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Office of the Press Secretary
to Mrs. Johnson

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF MRS. LYNDON B. JOHNSON
AT COLUMBIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

Dean Clark, Governor Ellington, Students and Faculty of Columbia College:

I am delighted to visit Columbia State Community College, which tells so much about the new vitality of education in our country.

Consider this story: The people of a county provide 204 acres of empty land, some seed money -- and a vision.

A state legislature and a governor -- determined that every student in the state shall be within easy distance of higher learning -- contribute the first millions -- and the vision becomes a plan.

The nation's government -- more strongly committed to education than ever before -- joins the venture with construction money, development grants, scholarships, work-study assistance, help for the library -- and enthusiastic moral support.

Thus, in the space of twelve months, a college is born -- to bring together 311 students and 23 teachers who might otherwise never have met.

That story is being repeated all across the nation. New colleges like this one are being established at the rate of one a week!

It is hard to realize that, at the turn of the century, there were only eight junior colleges in the United States -- and only one of those a public institution. Today, by contrast, there are 680 two-year colleges in the Nation -- more than 400 of them publicly supported.

Learning hallows this ground. But history lives here, too -- in the memory of President James Polk, who served Tennessee and the Nation, who was one of the great expansionist Presidents -- and who called this county home.

When Thomas Jefferson acquired the Louisiana Territory from Napoleon in 1803, our young Republic began its westward spread. The doubters of that day accused their President of squandering the Nation's wealth on a wilderness.

A few years later, James K. Polk of Tennessee added a vast area to the United States: Texas, the Oregon country, California. And these great additions were made amid controversy and the storm of war.

A century ago, under another President Johnson, Alaska became a part of our land -- and many scoffers called the whole transaction folly.

Today, the territorial growth of America has ended. The great explorers have ceased their journeys; there are no Louisiana Territories to be claimed.

But nonetheless, I believe, we have begun a new age of national expansion -- an age which Jefferson and Polk would richly praise.

We have turned our eyes to a new territory, richer than the wilderness of yesterday; to the brightest land of all: the promise of our people.

That new land is not in one part of America -- but in every part.

When a Teacher Corps volunteer brings help and learning to a mountain child in North Carolina -- we add to that new land.

When a Head Start teacher in California offers hope and health to a migrant child -- this nation grows.

When a Columbia Community College rises from a once-empty field-- this country expands, not outward, but upward.

This new country of human fulfillment is being gained -- as Polk gained Texas and Oregon, amid the sound of controversy. Just as it was with the Louisiana Purchase and with "Seward's folly" in purchasing Alaska, there are some whodoubt the wisdom of our new venture.

But that should not daunt us -- and this is the message I will take back to the President from the home of President James K. Polk:

If there are those who doubt that this time is as full of hope as Jefferson's or Polk's -- let them come to this spot. For Columbia College is an admonition to any pessimist: stop wringing your hands for a moment -- and listen to the ringing of the school bells in our new country.

That steady, hopeful sound is the new beat and rhythm of our land. I am grateful to you Dean Clark, and to your students, for letting me come here to hear it.

And I am honored to dedicate this college -- to dedicate it forever to the service of the people and the progress of our Nation.

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