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OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
WASHINGTON, D.C.

about
9/24/74

From the President:

To:

Paul Thie

Date:

Time

a.m.

p.m.

This was speech prepared
while V. P. by one of
staff.

Didn't see.

Maybe useful.

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

September 24, 1974

ADMINISTRATIVELY CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM FOR: PAUL THEIS

FROM: JERRY H. LOVE 

The attached was returned in the President's outbox and is forwarded for your information. The following notation was made:

-- This was speech prepared while V.P. by one of staff. Didn't use. May be useful.

Dr. _____, distinguished graduates, ladies and gentlemen. It is a privilege and an honor to be here with you this evening. I find it particularly gratifying to be at a commencement where I am not only a speaker, but also a proud parent. Mrs. Ford and I are delighted to share that pleasure with so many of you here this evening.

A wise Chinese philosopher once said that, "Those who talk most do not know . . . and those who do not talk, know." Tonight, however, I must run the risk of being considered unwise -- for I do have some basic concerns which I wish to share with you, and particularly with these graduates as representatives of our nation's youth.

In my travels about this great country of ours, I have been exposed to some who reflect a sense of impending doom and utter despair. The more strident voices among these project what they feel is growing and deep-seated cynicism among our people -- a cynicism directed at

every aspect of current American life. And the spokesmen for what they claim to be a prevailing "cult of cynicism" are quick to point out the reasons why.

They point to our current domestic political difficulties, symbolized by Watergate, and they contend that the moral climate in American life has reached a new low.

They scoff at the traditional virtues of enterprise, hard work, and initiative in American life as being irrelevant.

They decry what they consider to be the blind, unquestioning nature of the patriotic values of commitment and service.

They deplore what they feel is a lack of opportunity and spiritual purpose in American economic and social life.

They are deeply suspicious of the true purposes of our national involvement in the pursuit of world peace and order.

I stand before you this evening to take exception with these views. Webster defines a "radical", in part, as one who departs from what appears to be a prevailing view.

But I do not consider myself a radical because I am an optimist in terms of our nation's future.

I do not consider myself a radical because I have not lost my faith in our ability to achieve, as a nation and as individuals.

I do not consider myself a radical because I have not lost my firm belief in the durability and relevance of American values.

There are those who will criticize me as naive, unsophisticated and insensitive to changes which have occurred. To these, let me simply say that I am content to let time and history be my ultimate judge.

For in my travels, and as I hear the voices of cynicism, I see as well the evidence of purpose, commitment, and solid achievement.

I feel that the time has come to shift our concern and emphasis from those things decried by the cynics to the evident achievements of our people and our society.

We cannot hide nor deny the existence of national problems.

But we can and must approach these problems with a sense of optimism, confident that our nation's history clearly supports our capability to surmount them. We must approach our challenges with a serenity and confidence underscored by the achievements of a free people in nearly 200 years of existence as a nation.

The most serious charge of those leading this wave of cynicism is directed at the moral climate in American political life.

In their view Watergate and all its related problems stands as the glaring symbol of our moral degradation. They see Watergate as the culmination of a growing disinterest in moral principles as a guide to behavior, of a tendency to flagrantly disregard the law.

But a more serious side effect of Watergate lies in its potential impact on our youth. If our youth are so repelled or so disenchanted as to lose interest in political involvement or service, then Watergate indeed will have reaped a terrible harvest.

Let me say here and now to you and our youth that the cynics, in their zeal to use Watergate as evidence of a morally weak present and morally barren future, ignore the foundations of this Republic.

Watergate will not be pointed to as a proud episode in American history. But its redeeming value, as a national experience, lies in its solid demonstration of the basic moral concern of our citizenry and of our constitutional, legal and political processes.

Rather than a symbol of our moral decline, Watergate may ultimately stand as a symbol of our moral sensitivity.

But the moral strengthening of our political life will greatly depend on the actions of our youth. Their concerns, when mobilized,

can operate as a potent political force. The impact of the 18 year old vote has yet to be felt in American political life.

It is obvious to me that our youth want honesty and candor in our political life and in our public figures. It is hard to generate any enthusiasm to debate issues if one is suspicious of the motives, true purposes, and arguments of those debating them.

But the true road to influence in public life is involvement. And if you are concerned, the time to involve yourself is now, on the side of what you believe, who you believe, and those whom you feel can meet the standards of behaviour you consider essential. There is no more propitious moment in American history for your involvement.

In another of their many cries, the cynics see America as a "fallen angel" in our attempts to maintain a position of moral leadership in international affairs and diplomacy. Here, the voices of despair are of many hues.

There are those who criticize what they consider to be arrogant displays of national power, citing our involvement in Southeast Asia and the Dominican Republic as flagrant examples.

There are those who feel we have become captives of a cold war mentality which conditions our every action internationally, without regard for moral purpose.

There are those who would have us retreat from our involvement internationally to a neo-isolationist position similar to our policies prior to World War II.

In all these views there is a mixture of frustration, disenchantment, suspicion of our true motives and, I might add, a great deal of self-delusion.

The critics who attack our national involvement in Korea, Southeast Asia and the Dominican Republic cannot be confronted, of course, by examples of the more violent disorders and conflicts which

we possibly avoided by virtue of these involvements. The peace that is maintained or achieved is much more difficult to identify or measure than the conflict and sacrifice required to achieve that peace.

But the simple truth is that we have now gone almost three decades without a major world war. When we consider that only 21 years elapsed between the First and Second World Wars -- when we consider that during these past 29 years nations have been armed with the most destructive weapons ever known to man -- three decades of relative world peace is no mean achievement.

This peace has been maintained largely by the effective strength of the United States, actively pursuing world stability and willing to use its power to do so anywhere on the face of the globe.

And for the cynics and critics who bemoan our declining moral leadership as a nation I have a clear and unequivocal response -- you have grossly miscalculated the moral authority of our nation.

Our current efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East provide clear evidence of the moral weight and authority of our nation. In an area of the world historically scarred by conflict and tension, torn by four wars in the past 26 years, the most promising hope for stability and a lasting settlement has been fanned by the efforts of the United States, its President and its Secretary of State.

And the very simple, uncomplicated reason for the success of our national effort in the Middle East lies in the fact that we are the only nation trusted by both sides as an arbiter in that conflict.

This role bestowed on us by both sides in the Middle East reflects trust of a nation considered to have the higher purposes of world peace and stability clearly guiding its actions and policies. We, as Americans, have good reason to feel proud of this role.

Our involvement as a nation in the preservation of peace has particular consequences for you, our nation's youth. For, as your

fathers and grandfathers did before you -- you are the ones who may have to bear the sacrifice of that involvement.

Like most fathers here, it is my fervent wish that you may never be called upon to do so. But the ability of our nation to maintain its moral leadership, and the strength required to support that leadership, will depend on your awareness, your concern, your support, and your expressed willingness to sacrifice should the need arise.

In all of this there is as much or more room for optimism and hope than for cynicism and despair.

A well known columnist recently commented on our national situation by saying that "a country which has been able to absorb the racial strife of the past two decades and Vietnam and Watergate shows an immense vitality and resilience." I would add to that simply that such vitality and resilience is evidence of the durability of a nation's institutions and the perseverance of her people.

In the past 35 years as a nation we have borne the costs of three wars and remained viable as a nation.

We have borne the cost of restoring the economic well being of a war-torn Europe, Korea and Vietnam.

We have borne the cost of peacekeeping roles at flash points of potential conflict throughout the globe.

We have undergone a profound social revolution within our own society, often accompanied by violence and racial strife, and we are successfully coping with it.

We are meeting the crises generated by the environment, by energy problems and by the problems of an urbanized society.

How many nations in human history have been so beset, in such a short period of time, with the intensity of so many challenges? And who can deny that we have met and are meeting those challenges?

If there is not cause for optimism in that, then indeed my words are wasted. For in my view, the greatest cause of optimism lies in our nation's youth.

Beneath what appears to be an exterior of apathy, of disenchantment, lies our youth's potential vitality to "do their thing." Often, those of my generation judge and assess on what is readily visible. We forget, however, that you cannot measure a potential for service or commitment by the length of one's hair, by the color of one's jeans, or by the style of one's language. The moment is coming for our youth, and I for one am confident they will rise to the occasion.

They will do so because I believe that the true meaning and strength of enduring values has not been lost on them.

They will do so because a free and relevant education will give them the intellectual tools to do so.

They will do so because as proud Americans, without flag waving or fanfare, they will rise to their country's needs when indeed their country needs them.

And I for one will not be surprised at their accomplishments.

For I join Sir Winston Churchill in his optimism regarding youth, when he said:

"Come on now, all you young men, all over the world...

Enter upon your inheritance, accept your responsibilities...

Don't take no for an answer, never submit to failure... You

will make all kinds of mistakes; but as long as you are generous

and true... you cannot hurt the world or even seriously

distress her. She was made to be wooed and won by youth."

You, the youth of America, our most valuable national resource, shall win. And in your winning you will lay bare the false prophecies of the cynics, and lead our nation in a new era of peace and the proudest fulfillment of human values.

I wish you Godspeed and good fortune.

Thank you.