kennedy and Johnson Cabinets and organizer of the new organization, Common Cause. Here are his words from a recent commencement address:

"We now know beyond all doubt that nations die from within, and they are attacked less often by traitors within the gate than by traitors within the heart--complacency, apathy, cynicism, intolerance, self-deception, and an unwillingness on the part of the individual to lend himself to any worthy common purpose."

Appropriate for you graduates is a quotation attributed to a Frenchman named de Grellet who died more than one hundred years ago:

"I shall pass through this world but once. If, therefore, there be any kindness I can show, or any good thing I can do, let me do it now; let me not defer it or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."