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Office of the Press Secretary
to Mrs. Johnson

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF MRS. LYNDON B. JOHNSON
AT MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE COMMENCEMENT
EXERCISES, MIDDLEBURY, VERMONT

Dr. Armstrong, friends, and fellow-graduates:

All commencements are composed of three parts: graduates, faculty, and parents.

Anyone who has attended many commencement exercises knows that the busiest people in this room -- at this moment -- are not the graduates, but the parents and the faculty.

You graduates sit here weary and limp from overstudy at Starr Library, or over-recovery at the Pine Room or Lake Dunmore -- or BOTH.

But your parents and your teachers have been going through some fantastic mental exercises. Within this hour, they have been writing your biographies. Your parents' version might be called, "My Child, the Graduate!" and it covers everything from first steps through mumps, braces, bicycles, S. A. T.'s, unbalanced bank accounts, to this final hour.

The biographies written by your teachers would be shorter, sharper, but I daresay -- in each, there is a mixture of deep pride, some relief, and a tinge of regret that the chapters you co-authored are concluding. I congratulate all three of you.

There are many reasons why I particularly covet this degree from Middlebury. There is something very reassuring about uncluttered New England villages and countrysides. There is something very reassuring about the strength of a people who 200 years ago put more emphasis on the future of their children than on material things. The forefathers would be pleased to know that in our country today -- in 1967 -- a new college is being built every week and a new museum opened every three and a half days.

I am also especially proud to be associated with Middlebury because of your contribution to the future. The graduates you send out in such noble numbers to all phases of public service -- both in and out of uniform -- to the military services, to the Peace Corps, the Teachers Corps, Vista, and the Foreign Service tell a great deal about this school.

You are coping with civilization in a very real, very sophisticated way.

You may be shocked to hear me say it, but I salute you as protesters -- protesters in the very best sense of the work -- against injustice and inadequacy in all forms.

Your objection is made in the highest order by dedicated study and commitment of self to find the solution. For protest is a technique, and rings hollow as a final goal, either for the individual or our society.

It is easy enough to be a protester with a picket sign. All you do is show up and walk. No one is going to stop you.

What is tough is to be a working protester. That takes some effort. That takes some thought. That takes some giving. That takes patience.

America has been shaped and continues to be shaped by men of protest, by men of conviction. I know one of them well.....my husband. He has been a working protester most of his life -- protesting the injustice of man to man, of nation to nation, objecting to the lack of schools for some of our people, the lack of job opportunities for the less fortunate poor. He has, in fact, been in active revolt all his mature life -- against the wastes of poverty, illiteracy and disease.

So I congratulate you on your protest -- but I congratulate you even more on the good sense of your method.

It is our habit to see the world in terms of crises rather than continuity; the story is likely to be turmoil and disaster, not the quiet spectacle of men working -- making progress -- step-by-step.

We know that the picture on page one tomorrow is much more likely to show a riot than a graduation. But the sound and the fury must not distract us.

Let us continue to be about our business.

And what is the business of our day?

It is to raise the level of society in a thousand different ways with a thousand different tools.

This state, like my own, was a frontier state, pioneered by people who had to wrest their living from a beautiful but not bountiful land. Ploughing a granite mountainside and riding a broiling desert have one thing very much in common: the calibre and stamina of the people doing the impossible tasks. Their strength was not only in their backbones but in their hearts.

You have the happy fortune to be educated here in Middlebury, a town of two enduring riches, marble and minds. I have always loved the cool powerful presence of marble which, by the magic of the sculptor's hand, can be transformed into a warm human softness. It is no less a marvel when the human mind, with all its warmth and humanity, is honed to cool precision by the artistry of our educators.

Our country is the sum total of its people. So the choices you personally make, the directions you follow, the contests you join, will in the end, determine our nation's future. For in our land, the future of our society is not written in the stars -- it is not determined by dictators -- it is the sum total of the men and women who are that society.

As you leave this campus today, I would remind you of the words Woodrow Wilson once spoke on another campus:

"You are not here merely to prepare to make a living. You are here in order to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of hope and achievement. You are here to enrich the world, and you impoverish yourself if you forget the errand."

I believe, as I look among you, that you are already about your errand.

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