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REMARKS BY MRS. LYNDON B. JOHNSON
WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON NATURAL BEAUTY
MONDAY, MAY 24, 1965

Ladies and gentlemen:

Welcome to the White House Conference on Natural Beauty. We are grateful that you have taken two days of your busy lives to come here and discuss ways to restore and increase the beauty of our land.

In the catalogue of ills which afflicts mankind, civic ugliness and the decay of our cities and countryside is high on America's agenda.

For it seems to me that one of the most pressing challenges for the individual is the depression and the tension resulting from existence in a world which is increasingly less pleasing to the eye. Our peace of mind, our emotions, our spirit -- even our souls -- are conditioned by what our eyes see.

Ugliness is bitterness.

We are all here to try and change that. This conference is a step towards the solution and I think a great one.

Our immediate problem is: How can one best fight ugliness in a nation such as ours -- where there is great freedom of action or inaction for every individual, and every interest -- where there is virtually no artistic control -- and where all action must originate with the single citizen, or a group of citizens?

That is the immediate problem and the challenge. Most of the great cities and great works of beauty of the past were built by autocratic societies. The Caesars built Rome. Paris represents the will of the Kings of France and the Empire. Vienna is the handiwork of the Hapsburgs, and Florence of the Medici.

Can a great democratic society generate the concerted drive to plan, and having planned to execute great projects of beauty?

I not only hope so -- I am certain that it can. All our national history proves that a committed citizenry is a mighty force when it bends itself to a determined effort. There is a growing feeling abroad in this land today that ugliness has been allowed too long, that it is time to say "Enough," and to act.

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During these two days you will discuss and originate plans and projects both great and small. Great must be the scope of the major projects to redesign our urban areas, renew and brighten the gateways to our cities, cleanse, set in order and dignify our riverfronts and our ports. Small, but equally important -- perhaps most important is the single citizen who plants a tree or tends a flower. There are 190 million of him. He is everybody.

Perhaps the most important part of this conference will be to help educate our people that the beauty of their land depends upon their own initiative and their will.

I have heard said -- and many times -- that among our greatest ills is the deep sense of frustration which the individual feels facing problems which loom so complex and large in our century.

This ugliness is not that sort of problem. The vaster scope of it will call for much coordination on the highest levels. But -- and this is the blessing of it -- it is one problem which every man and woman and child can attack and contribute to defeating.

Natural beauty may be a national concern and there is much that government can and should do, but it is the individual who not only benefits, but must protect a heritage of beauty for future generations.

There are no autocrats in our land to decree beauty: only a national will. Through your work, I firmly believe this national will can be given energy and force, and produce a more beautiful America.

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