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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AT THE  
SPECIAL CONVOCATION COMMEMORATING  
SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY'S  
60TH ANNIVERSARY  
AND  
SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY'S  
BICENTENNIAL OBSERVANCE

MOODY COLISEUM

1:50 P.M. CDT

Chancellor Tate, President Zumberge, Senator Tower, Congressman Steelman, Secretary Clements, members of the faculty, student body, alumni and guests:

It is really a very great honor and a very high privilege for me to be here this afternoon, and I thank you, Chancellor Tate, and those in authority for giving me this honorary degree.

I could not help but think, as you suggested, that I might try out for and hopefully help the SMU football team. (Laughter) You are extending an invitation that is not justified. I played football at the University of Michigan so far back it was back when the ball was round. (Laughter) That would not help you very much against Florida tonight.

Just before I left Washington yesterday morning, I did receive a bit of very good news. Bill Clements, our Deputy Secretary of Defense, as well as the former Chairman of SMU's Board of Governors, informed me that I had been named the first and only honorary member of your sensational Mustang Band.

All I can say is, I have always been proud to be a Ford. In the future, I will be even more proud to be a Ford Mustang. (Laughter)

I am honored to address this opening autumn Convocation, beginning the historic year of SMU's 60th anniversary, as well as your participation in the National Bicentennial. I am extremely pleased to congratulate your new President, Dr. Jim Zumberge.

As I indicated, I have known Jim from his very first days as President; first, President of Grand Valley State College in Michigan in the district that I had the honor of representing for some 25 years. He started that school literally from a cornfield, and now through capabilities and experience and talent, it is great to see him here as the new President of this great University.

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I knew Jim not only as a distinguished educator and scientist but as an American who believes in the possibilities of the human individual. I am confident that under his presidency SMU will instill into the Bicentennial year a vision of the future, a vision that typifies the great State of Texas in this distinguished university, which has done so much to demonstrate what is right with America. And I have no doubt whatsoever that Texas will instill in your distinguished new president an even greater appreciation of what is right with Texas.

I have always felt very much at home in Texas because I admire so much of the Texas spirit and Texas accomplishments. There is a touch of Texas in all Americans and I am not immune to the stardust cast by the Lone Star State.

In Texas everything is possible and there is just enough Texas optimism in me to believe in America, to believe that in America not only is everything possible but our fate as a Nation is in our own hands.

The prophets of gloom and doom have predicted that the quality of life in America will worsen; that democracy as we know it is finished; that we face economic collapse; that we are either being poisoned by the food or will starve to death; that criminals are capturing our cities; that the President of the United States is no longer safe in greeting citizens in the Nation's communities; that if the earthquake does not get us an ice age will. I strongly reject such pessimistic scenarios.

I would like to share with you today something of my own vision for the future. I would build upon our proud past. In America's first century we developed political institutions responsive to the people. A great Nation was painfully consolidated with unity growing from diversity.

Our second century transformed an under-developed country into the most productive Nation that ever existed. America reflected the pioneer spirit, the achievement of industry, agriculture, the incentives of free enterprise, the contributions of free trade unions and the widespread sharing of economic gains both at home and abroad.

As we approach our third century I see this era as one of fulfillment of the individual citizen. I see a century devoted to education, which equips young men and women -- like the students of SMU -- to make their own decisions rather than permit their future to be programmed by massive Government structures that an imaginative writer foresaw for "1984" -- a nightmarish fantasy of what our third century could be.

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It is my deepest conviction that a Government big enough to give you everything you want is a Government big enough to take from you everything you have.

Let us usher in a third century in which the individual rather than the Government makes personal choices and decides how individual income is to be spent. Men and women must prevail over the endless agencies and bureaus that would reduce human beings to computerized abstractions and program people into numbers and to statistics.

I place a high premium on creativity, originality and your right to differentiate yourself from the mass. Today's mounting danger is from mass Government, mass education and mass technology, and we must not let them prevail.

I am determined to do everything in my power to prevent conformist pressures from smothering individual expression or stifling individual opportunity. Individualism must stand as the sentinel of 1976 against the monolithic threat of sameness in our society.

Never forget that in America our sovereign is the citizen; the Government and institutions exist to serve people. The State is a servant of the individual in that it must never become an anonymous monstrosity that masters everyone and is responsive to no one. These propositions are the foundations of our Bicentennial.

My vision of America's third century is one of an era of achievements rather than apathy, of fostering the ennobling and transcendental qualities of the individual spirit rather than building huge new bureaucracies.

Two centuries of sacrifices and struggle, of conflict and compromise, have won an unprecedented measure of political and economic independence for each of us. I am proud to be the President of a free Government that checks and balances its own excesses. I am proud of our free economic system which corrects its own errors, controlled by the marketplace of free and enlightened consumers.

I am especially proud of the role of free education in preserving individuality. Education is vital to my vision of our third century. Only education can equip individuals to take responsibility for their own lives in the face of pressures of mass systems of society. Education must provide the perception which rests the quality of individuality.

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I challenge educators and students to regain the commitment that made America great. Each generation brings a new spirit of competition, new reservoirs of enthusiasm, new responses to the humanitarian needs of others and regenerated pride in personal independence.

This generation bears a very special task -- the preservation of individualism. You are the bullwark of individualism. So is your family. So is your local community, and especially schools like Southern Methodist University, which join the public educational institutions and cross-germination of ideas.

My own background included two experiences in higher education. One, the University of Michigan; the other, Yale University -- one public, the other private. I value both. I buy an open market for ideas.

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Education is the key to diversity, which will determine the kind of people we will be. It must not become a mass product. All the armies, weapon systems of our defense will mean absolutely nothing without self-reliant individuals who retain the cherished qualities of Americanism. That is one great purpose of education.

Educated men and women not only provide answers to problems, but keep open the options in a society that make life worth living.

Our real first line of defense is the quality of individual life, in moral and spiritual values, compassion, love of community and country, creativity, innovation, enterprise, originality and healthy sportsmanship and fair, but tough, competition.

None of these attributes of individuality can be mass produced, they must be encouraged. They will grow within each man and woman, but that growth can be flourished on the portico of Angell Hall on my old campus at Ann Arbor.

There is an inscription from an act of Congress, adopted in 1787, the Northwest Ordinance Act, which states: "Religion, morality, knowledge, being necessary to good Government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged."

The American tradition can inspire the highest virtues, but the Government cannot achieve personal fulfillment for each of you. Your future depends upon your own determination to develop your highest potential.

Let us apply the theories of education in the laboratory of life. I urge students and graduates and faculties to direct their genius, their energy, to the solution of the problems facing America. I challenge you to help make not only America, but American life, beautiful, inspiring. You can do it.

Let us take a new look at ourselves as Americans by seeking a real partnership between the university and the rest of society. You can give greater meaning to your own life and help all Americans enhance the quality of their lives.

I look at Southern Methodist University and other privately supported institutions of higher learning, both in harmony and in competition with public institutions to help regenerate the values that make American life so very special.

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Students who prefer different philosophies of learning should be able to choose among the widest possible variety of options. This insures that diversity so essential to educate the whole person.-- the physical person, the intellectual person and the spiritual person.

In private education, there is a direct citizen participation in the educational process. SMU is not dependent on Government funding that establishes a rigid requirement or rigid guidelines. To maintain its very unique qualities, Southern Methodist University takes responsibility for its own support, and I commend its supporters, and you should all be most thankful for them.

I am concerned about the very heavy burden falling upon the working, middle-class citizens who are struggling to pay tuitions and costs at both public and private colleges. I am also concerned that private higher education is now in financial difficulty.

Private insitutions provide a leavening and stimulating influence for the public universities and the public colleges. Their continuing strength and vitality are essential to higher education.

We must help to keep this competition going between the private as well as the public colleges and universities.

Educators must innovate and respond to the world in which students of all ages and all backgrounds find themselves.

Private institutions can best serve by emphasizing their uniqueness, not by succumbing to any temptation to imitate the public university, but neither students nor Government will support a private college just because of its antiquity or its history.

They must offer something truly different, truly important. Private education, free of Government constraints, enjoys boundless freedom to experiment in vital areas that may fall outside general public support.

Let us encourage human growth, which can transcend from despair to dynamism, from confusion to clarity, from hopelessness to hope unlimited.

America is going through an unprecedented period of technological and economic change and dislocation. We have been jolted by shock after shock, but this Nation is not disintegrating. It is going through a period of transition. It may not be easy. It is experiencing the growing pains of a mighty nation of over 214 million with the world's greatest record of achievement in the short span of two centuries. We will transcend this period of trial. I believe in America, as I am sure all of you do.

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I am convinced, as I am certain each of you are, that all we have in America is far more right than wrong, and we should be proud of the progress we have made despite the difficulties over a period of time.

I am proud to have been in this office some 18 months and to have helped to create a new climate of peace abroad while striving for solutions to some of our most complex problems here at home. In the finest American tradition we have served as peace-maker in the Middle East. I am confident that the Congress will take quick action to ratify agreements involving Egypt and Israel.

All Americans can take the unifying pride in our initiative in making peace, not war. I have the deepest confidence in America's future and our educational resources. The schools of this Nation -- private as well as public -- can help to inspire the lives of Americans with new meaning and with new quality. Both private and public educators must combine their genius in preparing men and women for our challenges of the third century.

I urge you in the words of Thomas Jefferson to "enlighten the public generally, and tyranny and oppressions of body and mind will vanish like evil spirits at the dawn of day."

Thank you very much.

END (AT 2:13 P.M. CDT)