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Office of the Press Secretary  
to Mrs. Johnson

THE WHITE HOUSE

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REMARKS OF MRS. LYNDON B. JOHNSON  
AT WILLIAMS COLLEGE, WILLIAMSTOWN,  
MASSACHUSETTS

President Sawyer, friends:

I will always treasure this degree that you have given me. It is thrilling to stand among you today and salute the Center for Environmental Studies and Planning whose promise is as fresh as tomorrow. For a college of this calibre to take such a step is an event which I applaud with all my heart.

It does not come too soon. Almost everyone agrees that we have reached an environmental crisis. And symptoms of the crisis abound -- polluted streams, industrial slums, ghettos, littered roads.

But we should remember, perhaps, that our word "crisis" comes from the Greek word for decision. A time of difficulty calls for decisions -- and this time calls on us to choose:

between apathy and action in cities;

between ugliness and beauty in the environment;

between escape and involvement for the individual.

We are talking about more than "beautification". We are talking, really, about one of the most fateful questions of the time: whether the physical setting of American life will be pleasant or squalid.

If that question is not given a lively and enlightened answer, all our other efforts could be in vain.

Everything I read and see convinces me the Nation is geared for action to attack the problems that abound.

A front page story in the Wall Street Journal reports that amenity of towns is a crucial factor in deciding where factories locate. The magazines you pick are apt to have an ad showing a trout rising from crystal clear waters, with the caption, "This water could come out of your town's treatment plant."

The morning newspaper brings more and more cartoons poking fun at billboards, tree cutters, and yes, sometimes tree planters. Even our laughter shows our awareness.

The parade of mayors and city planners through Washington reveals they are scouting not only for funds, but for style and direction for their communities.

The question in America now is, whether the skill and talent and know-how is rising to fulfill the desire. We have learned that we cannot protect and enhance the beauty of this Nation solely through federal action, or just through citizens groups, or simply through academic institutions. All of these are necessary, plus a strong national will. Today, the crying need is for a partnership of thinking, planning, and action on the part of all groups.

Enhancement of our natural beauty requires and deserves more than a sentimental urge, important though it is. It calls for hard analysis, imaginative planning, political action -- hard day-to-day efforts to translate our dreams into realities.

If there is to be a meeting of minds between the professor and the mayor, between the architect and the budget officer, between the scientist and the artist, what better place than here, "far from the madding crowds," where people can think through their long-range visions?

Williams College can become the wellspring of fresh solutions to the problems of our environment. One alert must be sounded, however, and that is, the need for constantly relating theory to practice, concept to application. There is no time for annotated studies to gather dust on the library shelves. The other day, I read that while 11,000 city planning positions must be filled in the next five years, planning schools are producing only 450 graduates a year.

This morning as I flew out of the city and over these magnificent Berkshires, their foliage reaching like torches to the sky, my mind turned back over the history of how settlements evolved in our country, how we first wrested a beachhead on the Atlantic shores; later drove deep into the frontier with forts of protection; how patterns of settlement enlarged as people and goods swept westward. Centers of commerce in the eighteenth century became industrial beehives in the nineteenth.

Today, our minds throb with the vocabulary of megalopolis, the metropolitan agglomeration, with its core city, its inner freeway, its outer beltway, and its mile upon mile of suburban fringe. If the mass volume of the city shocks us, it can also spur us to action. How strange that after 5,000 years of building cities, we should at last rediscover the most obvious purpose of all -- which the Athenians knew so well -- the creation of a pleasant place to live.

There are more than 300 new towns in various stages of planning or development in the United States, and there are many rural regions, like this one in Berkshire County, searching for a harmonious growth pattern.

The President has recently announced that a 350-acre site in the Nation's Capital, no longer needed as a training school for boys, will become a model inner city community. There will be a welcome opportunity for creative new ideas about city living to show their merit.

I hope these new opportunities for study and application will be high on your agenda. Because the Nation needs thoughtful work that will approach the 20th Century man-and-nature equation as a science, and -- hopefully, conclude it as an art.

I envy those of you who will be part of this Center. I hope that you will feed out to the Nation new thought, new ways for 350 million people to live according to their aspirations.

Each of you students will return to your home in Houston and Helena and Haverhill. Once more I want to repeat that what I hope you will do is to take all you have learned and put it to work at home where in the coming decades these problems will be attacked with varying degrees of skill, and dedication, and know-how, and also -- in varying degrees -- solved!

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