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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
TO THE  
TULANE UNIVERSITY STUDENT BODY

TULANE UNIVERSITY

8:07 P.M. CDT

Mr. President, President Hurley, Senator Johnston, my good friends from the House of Representatives, Eddie Hebert, Dave Treen, Lindy Boggs, Lieutenant Governor Fitzmorris, students, faculty, alumni and guests of Tulane University:

It is really a great privilege and a very high honor of having an opportunity of participating again in a student activity at Tulane University, and for this opportunity, I thank you very, very much.

Each time that I have been privileged to visit Tulane, I have come away newly impressed with the intense application of the student body to the great issues of our time, and I am pleased tonight to observe that your interest hasn't changed one bit.

As we came into the building tonight, I passed a student who looked up from his book and said, "A journey of a thousand miles begins but with a single step." (Laughter)

To indicate my interest in him, I asked, "Are you trying to figure out how to get to your goal in life?" He said, "No, I am trying to figure out how to get to the Super Dome in September."

I don't think there is any doubt in my mind that all of you will get to the Super Dome. (Laughter) Of course, I hope it is to see the Green Wave have their very best season on the gridiron.

I have sort of a feeling that you wouldn't mind making this another year in which you put the Tigers in your tank. (Laughter)

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When I had the privilege of speaking 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 another direction. And I say again, I am extremely proud to be invited back.

I am impressed, as I undoubtedly said before, but I would reiterate it tonight, by Tulane's unique distinction as one of the only American universities 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 -- Bennett Johnston, Lindy Boggs, Dave Treen.

Eddie Hebert, when I asked him the question whether he was or not, and he said he got a special degree -- drop out '28. (Laughter)

But I think the fact that you have these three outstanding graduates testifies to the academic excellence and the 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 our great America.

New Orleans is more, as I see it, than weathered bricks and cast iron balconies. It is a state of mind, a melting pot that represents the very, very 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, outnumbered Americans used the tactics of the frontier, to defeat a veteran British force trained in the strategy of the Napoleonic wars.

We, as a Nation, 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 our national pride.

Yet, the victory at New Orleans actually 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.

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Today, America can regain the sense of pride that existed before Vietnam, but it cannot be achieved by refighting a war that is finished as far as America is concerned.

As I see it, the time has come to look forward to an agenda for the future, to unify, to bind up the Nation's wounds and to restore its health and its 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, but just as importantly, the problems of the future.

That is why I think it is so appropriate that I find myself tonight at a university which addresses itself to preparing young people for the challenge of tomorrow.

I ask that we stop refighting the battles and the 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, achievement and sharing. I ask that we accept the responsibility of leadership as a good neighbor to all peoples and an enemy of none.

I ask that we strive to become, in the finest American tradition, something more tomorrow than we are today.

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Instead of my 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 very remarkable self-governed society that possesses the flexibility and the dynamism to grow and undertake an entirely new agenda, an agenda for America's third century.

So, I ask you to join me in helping to write that agenda. I am as determined as a President can be to seek national rediscovery of the belief in ourselves that characterize the most creative periods in our Nation's history. The greatest challenge of creativity, as I see it, lies ahead.

We, of course, are saddened indeed by the 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.

Let me put it this way, if I might. Some tend to feel that if we do not succeed in everything everywhere, then we have succeeded in nothing anywhere.

I reject categorically such polarized thinking. We can, and we should help others to help themselves, but the faith of responsible men and women everywhere in the final decision rests in their own hands, not in ours.

America's future depends upon Americans, especially your generation, which is now equipping itself to achieve the challenges of the future, to help write the agenda of America.

Earlier today, in this great community, I spoke about the need to maintain our defenses. Tonight, I would like to talk about another kind of strength, the true source of American power that transcends all of the deterrent powers for peace of our Armed Forces. I am speaking here of our belief in ourselves and our belief in our Nation.

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

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It is in this spirit that we must now move past the discords of the decade. It is in this spirit that I ask you to join me in writing an agenda for the future.

I welcome your invitation, particularly, tonight because I know it is at Tulane and other centers of thought throughout our great country that much consideration is being given to the kind of future that Americans want and, just as importantly, will work for.

Each of you are preparing yourselves for the future, and I am deeply interested in your preparations and your opinions and your goals. However, tonight, with your indulgence, let me share with you my own views.

I envision a creative program that goes as far as our courage and our capacities can take us, both 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 our current 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. Of course, 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 of healing. My goal is to achieve or to assure basic needs and an effective system to achieve this result.

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 to destroy our environment.

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

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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 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 that 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 the alleviation of the world's hunger, we must realize that good intentions do not feed people. Some problems, as anyone who served in the Congress knows, 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. We did it with the best of intentions, but we are now learning that a strain of rice that grows in one place will not grow in another; that factories that produce at 100 percent in one nation produce less than half as much in a society where temperaments and work habits are somewhat different.

Yet, the world economy has become interdependent -- not only food technology, but money management, natural resources and energy, research and development -- all kinds of this group 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's also learn more about nutrition, about weather forecasting, about irrigation, about the many other specialties involved in helping people to help themselves.

We must learn more about people, about the development of communities, architecture, engineering, education, motivation, productivity, public health and medicine, arts and sciences, political, legal and social organization. All of these specialties, and many, many more, are required if young people like you are to help this Nation develop an agenda for our future, your future, our country's future.

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I challenge, for example, the medical students in this audience to put on their agenda the achievement of a cure for cancer. I challenge the engineers in this audience to devise new techniques for developing cheap, clean and plentiful energy and as a by-product, to control floods.

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

I challenge education, those of you as education majors, to do real teaching for real life.

I challenge the art majors in this audience to compose the great American symphony, to write the great American novel and to enrich and 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 and other nations. These do provide a basis of shared values, even as we stand up with determination for what we believe.

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

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The new agenda, that which is developed by you and by us, must place a high priority on the need to stop the spread of nuclear weapons and to work for the mutual reduction in strategic arms and control of other weapons.

I must say parenthetically, the successful negotiations at Vladivostok, in my opinion, are 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 the esteem of all people wherever they might be in this globe in which we live.

It will enhance our own perception of ourselves and our pride in being an American. We can -- we can, and I say it with emphasis -- 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 to work with developing nations, and I look forward, with confidence, to your participation in every aspect of America's future, and I urge Americans of all ages to unite in this Bicentennial year to take responsibilities 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 two centuries ago.

I pledge, as I know you do, each one of us, to do our part. Let the beacon lights of the past shine forth from historic New Orleans, and from Tulane University, and from every other corner of this land to illuminate a boundless future for all Americans and a peace for all mankind.

Thank you very much.

END (AT 8:32 P.M. CDT)