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REMARKS BY MRS. LYNDON B. JOHNSON
GRADUATION CEREMONIES AT THE
COLLEGE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS
ST. THOMAS, VIRGIN ISLANDS

This is a happy occasion for me.

Especially happy because I can begin this visit by participating in the graduation ceremonies of the College of the Virgin Islands. I remember so well what commencement day at the University of Texas meant to me. I had been a young lady determined that college would prepare me, one way or another, for the big world out there. I had studied typing and shorthand with the thought that I might become a secretary. I took education courses -- just enough, I'm afraid, to qualify for a teacher's certificate -- and I sometimes dreamed of teaching in what seemed to me a far-off, exotic place like Alaska or Hawaii. And I was a journalism major, with vague hopes of finding a place in those alluring news rooms where the clatter of events constantly breaks over typewriters.

But whatever I was to be, graduation day for me had the unmistakable air of the beginning of the great adventure. Carefree days were over. I was going out to face the stubborn, exciting, frightening, exhilarating world.

I am sure you, too, feel that way and you certainly have special reasons for your emotion. This is not simply another in the thousands of graduations taking place this month all over the United States. This class of 1965, the first of the College of the Virgin Islands, is a landmark in the long and significant history of the Caribbean. Some of you will now go on to further study. Others will take up occupations for which you have been trained. Whatever your immediate prospects, you are pioneers in the full sense of that fine old word.

The modern world, with all its turbulence and problems, has taught us many things but none more clearly than this: Education is the engine of progress. The classroom and the laboratory are the only sound ways by which any people can satisfy their legitimate demands for a better way of life.

This proud moment of your graduation is a testimonial to the far-sightedness and dedication of Governor Ralph M. Paiewonsky, President Lawrence C. Wanlass, your board of trustees and overseers, your thirty fine faculty men and women, and above all, to yourselves who have recognized the opportunity and acted upon it.

You now have a precious educational equipment and the question is: What are you going to do with it? In times past, in a number of countries, there has been a marked tendency for the young people of education and talent to leave their home base and seek fame and fortune elsewhere. This was true in many European nations, where the talented flocked to a few centers; on the mainland of the United States, where so many in the South and West made their way to Northern cities; and in your own Virgin Islands, where an education has often meant a high probability that the young man or woman would leave the islands.

Today, around the world, a strong new trend is showing itself. The young want to improve society and they believe that progress begins at home. They are casting down their stakes where they originated and working to make the area resemble more what they know so well it should be.

It has been said that the 1960's are an era marked by a revolution of rising expectations. The years are also marked by a rising generation which intends to bring the expectations into reality -- bit by bit, in their own backyards, and therefore, the more surely and the more quickly.

Certainly in following this trend you would be acting in the spirit of the college of which you become alumni today. The College of the Virgin Islands was created by the people of the Virgin Islands for the people of the Virgin Islands. It is emphatically in the tradition of the great state universities of the rest of the United States, which for more than a century have been harnessing knowledge to the needs of their own states and regions.

I particularly want to congratulate the College of the Virgin Islands on its newly established Caribbean Research Institute. This Institute, by engaging in fundamental, long-range economic and social research, will prove of enormous aid in developing the Virgin Islands for the benefit of its people.

So, too, the establishment of the Eastern Caribbean Development Scholarship Program, to help students of the Virgin Islands and surrounding areas, is a direct step toward self-improvement of the region. Quite properly the scholarships are granted on condition that the recipient commit himself to at least a period of service at home following completion of his studies.

We have so much to do -- all of us in all parts of the United States of America. In Washington, the Administration is seeking to make sure that everyone under the American flag enjoys equal opportunities. Who better than you in the Virgin Islands have proven over 100 years that equality can be a congenial way of life?

We all want to eliminate the ugly fences of poverty which cut off so many pastures of opportunity. We all want to provide adequate education for the young and adequate medical care for the aging; to protect the natural beauty which a generous Providence has bestowed on us.

You have all these problems and goals, and like each specific part of the United States, you have your own special concerns. But if there are problems to worry you, you also operate in a tonic atmosphere. Anyone who follows the economic history of the Caribbean is fully aware that the region is alive with a sense of promise unfulfilled, of beckoning opportunities, of heightened horizons. The winds of change, certain as the trade winds, are sweeping over these lush lands and shimmering waters. The changes will be wise in proportion as they are directed by a trained generation which really cares.

I remember, not many years after I graduated from college, listening on the radio to a great American President, Franklin D. Roosevelt. He came to the part of his address which concerned the young, and President Roosevelt said: "There is a mysterious cycle of human events. To some generations much is given. Of other generations much is expected. This generation of Americans has a rendezvous with destiny."

Many of us were deeply moved by these words. We rolled up our sleeves and tried to translate the words into a better America. We did a lot of good, I believe, and we also committed errors both of omission and commission.

Now we know that your generation, in a far deeper sense, has its rendezvous with destiny. It is not for those of us who too often fell short to lecture you, but perhaps one word of caution is permissible.

Perhaps there was in yesterday's generation a greater emphasis on saving the world in general. I believe I see in this generation the happy tendency to apply ourselves to our own area.

Standing here on this beautiful campus of a new school, at its first commencement exercise, in a setting of natural loveliness such as few schools in the world can command, one can almost feel the future sprouting up out of the ground. The jet age has brought to this island territory, and to the whole Caribbean, an era of explosive development. Your college is one of the first fruits of that era. The people and the leaders of the islands have showed foresight and wisdom in creating this institution, in time to meet a great need for leadership. As the culture of the mainland fuses with the old island ways, as prosperity increases and population expands, great challenges are opening up here. For this graduating class, and for future graduating classes of this swiftly growing college, your land of promise is your own back yard. Here will be the golden opportunities. The territory can absorb all the leadership you can give. It will offer you rich rewards for your dedication and service. In this way, the Virgin Islands of the future will continue to be shaped and directed by the sons and daughters of St. Croix, St. John, and St. Thomas. That is how it should be, and that is the most exciting and satisfying aspect of this college's first commencement.

It is a moving experience to watch the first group of young men and women, from a new institution so wisely oriented, being launched into the tides of human affairs. I am glad that I have had the opportunity to share this milestone with you.

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