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Office of the Press Secretary
to Mrs. Johnson

THE WHITE HOUSE

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BACCALAUREATE ADDRESS
RADCLIFFE COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE, MASS.
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It is four years since that anxiously-awaited envelope postmarked "Cambridge, Massachusetts" arrived in your home. This day marks the culmination of those years. You have struggled, groaned and grown within the demanding and rigorous intellectual life of this remarkable institution, and here you are today -- ready to turn your knowledge and skills to new fields.

But with all your perception, with all your brainpower, I wonder if you know how great is the pride in you of those who are in this hall today?

What can I say to make you know, too, how much the world reaches out for you? For if you are to be the anointed generation -- the one to do the most to build a society of the highest order -- then I hope you will consider your diploma not the accolade of a job past, but a passport to the world and a license to be a practicing member of it.

These last four years have probably taught you how to be a knowledgeable critic; now you must learn how to be a knowledgeable citizen. You must contribute peace, not disorder. And to give peace you must have peace within yourself.

This is no easy task in a world of experts on women with every bookstore offering up the joys of emancipation and every newsstand proffering the delights of femininity. But actually, amid all the worries and uncertainties -- and the provocative doctrines about the role of the educated woman today, a quite remarkable young woman has been emerging in the United States. She is your sister, your roommate, and if you look closely enough, probably, yourself. She might be the natural woman, the complete woman. She has taken from the past what is vital and discarded the irrelevant or misleading. She has taken over the right to participate fully -- whether in jobs, professions, or the political life of the community. She has rejected a number of overtones of the emancipation movement as clearly unworkable. She does not want to be the long-striding feminist in low heels, engaged in a conscious war with men. But she wants to be -- while being equally involved -- preeminently a woman, a wife, a mother, a thinking citizen.

Time has brought the emergence of the woman with the dual role, but necessity first created her in the expanding West. As we moved west, the American type, as contrasted with the woman influenced by European customs and attitudes, emerged. Dauntless in spirit, she moved with her man to hew out the forests and found the schools and the churches.

It was in the Western states that women first took the leadership in political and social movements. It was no happenstance that the first part of our country to give suffrage to women was Wyoming, even when it was a territory; the Western states sent the first woman to the House and the Senate.

She was a doer in things outside the home -- whether fighting the Indians or ploughing the fields; she was always the wife and mother because that's what she wanted to be. And -- alas -- the Pony Express brought no magazines to ask her complicated questions about whether she liked the dual responsibilities.

The confusion of roles for women today is still very real. The strains are real. But many women have been able to master the confusion.

Your own Mary Bunting who has been a pioneer in keeping women in training for the labor market is a remarkable example. How grateful we are that she practices what she preaches! For, it means that despite a great many other demands, she has found the way to give her country time to serve on the Atomic Energy Commission.

You should be as pleased as I that on the day her appointment was announced, a young mother said to me, "I just feel better knowing that an intelligent woman -- a mother of four -- is going to have a voice in what fallout means for my children."

There are many other women who are both working mothers and thinking citizens. I have been meeting them in the Cumberland mountains in Kentucky and in the government machinery in Washington.

You have been trained here at Radcliffe to contribute as much of yourselves to the future of your country as to your own present. The country needs your trained intelligence -- whether in the humanities or the sciences, in government, in the public services of health and welfare, in the enormously and grievously understaffed field of education.

The easy way, the easy life, is no longer the good life and the good people of this world know they cannot afford to live it.

The woman pioneer -- you -- will learn to master a number of fears. One -- the closest to the female heart of 20 -- is the fear that your intelligence is a threat to your femininity -- that whatever you may achieve in your chosen work outside the home competes dangerously with your desirability as wife and mother. It can, but it needn't.

I know you Radcliffe girls pride yourselves on your casual dress, nevertheless, I do not see among you any of those ungainly Thurber females with stones poised to crush the nearest male skull -- and I trust your male acquaintances include none of those equally ungainly Thurber men, hissing, "Where did you get those great brown eyes and that tiny mind?"

It is an awesome task, but you can organize life as you have learned to organize study. It is important to retain those qualities of warmth and tact and sensitivity which a real woman possesses. The man you marry will want you to be what you are -- not only his wife and the mother of his children, but a person in your own right, with drives and desires, talents and skills of your own.

Ultimately, it comes back to the spirit in which you can direct your own life -- how happily you can marry both man and job; or how happily you can marry one of them.

You graduate into a world of "Outlets Unlimited". A great deal has been written about how to help the 40 year old woman re-enter the labor market -- a very real problem -- but I am sure what is most on your minds right now -- is how to spend the next twenty years as you raise a family. I would like to see young women from the outset consider their lives in the longer perspective -- looking to the time after your children are grown when you will still have time for an on-going part in the human drama.

The difficulty immediately ahead for you lies in working it out in our servantless world. Unremitting domestic labor on your part tends to dissipate academic capital. It dulls the intellectual edge and can even end, by reducing self-confidence and initiative. I don't say this is a universal picture, but I say it is general enough to merit closer attention and, where possible, appropriate countermeasures -- such as Radcliffe itself has undertaken, with its Institute of Independent Study.

Not all of you, of course, will contribute to our society as young married women. There will be many whose contribution will grow from their job or their profession -- very often after years of meeting the intense demands of graduate training. I salute you because the world needs your talents.

Specifically, the role of the natural, young woman today is:

First, To remember in the most local, realistic terms that education is a loan to be repaid by gift of self. Your energy and intellect turned to your school or your children's schools can help to alleviate the most crippling weakness in our democratic society.

The drifters, the drop-outs, the soon-to-be delinquents are all too often the fall-out from our inadequate school systems and overtaxed teachers.

Second, To improve the esthetics of our cities where 70% of the people now live. More than 90% of our population growth will occur in our metropolitan areas. If our cities are cement and asphalt jungles, the children may be wolf-cubs.

Third, To make your frontline of freedom your front door. Happy women, with a sense of what they can do and where they are going, must create the homes in which children can learn young that habit of happiness which, more than anything else, lessens the darker strain in human nature and gives us hope for a stable future. It is an awesome task, creating the atmosphere of joy, giving young natures the taste of love, sending them out single-minded and confident. Do not short-change this task!

Of course, as a fourth point, I would like, as the wife of a life-long laborer in the political vineyard, to put in a plea for those great voluntary societies -- our political parties.

When you consider that the majority of potential voters are female and the majority of actual voters male, you can see there is a vast job to be done simply in stirring up the civic interest of women voters. We haven't yet, as lay citizens, searched out all the constructive pathways for peace. We haven't the lobby we need for the war on poverty and prejudice at home or abroad.

Anyone with imagination, zeal and brains has many opportunities in unfinished America. A number of you already participate in this through the Phillips-Brooks House.

I can tell you first hand that Appalachia cries out for young women with the pioneer spirit who are willing to teach in one-room schools. There is good raw material there. I saw it in the eyes of 20 youngsters in Lick Branch School. Perhaps someone here will organize a rural teachers corps. You don't have to build Rome, you can build Lick Branch.

The housing needs of the aged are far from satisfied. You have only to step inside such a model housing program as the Golden Age Center in Cleveland to know that while giant steps are being taken, this is only the beginning of an ideal way to meet man's new life span.

I urge you to enter these outlets, not as superwoman -- but as a total woman, a natural woman, a happy woman. If you can achieve the precious balance between women's domestic and civic life, you can do more for zest and sanity in our society than by any other achievement.

I profoundly believe what will best sustain the young woman today is not, on the one hand, glamorous images of herself as Ambassador or dreams of glory as she takes over the Presidency of General Motors. What you can do may never see the light of print. It is the integrity that comes from attempting without fuss or self-preoccupation to see a good job well done. Its value is the work itself, what you have given others, whether your product is a better school in Harlem, or an inspired husband and children, or both. I assure you, you will have no greater satisfaction than to pour back vitality into the mainstream of this country which has so richly endowed you with brains and ability. No city is so perfect -- or so remote -- that it does not need your talented hand. Start wherever you go.

Two weeks ago, I sat on the stage of the high school in Johnson City, Texas, where my husband graduated 40 years before with six pupils in his class.

Lyndon recalled how, right after high school graduation, his restlessness had driven him to the West Coast to seek his fortune. After two months he returned because he discovered "right here in Johnson City is where it all begins."

If I would give you any ringing message today it would be to say, that while indeed the world beckons and the problems of Zanzibar are your inheritance and your challenge, it still all begins right with you, in your job or studies, in your home, in your husband's work, and in your community and the way you want it to look. The way it looks to you it looks to the world.

I have no fear that you will not use all you have learned. Women have done this for more than 2,000 years and you will do it today with fewer handicaps than ever.

Perhaps you remember the most beautiful description in literature of the ideal woman. In the words of Solomon:

"She looketh well to the ways of her household and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her husband is known in the gates where he sitteth among the elders of the land; she stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy; her children arise up and call her blessed; her husband, also, and he praiseth her. Strength and beauty are her clothing and she shall laugh in the latter day."

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