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SEPTEMBER 21, 1975

OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY
(Stanford, California)

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT THE
DEDICATION CEREMONIES OF THE
STANFORD UNIVERSITY LAW SCHOOL

STANFORD UNIVERSITY

4:12 P.M. PDT

President Lyman, Dean Ehrlich, Waller Taylor, distinguished members of the Board of Trustees, and faculty, students, alumni and friends of Stanford University:

I am indeed honored to be here and to thank my good friend, Waller Taylor, for his excellent arrangements as Chairman of the Law School's Board of Visitors.

I know that I am not the first visitor to this beautiful campus who happened to be President or past President or a future President.

Former President Benjamin Harrison was one of your first professors of law. Future President Herbert Hoover, to whom this University owes so very much, was one of your very first students.

One of my first acts as President this year was to sign into law a bill authorizing Federal matching funds for the expansion of the Hoover Institution in honor of the 100th anniversary of the birth of this great American and great humanitarian.

I understand that former President William Howard Taft and future President John F. Kennedy also enjoyed brief associations with The Farm.

I hope I haven't overlooked anybody, but if so, I will blame the dedicated Stanford men and women who serve in my Cabinet and as my counsellors in the White House.

The contributions of the Stanford alumni in all branches of our Government in Washington are tremendous. I hope we have many, many more in the future, and I say that as a Yalie and a Michigander.

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It is a tremendous pleasure to be here at the Law school today, to be a part of this very special dedication. The students and faculty of Stanford have always demonstrated an outstanding devotion to the concept of truth, justice and equality under the law, and yesterday you did it once again.

When it comes to equality, you can't be any more equal than that game with Michigan -- 19 to 19. Well, what better place than a law school to celebrate a hung jury. (Laughter)

Today's dedication of this impressive new home for the law school is certainly no tie, it is one more victory in Stanford's unbroken record of educational excellence. The dream of Senator and Mrs. Stanford that children of California should be their children, with the help of many who followed their generous example, has broadened to benefit its young men and young women of all America and the world.

Back in 1968 when plans for this Law School complex were completed, there was a serious question in many sober minds whether the rule of law in this country was breaking down. Assassins gunned down a candidate for the Presidential nomination and one of our most eloquent civil rights leaders. In one week riots, arson and looting swept 125 cities in our country, including the capital of our Nation. Violent disorders, demonstrations and defiance engulfed many, many of our communities.

In the midst of this environment I was to make the 275th commencement address at the College of William and Mary, which produced such giants of Constitutional history as Thomas Jefferson and John Marshall.

As a result, I got an early start on my Bicentennial rereading of our Nation's beginnings and I asked myself what were the most precious possessions the first settlers of American wilderness brought with them across the Atlantic?

What was nurtured here in the New World to be carried across the mountains, across the plains, across the deserts and over the High Sierra to the Golden Gate of California? What made us the unique Nation and people that we are today? For the most part, the first American immigrants were poor, they were outcasts, they were persecuted, they were disadvantaged, they were dissenters, and they were rebels against the Old-World establishment.

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They brought little beyond what was on their backs and in their heads except a few seeds and a few tools and a few books. But, what they brought was very precious to them. They brought, even as they protested its capricious abuse, an abiding respect for the rule of law. They built orderly systems of self-government, even before they erected dry houses.

Generations later, when our Founding Fathers met in Philadelphia to declare their independence, they formally stated their reasons in terms of both moral and legal rights which the distant King and Parliament had denied them as colonists. Our American Revolution was unique in that we rejected our rulers but we revered their rules.

There were more colleges and universities in the 13 colonies before the American Revolution than in all of England, Scotland and Ireland put together. As Americans moved Westward, they set aside lands for the higher training of teachers, engineers, agriculturalists, scientists, doctors, lawyers and other professions. They encouraged the support of both private and public institutions of learning in State and Federal tax policies. No nation, at any time, has put a higher priority on education for all its citizens.

Finally, the long march of the Americans halfway around the world from Jamestown and Plymouth Rock, to the Westernmost trip of Alaska and the far Pacific Islands, carried with it a common commitment to the future. The material progress of the United States of America has been premised on the half-humanist, half-theological idea of perfectibility of society, the enlargement of human freedom and the innate worth of the individual.

Stanford University, where the winds of freedom still circulate through the pleasant quadrangles of old and new, was built and still stands on the solid triad of law, learning and liberty. The fears of seven summers ago were unfounded. The rule of law in America has survived. Our Constitutional instincts have proven sound. The commitments of Americans to law, learning and liberty continues in this very court this afternoon.

But, the contradictions and dilemmas remain in our society in abundance. They will always exist in a democratic nation where the delicate balances between freedom and order, between private right and public interest, between the safety of the State and the security of the individual, all require constant review and resolution.

This is the role of Government at all levels and the mission of both of those who make the law and who practice and respect it. There is an old saying that those who love the law and those who are fond of sausage should never examine too closely how either is actually made. (Laughter) I certainly don't intend to pick any quarrel with the sausage makers. But, as a former lawmaker and as a lawyer, I believe we need to examine much more closely how our Nation's laws are made in order to prevent perfectly laudable legislative intentions from having perfectly horrible consequences.

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Literally hundreds of examples can be cited. Let me take one area that affects almost everybody with which you, as lawyers, will surely have to deal; that is, the area of the individual's right of privacy, the right to keep one's individual identity inviolate or, in plain talk, the right to do things or to do your own thing.

I can speak with some authority on this because as Vice President one of my chores was Chairman of the Domestic Council Committee on the Right of Privacy. I took that duty very seriously.

Among the very first things we learned was that one of the worst offenders is the Federal Government itself.

I don't mean improper or illegal invasion of people's privacy or Constitutional rights by Federal agencies or individual officials, which nobody condones, and which I will not tolerate as long as I am President of the United States. Rather, I mean threats to privacy which have resulted from laws duly enacted by past Congresses for very laudable purposes having wide public support and appeal.

Many of these laws, with today's technology, cumulatively threaten to strip the individual of his privacy or her privacy and reduce him to a faceless set of digits in a monstrous network of computers. He has not only no control over this process but often has absolutely no knowledge of its existence.

For example, in a simpler and earlier era, the Government's principal interest in watching its citizens was to see that they obeyed the law, paid their relatively uncomplicated taxes and, from time to time, came to their country's aid in an emergency.

But, when the Government expanded enormously and undertook vast social programs that established a direct link between the citizen and the bureaucracy, Government logically became interested not only in monitoring criminal behavior, but also a lot of other things about its citizens' lives, its citizens' habits.

To determine the eligibility of millions of individuals for receiving Government benefits, for welfare or unemployment, or Social Security, or service pensions or other special assistance, Government has to gather, record and constantly update information.

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Government acquired a legitimate reason to inquire also into the private lives of students seeking scholarships, professors seeking research grants, businessmen wanting Government loans or requiring Government license, professional persons doing business with the Government or participating in subsidy programs. The list is literally endless.

Over the years, therefore, agencies of the Government, State and local, as well as Federal, gradually have amassed great amounts of information about almost every one of us. As technology advanced, it made administrative sense to combine and codify such information, especially when it was voluntarily given in expectation of benefits and beyond the special legal safeguards provided for Federal census and Internal Revenue data.

Here we face another dilemma of a democratic society in this new technological era where information is not only power, as it has always been, but also instantly retrievable by anyone trained to push the right button.

Certainly, we cannot scuttle worthwhile programs which provide essential help for the helpless and assist the deserving citizen. Yet, we must protect every individual from excessive and unnecessary intrusions by a big brother bureaucracy.

Many of the recommendations of the Committee on Privacy, which I chaired as Vice President, were incorporated in the Privacy Act of 1974, which a cooperative Congress passed and I was pleased to sign as President. That law goes into effect next Saturday.

Briefly, the Privacy Act generally prohibits collection of information concerning exercise of an individual's First Amendment rights. It requires that files on individuals be accurate, relevant, timely and complete.

It requires the Federal Government to reveal the existence and the whereabouts of all data systems containing identifiable personal information. It gives everyone the right to read his own file and to make corrections or to make amendments. It commands the Government to use the information only for the purpose for which it was collected, and it sets up an independent Privacy Commission with a two-year mandate to monitor the operation of the law and investigate additional privacy rules.

It is, to be sure, extremely experimental, but it makes a long overdue start in trying to restore to every individual some of his rights which have been eroded in the process of gaining other advantages.

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I have said in Bicentennial speeches around the country, and I will continue to say, that the great achievement of the first century of American independence was to perfect political institutions strong enough to endure stress and responsible to the times and to the needs of all of our people.

The second century of our independence, now ending, saw the development of the world's strongest economic system in a free climate for our political freedom that it fostered. Two hundred years of American independence have gained for all of us an unprecedented measure of political and economic stability and success.

But, we should ask ourselves, what should be the goal of our third century as a Nation? I prefer to look at our Bicentennial celebration through a telescope, not a rear view mirror. The great challenge of our next 100 years is the advancement of individual independence of specific safeguards that can be made available as to the identity of each and every American from the pressures of conformity.

These pressures close upon us from many, many quarters -- massive Government, massive management, massive labor, massive education, massive communication and massive acquisition of information.

To meet this challenge, we still need a positive and passionate commitment to law, to learning and to liberty. Without law, there is no liberty; without liberty, there is no learning; without learning, there is no law.

Here at Stanford you have all three -- law, learning and liberty. Make the most of them. Make them part of your lives. Make them your richest legacy, as well as your most precious inheritance.

Thank you very, very much.

END (AT 4:33 P.M. PDT)