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MONDAY, JUNE 27, 1966

Office of the Press Secretary
to Mrs. Johnson

THE WHITE HOUSE

Remarks of Mrs. Lyndon Johnson -- YOUTH CONFERENCE ON NATURAL
Welcome, BEAUTY

The President joins me in greeting all of you.

This is a landmark day. You young people are preparing to join in the leadership of an overriding cause of our time. It is more than just an issue or a problem. It is a cause.

Beautification, natural beauty, conservation -- we are searching for a word that will convey the enormity of the task.

What we are really talking about is the life pattern of your generation, and of those to follow.

What will your environment be?

Will you live in communities that free the mind or imprison it?

Will your cities be places to thrive in or merely to escape from?

And what places will there be left to escape to?

It is thrilling to me, that for the first time in history, America's major youth organizations are joining hands for a common purpose. It is doubly thrilling to me that this purpose is environmental beauty. You have the faith and backing of forward-looking business firms. You have the professional advice of conservation foundations. You have the ear of the Nation, and the Nation needs your action.

The next three days will be a time of self-testing for each of you. Your steering committee has given you a fine framework. It is up to you to build on it. You will feel the stimulation of sharing your thoughts, striking your mind against the flint of another, and finding that together you can spark the fire of an idea. This is all part of the magic of the human experience.

Young people today are seeking their own unique song to sing; their own imprint to leave on a continent that seemingly has everything. If the American dream of old was for personal wealth and success, today, I believe it is for personal contribution and work that adds some measure to the sum of society.

I wish that each of you could have been with me in recent months as I have travelled throughout this land to see the surge of efforts of people to improve their cities and countryside. It is no small dream, and there is a chance of realizing it in our time. Every living person and thing responds to beauty. We all silently thirst for it. We receive strength and renewal by experiencing stirring and satisfying sights.

Let me share with you news of a few of the wonderful projects that have crossed my desk in recent months. They will give you an idea of some of the things that youth has done; they may be stepping-stones on which you can build.

After reading their letter, I could just see those 70 boys in the Neighborhood Youth Corps in Phoenix, Arizona, building their own nature center, using handsome native wood and stone that was part of the very fabric of this land.

1500 students in Santa Ana, California, raised \$650 to landscape their new high school. On "Operation Green Thumb" day they came to school in overalls, carrying their garden tools, and planted hundreds of trees and shrubs. That evening they held a dance to celebrate!

At Jason Lee Jr. High in Portland, Oregon, 200 enterprising students built their own greenhouse. Later, they sold the plants they had grown and invested \$185 back into the project. They even started a special science class for 32 students organized around the greenhouse.

In Georgia, the 4-H Clubs have planted over 700,000 flowering trees and placed litter barrels and litter bags around the state.

I wish you could have been with me in a blighted corner of Philadelphia recently -- you would have seen a vacant lot turned into a series of miniature demonstration gardens. They showed which plants would survive the climate and hazards of city living, the limited sunshine, the fumes of exhaust and factory. And they were used by neighbors and clubs who came to learn what they could do with their strip of earth squeezed between red brick housefronts and the city sidewalk.

Here in Washington, we are trying to make the Nation's Capital become a natural beauty showcase. In your tour of this lovely Capital City yesterday, you saw the great buildings pictured in your civics class come alive. The white monuments of Washington are not only the hubs of our National government but they are also the familiar backdrop of a growing and vibrant city.

We have tried to make the great ceremonial avenues worthy of their noble ideal and institutions, with flowering cascades of dogwood in the spring and carpets of chrysanthemums in the fall. And we have tried to go behind the monuments to the public housing project and the schools to start some pilot projects that show how much flowers and plants can mean to all ages.

One police precinct station, watching our work down the street, asked for help, too. It was a gathering place, so the police boys band and the basketball team turned gardeners and now they have a nice place to play.

So I urge you, dream the impossible dream! You will not have reached maturity until you have tackled a hopeless, idealistic cause. You may be surprised to find it was not so hopeless after all.

One of the great facts of modern life is the rapid urbanization of America. 70% of our people now live in one percent of the land, and that figure is increasing. It is imperative that we bring new life and beauty into the cities.

The President has said that in the next ten years we are going to rebuild 40% of our cities. Think of the challenge for the young man or woman who could become a city planner, a landscape architect or gardener, an engineer, a social scientist or a water expert. There are so many possibilities!

There is one urgent point I would like to emphasize when you think of your future careers. There is nothing as satisfying as performing a service or doing skilled work with your hands. The pioneers did it. Don't sell short the many service opportunities in this prosperous country of ours. National legislation has upgraded these careers by putting new emphasis on the many possibilities for landscaping along roadsides and expert maintenance of parks.

The Nation now puts a premium on creativeness and artistry for the man and his crew who make the village green, the courthouse square, the mall, the most beloved place in town.

Wherever you go, whatever you study, I hope that many of you will seriously consider making America's beauty a full-time vocation. Seldom have I had a keener satisfaction in my own life than on a summer's day when, years ago -- I looked at my own back yard and saw it weeded and clipped, velvet and beautiful -- and knew it was the work of my own hands.

Your conference will mark out projects, that you can roll up your sleeves and "do." The items on your workshop agenda; air pollution, water pollution, open space, roadside beauty -- indicate to me that your goals are comprehensive; that you believe no task is too big and none too small to tackle.

This Nation needs bright young scientists who will find the way to curtail poisons that are daily poured into our air and streams. One has only to go boating on any of our major rivers and see the dead fish floating by to know that Nature's fabric has been badly violated, and that we ourselves are the ultimate losers.

There is another area where you -- especially you new drivers -- can be of invaluable help. That is in curbing our National bad habit of littering. Would you believe it costs 34¢ to remove each piece of litter in one state? In another state the bill is 64¢ per paper cup. Think what you can do by simply being "king of your car", and ruling that litter bags will always be used. All America will welcome the example your generation sets.

I hope, when you consider your land, that you will cherish those places that are still wild where you can don the moccasins of a Thoreau and explore Nature's secret places where bulldozer and highway have not invaded. The Wilderness Act of 1964 was a firm step in the right direction. Each community has its own reserves of natural beauty -- ever-new and ancient beauty -- that are your special province to know and protect and enjoy.

Each generation has its own rendezvous with the land. "Back to Nature" has a fresh meaning today when we have the technology -- and the will -- to bring groves of trees to the center of our cities; to link communities, not just with highways, but also with networks of trails for horses or bicycles; and to keep the deep sanctuaries wild for all time.

So many things are being done now that are irreversible. Once a woodland glade bows to the bulldozer, it is lost forever. An aroused citizenry is the greatest safeguard. Do not underestimate the power of your own ability to sound the cry to the editor of the city fathers.

In closing, may I give you this advice:

Use your heads. Follow your hearts. And, above all, respect your own ideas. Do not be afraid to trust yourselves. Do not dismiss your own thoughts just because they are yours. Emerson said: "In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts; they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty." Give your thoughts the red carpet treatment while they are still your own. Who knows there they may lead you?

You will leave here at the end of the Conference on Wednesday with your heads and notebooks crammed with new ideas, facts and figures.

You will have made real friendships that you will keep alive through your mutual interests in changing the face of your country and the atmosphere of your neighborhoods.

You will take home with you a new awareness -- a new pair of eyes -- for seeing things that you have looked at, but not really seen before. Everywhere you look you will begin thinking: Is it as it should be? Is it as good as it could be? What can I do to make it better?

You have come here because the President and I and many, many others believe in you and your ability to translate conviction into action.

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