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TD: Bill Roberts
MARGARET DEMONTE
MARSHAET VANDERHUYE

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE

UNTIL 6:00 P.M., EDT, 5:00 P.M., CDT

APRIL 23, 1975

Office of the White House Press Secretary
(New Orleans, Louisiana)

PH: PRESS OFFICE
NEW ORLEANS

THE WHITE HOUSE

TEXT OF REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
TO THE STUDENT BODY AT TULANE UNIVERSITY
NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

When I spoke here in 1968 at your "Directions '68" forum, I had no idea that my own career and our entire Nation would move so soon in a new direction. I am very proud to be invited back.

I am impressed by Tulane's unique distinction as the only American university to be converted from state-sponsorship to private status. And I am also impressed by the Tulane graduates who serve in the United States Congress and so many areas of our national life -- testifying to the academic excellence and inspiration of this historic university, rooted in the past, with its eyes on the future.

Just as Tulane has made a great transition from the past to the future, so has New Orleans, the legendary city that has made such a unique contribution to America. New Orleans is more than weathered bricks and cast-iron balconies. It is a state of mind, a melting-pot that represents the best of America's evolution, an example of retention of a very special culture in a progressive environment of modern change.

On January 8, 1815, a monumental American victory was achieved here, the Battle of New Orleans. Louisiana had been a State for less than three years. But outnumbered Americans innovated and used the tactics of the frontier to defeat a veteran British force trained in the strategy of the Napoleonic wars.

We had suffered humiliation and a measure of defeat in the War of 1812. Our national capital in Washington had been captured and burned. So the illustrious victory in the Battle of New Orleans was a powerful restorative to national pride.

Yet the victory at New Orleans took place two weeks after the signing of the armistice in Europe. Thousands died although a peace had been negotiated. The combatants had not gotten the word. Yet the epic struggle nevertheless restored America's pride.

Today America can again regain the sense of pride that existed before Vietnam. But it cannot be achieved by relighting a war that is finished -- as far as America is concerned. The time has come to look forward to an agenda for the future, to unity, to binding up the Nation's wounds and restoring it to health and optimistic self-confidence.

In New Orleans a great battle was fought after a war was over. In New Orleans tonight we can begin a great national reconciliation. The first engagement must be with the problems of today -- and of the future. That is why it is so appropriate that I find myself tonight at a University which addresses itself to preparing young people for the challenge of tomorrow.

(MORE)

I ask tonight that we stop relighting the battles and recriminations of the past. I ask that we look now at what is right with America, at our possibilities and our potentialities for change, and growth, and achievement, and sharing. I ask that we accept the responsibilities of leadership as a good neighbor to all peoples and the enemy of none. I ask that we strive to become, in the finest American tradition, something more tomorrow than we are today.

Instead of addressing the image of America, I prefer to consider the reality of America. It is true that we have launched our Bicentennial celebration without having achieved human perfection. But we have attained a remarkable self-governed society that possesses the flexibility and dynamism to grow and undertake an entirely new agenda--an agenda for America's third century. I ask you today to join me in writing that agenda. I am determined as President to seek national rediscovery of the belief in ourselves that characterized the most creative periods in our history. The greatest challenge of creativity lies ahead.

We are saddened, indeed, by events in Indochina. But these events, tragic as they are, portend neither the end of the world nor of America's leadership in the world. Some seem to feel that if we do not succeed in everything, everywhere, then we have succeeded in nothing anywhere. I reject such polarized thinking. We can and should help others to help themselves. But the fate of responsible men and women everywhere in the final decision, rests in their own hands.

America's future depends upon Americans--especially your generation which is now equipping itself to assume the challenges of the future--to help write the agenda for America. Earlier today, I spoke about the need to maintain our defenses. Tonight, I want to talk about another kind of strength--the true source of American power that transcends all the deterrent powers for peace of our armed forces. I am speaking of our belief in ourselves and in our Nation.

Abraham Lincoln asked, in his own words, "What constitutes the bulwark of our own liberty and independence?" And he answered: "It is not our frowning battlements, or bristling seacoasts, our army and our navy... Our defense is in the spirit which prized liberty as the heritage of all men, in all lands everywhere."

It is in this spirit that we must now move beyond the discord of the past decade. It is in this spirit that I ask you to join in writing an agenda for the future. I welcome your invitation tonight because I know that it is at Tulane and other centers of thought and study that much consideration is being given to the kind of future Americans want and will work to achieve. You are preparing yourselves for that future and I am deeply interested in your preparations and your opinions and your goals.

Tonight I will share my own views. I envision a creative program that goes as far as our courage and capacities can take us--at home and abroad. My goal is for a cooperative world at peace, using its resources to build, not to destroy. As President, I am determined to offer leadership to overcome economic problems. My goal is for jobs for all who want to work and economic opportunity for all who want to achieve. I am determined to seek self-sufficiency in energy as an urgent national priority. My goal is to make America independent of foreign energy sources by 1985. I will pursue interdependence with other nations and a reformed international economic system. My goal is for a world in which consuming and producing nations achieve a working balance. I will address the humanitarian issues of hunger and famine, of health and healing. My goal is to assure basic needs and an effective system to achieve this. I recognize the need for technology that enriches life while preserving our natural environment. My goal is to stimulate productivity but use technology to redeem--not destroy--our environment.

I will strive for new cooperation rather than conflict in the peaceful exploration of the oceans and space. My goal is to use resources for peaceful progress rather than war and destruction.

Let America symbolize humanity's struggle to conquer nature and master technology. The time has now come for our Government to facilitate the individual's control over his or her own future--and of the future of America.

But the future requires more than Americans congratulating themselves on how much we know and how many products we can produce. It requires new knowledge to meet new problems. We must not only be motivated to build a better America, we must know how to do it.

If we really want a humane America that will, for instance, contribute to alleviation of the world's hunger, we must realize that good intentions do not feed people. Such problems are complex. There are no easy answers. Willpower alone does not grow food.

We thought, in a well-intentioned past, that we could export our technology--lock, stock, and barrel--to developing nations. But we are now learning that a strain of rice that grows in one place will not grow in another. Factories that produce at one hundred percent in one nation produce less than half as much in a society where the human temperament and work habits differ.

Yet, the world economy has become interdependent. Not only food technology but money management, natural resources and energy, research and development of all kinds require an organized world society that makes the maximum effective use of the world's resources.

I want to tell the world: let's grow food together. But let us also learn more about nutrition, about weather forecasting, about irrigation, and about the many other specialties involved in helping people to help themselves. And let us learn more about people, about the development of communities, architecture, engineering, education, motivation, productivity, public health and medicine, the arts and sciences, political, legal and social organization. All these specialties and many more are required if young people like you are to help this Nation develop an agenda for the future.

I challenge the medical students in this audience to put on their agenda the achievement of a cure for cancer.

I challenge the engineers to devise new techniques for developing cheap and plentiful energy.

I challenge the law students to find ways to speed the administration of equal justice and make good citizens out of convicted criminals.

I challenge education majors to perfect real teaching for real life.

I challenge the arts majors to compose the great American symphony; to write the great American novel, to enrich and to inspire our daily lives.

America's leadership is essential. America's resources are vast. America's opportunities are unprecedented.

As we strive together to perfect a new agenda, I put high on the list of important points the maintenance of alliances and partnerships with other people. These provide a basis of shared values even as we stand up with determination for what we believe.

This requires a continuing commitment to peace and determination to use our good offices wherever possible to promote better relations between nations.

The new agenda must place a high priority on the need to stop the spread of nuclear weapons and to work for mutual reduction in strategic arms and control of other weapons. I regard my successful negotiations at Vladivostok as just a beginning.

Your generation of Americans is uniquely endowed by history to give new meaning to the pride and spirit of America.

The magnetism of an American society, confident of its own strength, will attract the good will and esteem of all people. And it will enhance our own perception of ourselves and our pride in being Americans.

We can write a new agenda for our future. I am glad that Tulane University and other great American institutions are reaching out to others in programs in developing nations.

And I look forward with confidence to your participation in every aspect of America's future.

I urge Americans of all ages to unite in this Bicentennial year to take responsibility for themselves as our ancestors did. Let us resolve tonight to rediscover the old virtues of confidence and self-reliance and capability that characterized our forefathers of two centuries ago. I pledge to do my part.

Let the beacon light of the past shine forth from historic New Orleans and from Tulane University and from every other corner of America, to illuminate a boundless future for all Americans.

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