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Office of the Press Secretary
to Mrs. Johnson

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS BY MRS. LYNDON B. JOHNSON
EMORY UNIVERSITY HONORS DAY CONVOCATION
1:30 p. m., Monday, May 11, 1964
Glenn Memorial Auditorium
Atlanta, Georgia

What can I say to tell you my pride in you -- you young Americans who have shown such zest for learning, you who are leaders in meeting the American challenge to excellence?

As a mother, I know the pride you have brought to your parents by the honors you have earned. As a wife, I know the inspiration that achievement such as yours brings to my husband.

In you and through your achievements gleam both the present reality and the future promise of the New South. That New South, while never forgetting or slighting the gallantry and chivalry of its long past, will also not now ignore the shortcomings and inequities of that past as it reaches out for tomorrow's birthright. This birthright of tomorrow -- and already you are moving toward its realization -- in a South strong in its fairness and mighty in its contributions to the mind and spirit of all the United States of America.

A famous man -- Mirabeau B. Lamar -- who belongs to both Georgia and Texas, once said in establishing the University of Texas: "A cultivated mind is the guardian genius of democracy. It is the only dictator that free men acknowledge and the only security which free men require."

Here, in the Southland, is a garden for just such a cultivation. And, if I may make one earnest request of you, it is that you who have drawn so much in intellectual nourishment from this garden -- I speak of the garden of the South -- will now put back into the South something of what you have gained from this beautiful campus of white marble and spring-green trees.

For the South is on the march, moving resolutely toward the future. No frontier in all the world is more truly open than the frontier of the South. This is the part of the world which gave birth to Secretary Dean Rusk; Henry W. Grady, Dr. Crawford W. Long as well as your outstanding public servants in Congress. Its contributions to the literature of our time has been unexcelled -- Thomas Wolfe, William Faulkner, Harper Lee, Eudora Welty and, of course, Atlanta's own beloved Margaret Mitchell, to name but a few of its men and women of letters. Now there opens a like opportunity for the philosophers, the humanists, the scientists in making a better life for all people. We need our Southern recruits to the ranks of those who ennoble not simply our noble language, but also our traditions of mutual help in the very basic process of living itself. We need -- and we will find -- Tom Dooleys and Albert Schweitzers from the South, too. We must graduate with honors in the science of human engineering.

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It is an old, old region -- but it is a new and dynamically going-forward region, too, where the best of the past can be merged alike with the finest of the present and with the highest hopes of the future. It is not only four-lane highways and new industries we need, it is also that reaching for the best things of mind and heart which is profoundly, so humanly, illustrated here today.

The South has come a long way, even in my lifetime. I was a college student in the South, in a different decade and in a different state of affairs. If you will look back with me for a moment to the 1930s, it may make much clearer to you the challenge of the Sixties -- the challenge, that is to say of excellence. My preparation for higher education was a one-room country school in East Texas.

As the Great Depression put its grip upon the land, some children had no school buildings at all. Some went to classes in lodge halls, in abandoned tenant houses, in country churches. The South of my generation was trying to educate one-third of the Nation's children with one-sixth of the Nation's school revenues -- and ahead there lay the darkness of war of a savagery and in a depth never before known by mankind.

Seen from the perspective of the past, look now at the present and see how far we have come toward a more promising day.

In this proud State of Georgia, your Governor and your Legislature, have only this year opened a vast new thrust for improvement in education. Your people have readily taken up a heavier tax load for public schooling, great new buildings have replaced the one-room schoolhouse of my own youth. And as your public colleges and universities grow and flourish, so do your superb private institutions like this one where the permanent values have forever put upon you a stamp as light as a Gulf breeze, but as enduring as the stoutest building upon this campus can ever be.

And, it is not without pride of my own that I remember the first major bill signed by my husband as President. It was the bill, you may recall, for increased assistance to higher education and most specifically for a much broadened vocational education program.

Education has been the American lamp which lights our way out of the darkness and illuminates the new houses of national purpose we must now enter. Go on learning, my young friends, but labor, too, to see that others are taught. You have established your own talents. But talents such as yours must lead, must find and help the talents in others. And leaders themselves must never cease to learn, in the bright and complicated, demanding and rewarding future you will inherit. The Modern South is being renewed and reformed by such minds and spirits as yours. You have gifts to bring her; she has need of you and of your gifts.

What can you do --

- To revamp the cities?
- To hew away at the 20 percent that still lives in our land in poverty and ignorance?
- To turn automation from beast into blessing?
- To master the most important art of all -- human understanding?

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The unfortunate are fewer now than in the Thirties -- one-third then, one-fifth now. But the American conscience -- and no less the American necessity -- requires us still to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. So at last all of our helpless will have been enabled to help themselves. So at last all of our hopeless will have found that our free society does hold hope, after all.

I have never seen my husband happier or more rewarded within himself than in those years of the distant Thirties when he worked with the National Youth Administration in Texas, helping the young to go back to school from the slack pools of idle despair in which they had lived. For then, as now, education was our key to the door of hope -- and to bring hope to the hopeless was, as it is, our society's aim. It was a threadbare time. It was, therefore, a time of invigorating challenge.

I saw my husband and his NYA helpers taking young hitchhikers and hoboes off the highways and boxcars and putting them to work, or seeing to it that through part-time jobs, they were able to stay in school and learn.

The glow from the lamp of education brightened a bit in depression America, the key began to turn in the door, but just look at our land now. We have come from my one-room school to great systems, splendidly taught; we have come through hard times when southern farm people could earn an average gross income of only \$186 a year, to this new time, in which Georgia's per capita income exceeds \$1,800. We have come through our wars bravely and built the most powerful and well intentioned nation on the earth and, with the blessing of God, we have borne a generation like you.

We have come far, from my college days to yours. And though they are separated in time and circumstances, I believe the deepest lessons of the 1930s endure in 1964: First, that ever-increasing excellence in education and devotion to learning, is the surest path we can take to meet the ever-growing demands that life will put upon us, as individuals and as a nation; and second, that even though we find our own way, our duty is not done until we help any who have fallen to find their feet again.

Still, there are among us people in need, proud Americans who do not want a handout, but who do need a hand up. As it was in the 1930s, it is a special duty in the 1960s to finish our personal work as Americans to serve others as this kind land has served us -- to turn the gifts we are given, or the excellence we achieve, to the service of all who have need, until none is in want.

As a mother, as a wife, and as one who knew as an American college girl the sense of wonder you feel. Now, I say to you: I'm very proud of you. My prayer is that each one of you will achieve to the limit of your great promise, and serve to the fullest measure of your good heart.

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