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QUALITY OF LIFE
STANFORD UNIVERSITY COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS
JUNE 13, 1976

TO RETURN TO THE LAWRENCE FROST AMPHITHEATER JUST 21 YEARS AFTER MY OWN COMMENCEMENT BRINGS SUCH A FLOOD OF THOUGHTS TO MIND. SO MUCH HAS HAPPENED TO THE UNIVERSITY, THE COUNTRY, THE WORLD AND TO ME.

THAT A NUMBER OF YOU HAVE BEEN BORN SINCE I WAS LAST HERE IS SOBERING ENOUGH.

BUT WHAT ABOUT OUR SOCIETY? NOW THAT A GENERATION HAS PASSED SINCE MY GRADUATION, WHAT CAN I SAY ABOUT THE QUALITY OF LIFE IN OUR COUNTRY TODAY AS COMPARED TO THEN?

IT MAKES LITTLE DIFFERENCE, I SUPPOSE, AS TO WHETHER THEN OR NOW WAS THE BEST TIME TO BEGIN CAREERS. YET I WOULD LIKE TO THINK THAT OUR HOPES -- YOURS AND MINE -- CAN BE HIGHER TODAY FOR THE FUTURE THAN THEY WERE IN 1955.

1955 -- OVERSAW THE WINDING DOWN OF THE KOREAN WAR, JUST AS WE NOW WATCH THE BITTERNESS OF VIETNAM RECEDING. WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED OF WAR? MAYBE NOT ENOUGH TO AVOID ANOTHER ONE, BUT PERHAPS AT LEAST ENOUGH NOT TO ACCEPT BLINDLY THE NARROW VIEWS OF OTHERS REGARDING WHAT IS AND WHAT IS NOT WORTH FIGHTING FOR.



1955 -- WAS ALSO THE YEAR AFTER BROWN VS. THE BOARD OF EDUCATION. SEPARATE BUT EQUAL FACILITIES FOR BLACKS, SAID THE SUPREME COURT, IS A CONTRADICTION OF TERMS. THAT DECISION LAUNCHED A SOCIAL REVOLUTION UNSURPASSED IN THIS CENTURY, AND ANY FAIR-MINDED EVALUATION SHOWS GREAT PROGRESS -- REGARDLESS OF HOW MUCH WE SEE THERE IS YET TO DO.

THE OTHER SOCIAL REVOLUTION OF THIS CENTURY BEGAN ONLY ONE GENERATION EARLIER IN THE 1930'S. OUR MOST GENEROUS EFFORTS TO IMPROVE OUR SOCIETY STEM FROM THE PERIOD OF THE NEW DEAL. THAT THOSE AND SUBSEQUENT EFFORTS HAVE FALLEN SHORT OF THEIR GOAL AND HAVE LEFT IN THEIR WAKE INEFFICIENT GOVERNMENT BUREAUCRACIES ARE NOT THE MOST MATERIAL POINTS. THE SIGNIFICANCE IS THAT IN THE 30'S AND AGAIN IN THE 50'S WE BEGAN MAJOR EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR A GREATER PROPORTION OF AMERICANS.

NOW IN 1976 AFTER ALL THAT HAS OCCURRED IN THESE LAST TWO YEARS, WE ASK AGAIN -- JUST AS WE DID IN THE 50'S AND IN THE 30'S -- DO WE AS A NATION HAVE THE STAMINA TO TRY AGAIN TO FIND A BETTER WAY? CAN YOU FIND FOR YOURSELVES AND CAN WE FIND AS A SOCIETY A MEASURE OF REAL IMPROVEMENT IN THE GENERATION AHEAD?

PUT SIMPLY: IS OURS A RISING OR A DECLINING CIVILIZATION?

THERE ARE OBVIOUS MARKS OF IMPROVEMENT. BLACKS, WOMEN, JEWS, CATHOLICS -- ALL MINORITIES -- CAN ASPIRE TO BROADER SUCCESS IN BUSINESS, THE PROFESSIONS, POLITICS, AND SOCIETY, WHETHER THROUGH THE FORCE OF LAW OR THE CHANGE OF TRADITION, THE OBSTACLES OF THE FIRST THREE-QUARTERS OF THIS CENTURY SEEM TO BE IN SOME MEASURE THE OPPORTUNITIES OF THE LAST QUARTER.

WHEN YOU LEFT SCHOOL FOR YOUR SUMMER RECESS JUST TWO YEARS AGO, THE COUNTRY WAS ENTERING BOTH ITS GREATEST CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS AND AN ECONOMIC DECLINE THAT THREATENED TO RIVAL THE GREAT DEPRESSION OF THE 1930's.

REASONABLE PEOPLE LOOKED THEN WITH DESPAIR AT A POLITICAL SYSTEM WHOSE LEADERS WERE BEING CONVICTED AND DISCREDITED ON A SCALE UNPARALLELED IN THE FREE WORLD AND AT AN ECONOMIC SYSTEM THAT SEEMED UNABLE TO MAINTAIN ITSELF.

BUT TODAY IN OUR BICENTENNIAL YEAR, WE ARE APPROACHING THE ELECTION OF 1976 WITH A DEDICATION TO MORALITY AND FAIRNESS UNEQUALLED IN OUR 200 YEARS AND PERHAPS UNEQUALLED ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD. WE HAVE LEARNED AGAIN THAT OURS IS STILL A CREATIVE SOCIETY, A COUNTRY OF UNRIVALED VITALITY. MORE THAN ANY OTHER NATION, IT IS STILL AMERICA THAT IS DISPLAYING THE STRENGTH TO LEAD THE FREE WORLD OUT OF ITS ECONOMIC AND MORAL RECESSION.

"SO WHAT?" -- YOU MAY SAY. HERE WE ARE AGAIN -- BACK WHERE WE STARTED. THE POORLY EDUCATED, POORLY FED, POORLY HOUSED, AND JOBLESS ARE STILL WITH US IN NUMBERS FAR TOO LARGE TO BE ACCEPTED. WHERE ARE THE CONCEPTS, THE STRATEGIES, AND THE LEADERS THAT WILL SOLVE THESE PROBLEMS? IS IT ENOUGH TO RECOVER OUR BALANCE? WILL WE NEVER ADVANCE?

OUR NATIONAL CONFIDENCE IN OUR INSTITUTIONS HAS BEEN ON AN EMOTIONAL ROLLER COASTER. AS SOON AS POLITICAL LEADERS WERE PURGED, HEADLINES FEATURING THEM WERE REPLACED WITH NEW ONES ABOUT BUSINESS LEADERS WHOSE INTEREST IN COMPETITIVE BRIBERY SEEMS TO HAVE SURPASSED THEIR COMMITMENT TO COMPETITIVE PRICING. TODAY, BOTH HAVE GIVEN WAY TO NEW WAVES OF HEADLINES THAT REFLECT POORLY ON SOME LEGISLATORS IN WASHINGTON.

BUT, THE SURVIVING TRUTH IS THAT WE STILL HAVE OUR SENSE OF INDIGNATION -- THE PLIGHT OF OUR UNDERPRIVILEGED AND THE TRANSGRESSIONS OF OUR LEADERS STILL INVOKES OUR OUTRAGE.

THE THRUST OF MY FEW REMARKS THIS MORNING WILL BE AN ASSESSMENT OF OUR WILL AND OUR CAPACITY FOR MEANINGFUL IMPROVEMENT, AS WE BEGIN OUR THIRD CENTURY AND AS WE AGAIN ATTEMPT TO DEAL WITH THE SAME SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS THAT HAVE FRUSTRATED DEDICATED AND EXPENSIVE GOVERNMENTAL EFFORTS IN THE PAST. THAT WE CAN CAUSE CHANGE IF WE PUT OUR MINDS AND MONEY TO THE TASK CAN SCARCELY BE DOUBTED, FOR OUR HISTORY IS REplete WITH HEROIC ACHIEVEMENT.

TWENTY-ONE YEARS AGO, FOR EXAMPLE, THE IDEA OF FLIGHT BEYOND THE EARTH'S PULL OF GRAVITY WAS A DREAM OF A FEW FAR-SEEING SCIENTISTS AND FICTION WRITERS. TODAY THE ADVENTURES OF THE ENTERPRISE CREW IN STAR TREK SEEM COMMON PLACE TO OUR YOUNGEST CHILDREN AND THE FUTURE OF MAN IN SPACE IS LITERALLY TAKEN FOR GRANTED.

THE MORE DIFFICULT QUESTION IS WHETHER WE HAVE THE WISDOM AND THE STAYING POWER TO SECURE CHANGES THAT WILL GIVE A GREATER PROPORTION OF AMERICANS BOTH THE DESIRE AND THE CHANCE FOR A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE.

ONE INDICATION OF OUR CAPACITY TO CHANGE IS OUR GROWING REALIZATION THAT OUR RESOURCES ARE LIMITED AND THAT WE HAVE BEEN A WASTEFUL PEOPLE.

THE GASOLINE CRISIS TAUGHT US THAT WE WASTE ENERGY.

THE ENVIRONMENTALISTS TAUGHT US THAT WE WASTE THE AIR AND WATER RESOURCES UPON WHICH WE DEPEND FOR SURVIVAL.

THE CIVIL DISTURBANCES OF 1968 TAUGHT US THAT WE WASTE OUR HUMAN RESOURCES BY CONSIGNING LARGE SEGMENTS OF OUR POPULATION TO A CONTINUING CYCLE OF POVERTY FROM WHICH FAR TOO FEW BREAK FREE.

WE KNOW WE HAVE WASTED THE CAPACITY OF WOMEN TO CONTRIBUTE.

OUR COLLECTIVE EXISTENCE HAS BEEN ONE OF CONSUMPTION. WE CONSUMED A FRONTIER AND TURNED IT INTO A SERIES OF SPRAWLING CITIES. AND WE CONSUME OUR RESOURCES AT A FRIGHTENING RATE TO KEEP THOSE CITIES ALIVE. YET ONE LOOK AT OUR CITIES MAKES IT APPARENT THAT WE ARE WASTING THEIR POTENTIAL AS A QUALITY HABITAT FOR MAN.

IT IS TRUE THAT OUR STANDARD OF LIVING HAS INCREASED OVER THE PAST THREE DECADES. BUT IT IS ALSO TRUE THAT SINCE WORLD WAR II THE LEVEL OF OUR DESIRES HAS ESCALATED EVEN MORE.

THE LEVEL OF GOODS THAT PEOPLE IN THIS COUNTRY THINK THEY ARE ENTITLED TO OWN IS MUCH HIGHER TODAY THAN IT WAS 30 YEARS AGO. WE LIVE IN BIGGER -- NOT NECESSARILY BETTER -- HOUSES. WE HAVE BECOME ACCUSTOMED TO DRIVING BIGGER -- NOT NECESSARILY BETTER -- CARS. OUR APPETITES HAVE INCREASED FASTER THAN OUR RESOURCES.

SEVENTY YEARS AGO RIGHT HERE ON THE STANFORD CAMPUS, THORSTEIN VEBLIN TOLD US WHAT WAS COMING: HE SAID WE WERE MOTIVATED AS MUCH BY OUR DESIRE TO CONSUME CONSPICUOUSLY AS BY OUR DESIRE FOR ECONOMIC SUFFICIENCY. AND ONLY LAST YEAR PROFESSOR DANIEL BELL NOTED THAT WITH OUR PRESENT ATTITUDE NO GIVEN LEVEL OF ECONOMIC WELL-BEING WILL EVER SUFFICE. PROFESSOR BELL CALLS THE YEARS SINCE WORLD WAR II A REVOLUTION OF "RISING ENTITLEMENTS".

NOWHERE HAS OUR WILLINGNESS TO THROW AWAY THE SLIGHTLY TARNISHED FOR THE SHINY NEW BEEN MORE EVIDENT THAN IN OUR CITIES, A SUBJECT OF PARTICULAR CONCERN TO THE SECRETARY OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT.

THE STARK FACT IS THAT LARGE PARTS OF OUR GREATEST CITIES HAVE BEEN SACRIFICED TO OBSOLESCENCE AND DECAY. IN NEW YORK CITY ALONE 50,000 UNITS OF HOUSING ARE ABANDONED EACH YEAR.

ABANDONED NEIGHBORHOODS AND NEARBY SLUMS HOUSE A CONCENTRATION OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS OF A MAGNITUDE WHICH SEEM NEAR INSOLVABLE: CRIME, RACIAL ANIMOSITY, FAMILY DISINTEGRATION.

OUR YEARS OF ABUNDANCE SOMEHOW FOSTERED THE NOTION THAT OUR URBAN ASSETS COULD BE DISCARDED. AS OUR CENTER CITIES GREW OLD, THOSE WHO COULD, FLED THE URBAN CORE WITH ITS PROBLEMS FOR THE NEWLY-BUILT SUBURBS. UNTIL RECENTLY, GOVERNMENT POLICIES ACTUALLY ENCOURAGED THIS SUBURBAN SPRAWL, A SPRAWL THAT HAS CONSUMED THOUSANDS OF SQUARE MILES OF OUR REMAINING OPEN SPACE.

YET OUR CITIES HOLD IRREPLACEABLE RESOURCES. GREAT MASSES OF INVESTED WEALTH AND PRODUCTIVE CAPACITY AS WELL AS HISTORY AND BEAUTY CAN BE FOUND THERE. A LARGE PORTION OF OUR HOUSING STOCK IS SITUATED THERE, ALONG WITH NEEDED WATER AND SEWER LINES, FACTORIES, ROADS, SCHOOLS, TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS, AND UTILITIES. WE FORGET TOO EASILY THAT WHEN WE ABANDON A HOUSING UNIT IN A CITY, WE ARE ABANDONING A PART OF ALL THESE RELATED ASSETS.

I STATE THE OBVIOUS WHEN I SAY THAT RECYCLING CITIES IS HALF AS COSTLY AS SUBURBAN DEVELOPMENT ON ALL COUNTS -- CAPITAL, LAND, ENERGY, AND ECOLOGICAL DISRUPTION.

FAIR-MINDED PEOPLE CAN LOOK AT THE AGONY OF OUR CITIES OVER HOUSING, JOBS, AND BUSSING, AND AGREE THAT THE BLAME DOES NOT TOTALLY LIE WITH RACISTS OR WITH MEDDLESOME OFFICIALS. RATHER IT IS APPARENT THAT ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS HAVE GROWN FAR FASTER THAN OUR DETERMINATION TO FORGE ACCEPTABLE SOLUTIONS.

WHAT WE NEED AND WHAT WE ARE NOW BEGINNING IS A WAR, A WAR THAT CANNOT BE WON WITH MONEY ALONE, A WAR THAT MUST BE SKILLFULLY DIRECTED AND SUPPORTED ON A LOCAL LEVEL. WE COULD NOT WIN THE WAR OF THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE VILLAGES WITH BILLIONS OF DOLLARS OF AID, AND WE LOST THE FIRST ROUND OF OUR FIGHT TO SAVE OUR CITIES EVEN THOUGH WE SPENT BILLIONS OF DOLLARS ON PUBLIC HOUSING.

CITIES, WHICH HAVE HAD THEIR TAX BASE DANGEROUSLY ERODED, WHOSE SCHOOLS HAVE PRIMARILY THE DISADVANTAGED, AND WHOSE INDUSTRY IS LEAVING, ARE IN A DOWNWARD SPIRAL. TO REVERSE THAT SPIRAL REQUIRES NEW INCENTIVES TO ATTRACT BUSINESSES AND TO ATTRACT A HETEROGENOUS MIX OF PEOPLE.

NEW YORK'S PLIGHT HAS BEEN THE SYMBOL OF A BATTLE SEEMINGLY LOST. WILMINGTON, HARTFORD, PORTLAND, PHILADELPHIA, BOSTON, SAINT LOUIS, CHICAGO, AND KANSAS CITY COULD BE SYMBOLS OF SUCCESS.

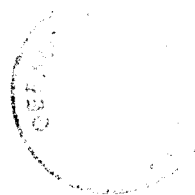
SUSPENSION OF PROPERTY TAXES, PRIVATE INVESTMENT INCENTIVES, FEDERAL REVENUE SHARING, AND FEDERAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANTS -- WHICH BET ON LOCAL INITIATIVE ARE ALL WEAPONS THAT WELL DIRECTED CITIES ARE USING.

IN THE PAST WE, AS INDIVIDUALS, HAVE ABANDONED THE CITIES TO THEIR PROBLEMS. RATHER THAN ATTACK DETERIORATING NEIGHBORHOODS, INCREASING CRIME, SEGREGATED EDUCATION, AND JOBLESS MINORITIES WITH OUR VOTES, OUR TAX DOLLARS, AND WITH ALL THE CREATIVITY AND ENERGY THAT WE COULD MUSTER, WE HAVE TOO OFTEN CURSED THE INEPTITUDE OF OUR CITIES' LEADERS FROM THE SANCTITY OF OUR SUBURBS.

OF COURSE THE ANSWER IS NOT IN BUSSING OUR CHILDREN BACK AND FORTH. IT IS TAKING OURSELVES BACK TO THE FIGHT TO REHABILITATE THE STRUCTURES, THE GOVERNMENT, AND THE SCHOOLS OF THE CITIES.

FORTUNATELY, THE VERY FORCES WHICH NOW REQUIRE US TO CONSERVE OUR URBAN ASSETS ARE ALSO GIVING US THE OPPORTUNITY AND THE INCENTIVE TO REVITALIZE THEM. SCARCITY AND THE RESULTANT HIGH COST OF LAND, RAW MATERIALS, AND ENERGY ARE MAKING URBAN LIVING A MORE ATTRACTIVE ALTERNATIVE.

SOME CHILDREN OF THE GENERATION WHO FLED TO THE SUBURBS ARE RETURNING TO THE CITIES. AREAS THAT ONCE WERE SLUMS HEADING FOR ABANDONMENT ARE BEING RESTORED BY FAMILIES NO LONGER WILLING TO BEAR THE COST AND INCONVENIENCES OF SUBURBAN LIFE.



IT TOOK OUR CITIES A LONG TIME TO REACH THEIR PRESENT STATE OF AFFAIRS, AND IT WILL TAKE A LONG TIME AND GREAT INGENUITY TO TURN THE TREND -- BUT TURN IT CAN. OUR ADVERSITY CARRIES WITH IT THE OPPORTUNITY TO RE-CREATE THE URBAN CENTERS TO THEIR KEY ECONOMIC, HISTORIC AND CULTURAL PLACE.

I DWELL ON THE CITY HERE PARTLY BECAUSE IT HAS BEEN THE FOCUS OF MY WORK IN WASHINGTON BUT MOSTLY BECAUSE CITY PROBLEMS PROVIDE AN INTENSE COMPOSITE PICTURE OF ALL OF OUR CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMS. IF WE AS A PEOPLE ARE TO SECURE REAL SOCIAL IMPROVEMENTS IN THE GENERATION AHEAD WE MUST PROVE OUR WILL AND CAPACITY TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEMS CONCENTRATED IN OUR CITIES.

AS I SEE THE BATTLE FOR THE CITIES EVOLVE, I SEE A NEW TOLERANCE TAKING SHAPE FOR THE ART OF THE POSSIBLE.

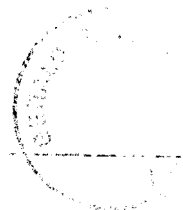
MORE AND MORE I SEE THE UNRESTRAINED GROWTH OF THE PAST YIELD TO THE RECOGNITION THAT WE HAVE DEVELOPED APPETITES FOR INCOMPATIBLE GOALS. WHEN THERE WAS PLENTY OF EVERYTHING, WHETHER IT BE SPACE, AIR, CLEAN WATER, OR FEDERAL FUNDS, WE SEEMED TO PERCEIVE ONLY SINGLE TRUTHS -- ONE PROBLEM, ONE ANSWER. SOMETHING WAS EITHER DESIRABLE OR UNDESIRABLE -- RIGHT OR WRONG. OUR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS COULD BE FAR MORE EASILY EXPLAINED IN SUCH A FRAMEWORK.

ONCE WE ADMIT THAT THERE ARE FEW ABSOLUTES AND KNOW THAT WE WILL BE CHOOSING BETWEEN DIFFERENT RIGHTS, NOT NECESSARILY BETWEEN RIGHT AND WRONG, WE CREATE A CLIMATE OF ACCOMMODATION THAT IS THE NECESSARY PREREQUISITE OF PROGRESS.

WE KNOW NOW THAT OUR RESOURCES ARE NOT SUFFICIENT TO ACHIEVE ALL THE OBJECTIVES THAT EACH OF US INDIVIDUALLY WOULD LIKE TO SET FOR OUR CIVILIZATION, AND WE TURN TO THE FAR MORE DIFFICULT, BUT FAR MORE PRODUCTIVE, PROCESS OF MAKING THE NECESSARY RELATIVE CHOICES.

AMERICA HAS BEEN A SPOILED CHILD, BUT IT NOW MAY BE PASSING OUT OF ITS ADOLESCENCE.

WITH LUCK AND GOOD LEADERSHIP WE WILL SPEND THE NEXT 21 YEARS FINDING BETTER WAYS TO SOLVE THE ISSUES THAT DIVIDE US -- ISSUES FOR THE MOST PART THAT ARE NEITHER CONSERVATIVE NOR LIBERAL -- SIMPLY TOUGH:



NEW BUSINESS AND ENERGY GROWTH

VERSUS

THE INSISTENT DEMAND FOR BETTER ENVIRONMENT.

THE PRESSURE ON GOVERNMENT TO GUARANTEE
NEW JOBS, HOMES, AND SECURITY

AS OPPOSED TO

OUR FAITH IN FREE ENTERPRISE.

THE CRITICAL NEED FOR A MORE EFFECTIVE
SYSTEM OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

WEIGHED AGAINST

OUR DEDICATION TO FAIR TRIALS AND OUR
COMPASSION FOR THE UNDERPRIVILEGED.

THE DEMAND OF CONSUMERS FOR BETTER
TREATMENT

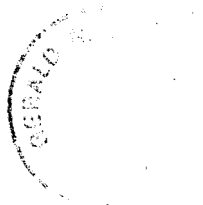
AGAINST

THE CALL OF OTHERS FOR LESS GOVERNMENT
REGULATION.

THE DESPERATE CRY OF THE UNEMPLOYED

VERSUS

THE DESPAIR OF THOSE IMPOVERISHED BY
THE LAST INFLATIONARY CYCLE.




PROBLEMS SO STATED ARE TIMELESS. THEY ARE FAR MORE LIKELY TO EBB AND FLOW -- THAN TO BE SOLVED.

OUR GOVERNMENTS WILL IN THE FUTURE, AS THEY HAVE BEFORE, ALLOCATE PEOPLE AND RESOURCES TO DEAL WITH THEM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PRIORITIES THAT PEOPLE DEMAND.

YOUR OWN CHANCES TO DEAL WITH THEM IN YOUR PRIVATE AND GOVERNMENTAL CAREERS WILL COME ABOUT AS MINE DID THROUGH A COMBINATION OF YOUR OWN DESIRES -- AND CHANCE. AS YOU SEE SOME PROBLEMS REACH CRISIS LEVEL, YOU WILL SEEK DEDICATED, IMAGINATIVE EFFORTS TO REDUCE THE TURMOIL TO A TOLERABLE LEVEL, AND YOU WILL SURELY SEE NEW CRISES ARISE TO COMMAND THE NATION'S AND THE WORLD'S ATTENTION.

THE MEASURE OF OUR CIVILIZATION IS WHETHER WE MAINTAIN THE CAPACITY AND WILL TO DEAL WITH THESE CRISIS AS THEY ARISE. MY VIEW, OBVIOUSLY, IS THAT WE DO INDEED HAVE BOTH AND THAT THE PROBLEMS WHICH MAY SEEM DESPERATE TO SOME SHOULD TO YOU BE THE GREAT CHALLENGES THAT AWAIT YOUR ATTENTION.

IF MY OPTIMISM FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR SOCIETY SEEMS NAIVE TO SOME, LET ME SAY SIMPLY THAT I SHARE THE CONCERN REGARDING THE FORCES THAT THREATEN OUR DEMOCRACY. THERE HAVE BEEN FAR TOO MANY REVELATIONS OF MISCONDUCT NOT TO BE WARY.



BUT I SHARE MORE THE VIEWS OF THOSE WHO BELIEVE THAT THE CLEANSING PROCESS OF THE PAST TWO YEARS HAS STRENGTHENED OUR SOCIETY. I DO NOT AGREE WITH THOSE WHO CHARGE THAT WE HAVE BEEN ENGAGED IN A FOOLISH SELF-FLAGELLATION BY DISCREDITING OUR INSTITUTIONS: GOVERNMENT, BUSINESS, AND THE MILITARY. THERE ARE, OF COURSE, THOSE WHO CLAIM THAT THE WORLD NEEDS A STRONG, SINGLE-DIRECTED AMERICA, NOT ONE DISTRACTED BY SELF-CRITICISM.

I SEE IT DIFFERENTLY. I SEE THIS COUNTRY ENTERING ITS THIRD CENTURY IN FULL ADULTHOOD WITH ITS HOUSE IN GOOD ORDER, WITH THE STRONGEST ECONOMY AND THE STRONGEST DEMOCRACY THIS WORLD HAS EVER KNOWN. WITH THE OLDEST CONTINUING GOVERNMENT IN THE FREE WORLD, WE STILL RETAIN MORE THAN ANY OTHER NATION, THE WILL AND CAPACITY TO REFORM.

I AM, IN SHORT, PLEASED TO BE IN MY HOME STATE, AT MY UNIVERSITY, TO CELEBRATE YOUR COMMENCEMENT, WITH A FIRM BELIEF THAT THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE QUALITY OF YOUR LIVES AND OUR SOCIETY HAVE NEVER BEEN GREATER.

THANK YOU.

