

Speech to be Delivered at  
JOINT CIVIC CLUB LUNCHEON FOR  
DISTINGUISHED CITIZEN SERVICE AWARD FOR 1970  
At Johnson's Restaurant, Plant City, Florida  
Wednesday, March 4, 1970

I am flattered to have been asked to speak on this occasion when you pay honor to one of your number for the quality of his life. There is a great deal of discussion about the "quality of life", and for the most part in using that phrase we refer to man's environment; but the quality of life is really a dividend of man's spirit, and I honor you for the recognition of that fact implicit in this occasion.

You are saying by this annual ritual in the midst of your strawberry festival that what really gives life meaning, what really turns you on, what really is "relevant" in your life-style, is not the qualities of your strawberries, but the qualities of life as exemplified in this one life you have singled out to honor.

If the world really wants to understand middle America, if the dissidents really want to "tune in" before they "freak out", this is what they better listen to, for this is "where it's at". If they want to conduct a sit-in, they had better sit around these walls and listen to middle America hold up its own ideals by honoring one man who best typifies them, and the

generation gap will narrow, and maybe even close.

It's so important that you conduct these annual rites:

The value system which characterizes this nation;

The political principals which guide this nation;

The ideals which inspire this nation..

are not to be taken for granted.

They have been purchased at a dear price;

They are the product of countless trials and errors;

They are a good heritage..

And it is right that we should stop now and then to reflect on these precious qualities.

The unique qualities of America are not her strawberries, nor her tomatoes, nor her oranges ..

but her commitment to freedom and dignity, and her constant search for excellence.

Neither of these is a static concept. They grow, and growth is change. For a nation, as for a man, where you are is never as important as where you're going.

A few years ago I was flying from Washington to Cape Canaveral in the company of Walt Rostow, a distinguished scholar who served as a special advisor to President Kennedy. The discussion was about America's decision to put men on the moon in the 60's. Mr. Rostow pointed out that this decision

was made like many really great American decisions:

We didn't really know where we were in the space race with the Russians:

We didn't know how we were going to get to the moon;

We just settled on the highest goal of which we could at that time conceive, committed ourselves to it, and set off into the unknown.

That was in the tradition which opened up the frontiers of this nation, of Lindberg's flight across the ocean, and Byrd's trip to the Antarctic.

Because President Kennedy set that high purpose, that unattainable goal, the people of Florida themselves began to reach for a star. In that very summer of 1961, with little more substantial to support us than the inspiration of that great national endeavor, the State scraped together \$25 million to start Florida's higher education moving. Because of the inspiration of that high purpose we approved a \$300 million bond issue which is still being used to build the universities, junior colleges and technical schools of this state. The fallout, not from federal aid, but from President Kennedy's high purpose changed the history of Florida and the lives of thousands of its children -- and that's true whether or not we had ever reached the moon.

I recall listening one night to General James Gavin at a

dinner here in Florida when he first suggested a Peace Corps. He recognized that young Americans today, as always, respond best to some challenge that calls for their total commitment -- that sets them on a journey with only the stars as their guide. Today thousands of these Americans are experiencing hardship and loneliness -- and fulfillment -- in many countries around the globe because their nation called them to a high goal.

But the young have no monopoly on great adventures.

All America, old and young, have made many new commitments they don't know how to fulfill -- only that they must.

We are committed to the proposition that no child shall be crippled if our national resources can make him whole. It began to form at meetings like this, where civic clubs pooled their funds to send some helpless child to the finest hospital and doctor they could find -- and there is no one in this room who hasn't participated.

We are committed to the proposition that no older person, whom age or misfortune has robbed, shall live out his life in loneliness and poverty, if we have the national resources to prevent it. There are many things about the welfare program that make us unhappy, but helping old people isn't one of them.

We are developing a commitment to the proposition that this beautiful earth which God has given us for an inheritance shall not be desecrated by our carelessness or ~~abused~~. Like our

decision to go to the moon, we don't know yet how to do it, nor how the price is to be paid, but we have fixed on our goal and we will achieve it.

I am sure no one in Florida had the remotest idea that we could absorb hundreds of thousands of Cubans as they fled from Castro. But we have! And still they come. Now we take it for granted, but truly Floridians have written a shining chapter in the history of freedom, and are still writing.

We have decided to bring the advantages of medical science to the diseased and the disabled. In a nation which began with a commitment that no American should be imprisoned for debt, nor without due process, nor because of excessive bail, there is gradually forming a commitment that no American shall be imprisoned because of disease if it is in the power of his fellows to free him.

We have decided to give every child the opportunity to learn and to develop to his full potential. It was Thomas Jefferson, not Huey Long, who first conceived that every American should be a King, but it may be given to this generation to achieve that goal.

It is natural and right that we should be repulsed by the violent confrontations that radicals create as they try to subvert our government, but we cannot and should not recoil or retreat from the revolutionary spirit of these times. The

values that we cherish are not ancient forms, but eternal rights. Our commitment is not to ancient forms, but to eternal rights, and it has been the genius of American Society that we have been able to change the forms while we enlarge the rights. We have been able to take the pragmatism of social and economic reform and fit it into the idealism of political reform.

These commitments form the other part of freedom -- they are freedom's obligations. They make a unique and special nation out of the American people.

No man has described Americanism more aptly than DeToqueville, who as he marvelled at our laboratory of liberty more than a century ago, saw in this "land of wonders" a place where:

"No natural boundry seems to be set to the efforts of man: and in his eyes what is not yet done is only what he has not yet attempted to do."