

FOR RELEASE ON DELIVERY
Monday, May 20, 1968

OFFICE OF THE PRESS SECRETARY
TO MRS. LYNDON B. JOHNSON
THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCERPTS FROM REMARKS BY
MRS. LYNDON B. JOHNSON
AT THE DEDICATION OF THE
JAMES POLK BIRTHPLACE
PINEVILLE, MECKLENBURG COUNTY,
NORTH CAROLINA

I can't tell you how glad I am to be here -- and how much the President would like to have come with me. You can be sure that he will get a long and detailed account of what I have seen today in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

It is not hard to understand how this county produced a man who would one day be President; how a little college north of here influenced both a great President, Woodrow Wilson, and a great Secretary of State, Deak Rusk.

We are gathered here to pay tribute both to the past and the present: to pay honor to two centuries of history; to dedicate the birthplace of a notable President; to celebrate present progress.

Perhaps this is a perfect moment for us to reflect, in President Lincoln's words, about "where we have been, and whither we are tending."

Today we dedicate more than a historic landmark; we preserve a bit of the national memory -- and that, I believe, is a vital and important achievement.

Imagine yourself awakening tomorrow with no memory at all: suddenly robbed of any sign or signal of your personal past. An affliction like that would plague not only your thoughts, but your action. The simplest act might be beyond you; every person you met would be a stranger. Few of us can think of a tragedy more haunting than the loss of personal memory, the loss of the past as a guide for the future.

There is danger and tragedy too, I believe, in a loss of national memory: danger in becoming indifferent to the facts and the values of our past; tragedy if we destroy the landmarks which are symbols and reminders of the past.

This Southern country -- yours and mine -- is still rich with landmarks. But they are threatened. What an irony it would be if our own bulldozers destroy more in the 1960's than an invading army destroyed in the 1860's.

What of this house, so perfectly restored?

It is more than a physical landmark; more than an attraction for tourists and students.

For those who have eyes to see, it may yield some insights about a country which can raise up notable men from modest two-room houses. I wonder how many children are living now -- perhaps in poverty or hunger -- in one-room houses in America: children who have potential for greatness. I wonder if we can find them. I hope we can encourage them and give them opportunity.

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The experiment has worked. The stars in their eyes matched the stars in their new flag. They brought their genius as well as their hearts. Albert Einstein, Andrew Carnegie, Joseph Pulitzer, Igor Sikorski, Alexander Graham Bell, George Santayana, David Sarnoff, Sergei Rachmaninoff, and Father Flanagan are but a few.

Our very name, America, comes from Amerigo Vespucci.

Down the bay is the great Verrazano Narrows Bridge; across the meadow stretches the tremendous Pulaski Skyway; but over and above their great men, they brought the love and strength of the common man to this land. Though they came from all quarters, their love, their blood, their prayers, their families united in this great nation -- proving to the world that in union, there is strength.

To their descendants, I have no greater accolade to bestow than to say the President and I embrace you in the common joy and pride of being fellow Americans.

Here in this museum, all Americans can better understand the epic story of immigration.

I'm delighted to be here to open it.

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