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FRIDAY, MAY 17, 1968

Office of the Press Secretary  
to Mrs. Johnson

THE WHITE HOUSE

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REMARKS OF MRS. LYNDON B. JOHNSON AT THE  
DEDICATION OF AMERICAN MUSEUM OF IMMIGRATION -  
STATUE OF LIBERTY

I have been to the Statue of Liberty many times -- but I can never come here without a lift of spirit or a catch in my throat.

The few acres of this little island are as sacred to American history as Plymouth Rock. For the ancestors of tens of millions of American citizens discovered their America here.

As we begin a trip up the Hudson River -- perhaps the most beautiful river in America -- this Statue seemed the most appropriate place to start.

For it symbolizes -- and the museum of immigration we dedicate symbolizes -- the new start that millions of people received in this country.

The exhibits here remind us of what we as a people have been. They remind us that America was the willing recipient -- and fortunate beneficiary -- of the greatest mass migration in the history of mankind. Nothing like it had ever taken place before; and probably nothing like it will ever take place again.

Nearly 45 million human beings have come to these shores since 1820. Every race, color, and creed passed through the waters of this bay.

They brought their worn humble suitcases -- their pictures of home -- their bits of needlework -- and their dreams.

I'm so pleased that there will be a museum to show the many divergent threads that make up the fabric of America. I was delighted -- when I was asked to find a copy of the German language newspaper, published in a small town in Texas -- Fredericksburg -- which proclaimed the news in 1908: "A Son Born to Sam Johnson on 27 August."

In talking with the historian in Fredericksburg, I asked, "How big was the item -- about two inches?"

"One and a half," she said flatly.

We are all immigrants, except the Indians who roamed the plains for centuries before we ever came. The immigration to America began prophetically when an Englishman, an Irishman, and a Jew signed on to sail with Christopher Columbus.

The immigrants pledged their lives and loyalties to the Republic, and in return the Republic pledged they would be full-fledged Americans.

For those who have eyes to see, a visit to this place may start an investigation into the life and times of President Polk -- a president too little studied, too little noted.

He was a controversial President -- and his was a tumultuous age. But it was an age of rich expansion and development for America. He came to office just as Texas entered the Union. Under his Administration, the Oregon question was resolved; adventurous settlers began to pour into California.

I leave it to the historians to determine President Polk's place in history. But I have become something of a student of Presidents. I have seen a little controversy, too. And I am deeply convinced that this age in America for all its tumult and debate, will be remembered as a time of growth and expansion for America. Not outward growth -- but growth upward: growth toward better health and education, toward a more beautiful landscape and cityscape; toward more real liberty and opportunity for every citizen.

I see it happening here, and I salute you for it.

And when I return to Washington tonight, I will take back with me a message for the President:

Today I saw a place and a people who work and strive in the present, but respect the best of their past.

Today I was fortunate enough to see a bit of the national memory preserved for the future.

Today, I journeyed South and met a great many warm, concerned and generous citizens.

This is why I am an optimist about America. Thank you.

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