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Office of the Press Secretary
to Mrs. Johnson

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF MRS. LYNDON B. JOHNSON
B'NAI B'RITH LUNCHEON - MARCH 26, 1968
SHOREHAM HOTEL, WASHINGTON, D. C.

Mrs. Rosenbluth, Friends of B'nai B'rith:

Thank you so much for your delightful program and your generous gift.

I am directing it to a project in southeast Washington which I have watched become "a possible dream." It is the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum located in one of the neediest areas of the city.

Let me tell you about it because it is the kind of project or dream which I think would be possible in almost any town -- perhaps in your town.

Almost every town has a museum -- often with more exhibits tucked away in a basement than they have room to show. That was the case of the Smithsonian Institution here. Dr. Dillon Ripley felt that the museum should be stretching out to neighborhood programs in Washington.

An old abandoned theater was found. A group of neighbors were gathered together to select from a list the exhibits they would most enjoy -- space objects, prehistoric animals, sea life -- everything from skeletons to model airplanes rated very high.

Young people -- through Operation Trail Blazers -- went to work painting up the place, high school girls sewed the curtains for the stage where programs are now held regularly. The boys cleaned up an adjoining debris-filled lot and put in trees, benches and walks.

A host of community volunteers helped the youngsters scrape, plaster, paint and plant.

Today Anacostia Neighborhood Museum is a meeting place and learning place, with a busy program of art, drama, science classes, going on among the exhibits.

A building which served only as an eyesore has become the action spot for a neighborhood with very few outlets and opportunities.

I'm told they need art supplies, duplicating machines, audio-visual equipment -- for their growing circle of participants. Your gift will help them grow. And I thank you. I chose this because you are oriented toward helping youth.

I am deeply impressed with all the activities of the women of B'nai B'rith -- from Operation Stork which, through better care for mothers, has helped reduce the number of birth defects -- to your Adopt a Grandparent program.

There is certainly no generation gap in the loving care which your chapters give to people of all ages in need, sometimes in need only of an interested friend.

Today when we are surrounded by many unmet human needs, we meet them by combining our talents -- just as you are doing.

In an earlier and less complicated age, Thomas Jefferson spoke of "the pursuit of happiness." Each generation must redefine the meaning of this phrase. In this sense, we are always on the journey of discovery.

For many of us, to "pursue happiness," means to help find it for someone else. That is why we constantly seek the dignity of a better life for all our citizens.

Someone once said, "You have to stay awake to make your dreams come true."

And when I look at the long list of projects and activities which B'nai B'rith engages in each day, I know you are awake, and you are making dreams come true.

We are living in an era when dreams are possible -- when we dare to draw the curtain back on the ghetto and face up to the great problems we see.

Businessmen -- labor leaders -- community leaders, and most important, women, are joining in to do something about them.

You, who have devoted your efforts to the age-old problems of mankind -- poverty, disease, ignorance -- certainly know that there is a growing effort of all responsible citizens to solve the problems the Nation faces -- in housing, in employment, in our environment.

The social conscience of an affluent society has prompted the Nation's life insurance companies to invest one billion dollars in rebuilding the city slums across America. Almost daily, I see the parade through the White House of people who are answering the President's call to hammer out realistic solutions to tough problems -- such as how to hire the hardcore unemployed.

This effort will always have its critics. Every great effort in our history from the Declaration of Independence to the Emancipation Proclamation, to the War on Poverty has faced the old complaint of the cynics: "You'll never get it off the ground."

Sometimes I think we Americans constantly punish ourselves by questioning and criticizing our own good achievements. We must not be complacent -- never! We must be struggling always. But certainly we do not have to spend our time on a collective psychiatrist couch.

Skepticism is valid, but cynicism -- the kind of doubt which paralyzes -- can cripple a Nation's self-confidence and undermine its spirit.

A cynic, it has been said, is a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.

And so -- I salute you for your lack of cynicism -- for your courage and your willingness to keep your eyes on the tasks before you.

The dedication of your talents and your energies to your communities and your Nation is an inspiration to all of us. Please know how grateful the President and I are for all you do.

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