

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Wednesday, June 10, 1964

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Up about 10 o'clock to see to getting a car for Mary^{ia}ellen; Mary, now growing up tall and slim, and wearing glasses; and Will, so manly, but growing too and his voice about to change. The three of them sightseeing.

I had my third cup of coffee with the Wests in their room, and the Chambers. The Chambers were about to leave to go to the hotel, clad in tux and evening dress, and I said "Whoa, not unless we all want a few columns, so let's just lend your key to Ashton, and she'll go out and get you some changes," - which she did.

The Wests are going on to New York later in the evening but Neva and Dee stayed for lunch with me, and as always I got Neva to help me some on interior decoration. ~~The~~ solarium, which after all, I probably will leave, until the great question is decided. And showed them in detail, all the rooms.

After they left, I got a bit of work done on the mail.

And then at 5:30, was the really big event of the day, the ceremony for the Presidential Scholars.

This is one of the best conceived and best planned things that has happened since Lyndon has been here, although in execution, it lacked a little. It was the brain child of Dr. Eric Goldman. Two high school graduates from each of the 50 states, and then some from the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and a few at large, totaling 121, had been chosen as Presidential Scholars by a Commission headed by Milton Eisenhower, and having on it such people

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as Senator Fulbright; our own Bill Hagerty, now of Drexel; Dr. ~~Gene~~^{Gene} Noble; and Mrs. Louanna Troupe, the teacher of the year. They were chosen for intellectual attainment and potential.

The students were to receive from Lyndon, a medallion designed by that distinguished, if controversial, sculptor, Jaques Litchitz, that I had met at the Museum of Modern Art. They will not receive a scholarship but most all of them had already been awarded a scholarship, or were assured of going on to college.

The idea was to spotlight excellence, to applaud intellectual attainment in a country where there has been so much accent on attainment in football.

The children had had a marvelous day in Washington, beginning with the briefing by Secretary of State Dean Rusk, then a tour of the Capitol building, and lunch with their own Senators and Congressmen, and then a briefing by no less than astronaut ~~Allen~~^{Alan} Sheppard, (I expect that that is what a lot of them liked best) in NASA Auditorium, and then to the Supreme Court where Chief Justice Earl Warren talked to them.

And then at 5:30, here to the White House for the Presidential reception.

When we entered the East Room, the familiar gold chairs were in a semi-circle, the 121 students and as many of their parents as could come, were seated, along with quite a few of the members of the Commission that chose them. And a glittering galaxy of other guests.

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I thought Lyndon's speech was one of the best I ever read, although, unhappily, it was not the very best Lyndon who delivered it. Later on I found out why. Southeast Asia coming to a boil, is nailing him to his desk and he is studying about it, and in constant meetings with everyone in State and Defense concerned with it.

I love the lines of his speech where he talked about "...^{demagogues} demigods and dictators, believed ^{in our} to be a parents' generation, that American youth would be proved soft, would love luxury more than liberty, choose comfort over courage. Your parents proved that calculation wrong. Today's cynics and doubters believe of your generation, that you will be too content with the average, to take on the arduous, too concerned with conformity to be creative, too cool to be committed, too callous to be caring. You will prove this calculation wrong too. Your destiny will not be a faceless and thoughtless existence in a dull and dreary society. I believe the destiny of your generation and your Nation, is a rendezvous with excellence.

Early in this century, William James answered those who complained that our democracy had an instinct for the inferior. He said, "the best of us are filled with a contrary vision of a democracy stumbling through every era, 'til its institution glow in justice and its customs shine with beauty. Our better men shall show the way, and we shall follow them."

Today, as never before, we must look to our better minds to show the way toward our society's greatest day, that is your challenge and your duty. You are exceptional members of an exceptional generation. You have been

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born to man's most exceptional opportunity. You are younger than most of the earth's quarrels and older than most of the earth's governments. You are younger than most of man's ignorance and older than much of his knowledge. Since you were born, man has developed both the capacity to destroy human life, and the capacity to make life worthwhile for all the human race. //

And then all the congratulations, and then the handing out of the medal, and the calling of the names and the states to each of the 121 students. A handshake with them and a big glow ^{from} for me, particularly a^s certain of them, filed by, because I had been reading their biographies.

Of the 121, I expect you would have to arrive at the conclusion, ^{an} economically comfortable home, with stable and happy parents is more likely to produce excellence but there were wonderful instances of those who had risen above all obstacles. ^R The Arkansas boy whose father was a machinist and his mother a laundry maid. The school counselor says 'he comes from a home so poor, ^o one would hardly believe it. He supports himself by tutoring and he's first in his class of 660, and wants to become an organic chemistry major at the University of Arkansas.

Another, a girl from Shreveport, whose mother was a clerk-typist and father 'believed dead'. She had been shunted around between grandparents and aunts, all over the lot, because of a broken home, and then in the sixth grade, had been in a serious accident and been hospitalized for many months. In spite of that, her grades were excellent and she wanted

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to go to the University of Southwestern Louisiana, and become a high school teacher.

And then there was a young boy from Denver, whose father was dead and his mother completely disabled. He worked at nights and after school to put himself through school. His counselor said that 'he does not complain or offer excuses. He ranks very high in all scores and he works toward becoming a professional musician or lawyer at Columbia University.

And probably the top student, ^{who} was only 15, a New York boy, Kenneth Mikoff. First in a class of 1265, heading for studying mathematics at Harvard.

And ~~in~~ one, an Illinois boy, ^{who} is totally deaf but he's won awards in Science and ~~In~~ English, and a school letter in wrestling, and he's heading for Oberlin College to become a scientist or engineer.

There was one from Hawaii, ^{of} Chinese extraction; two from Puerto Rico, with Spanish names, both of whom had received the highest PSAT's possible, in Math and verbal ability.

One of my regrets is that there's nobody with a Latin name from Texas, or from California.

There's some great success stories among the negro students. A girl, Jacqueline Evans, one of the first to be integrated at Little Rock, father a nurses' aide, mother a teacher. Her counselor says "She's gained the respect and admiration of her fellow students for ^{the} ~~her~~ excellence of her work. She plans to attend Radcliffe and be a creative writer.

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One, a negro boy from New Orleans, son of a mail carrier and a teacher (that "teacher" recurs over and over). His principal says, "He's the best student we've ever had. He plans to go to California Institute of Technology and become a nuclear engineer.

And then the son of a Dean at Howard, a negro boy, Frank Snowden, first of his race ever to be admitted to St. Albans, and graduated first in his class and also a good athlete.

There were others whose fathers and mothers were elevator operators, cashier wrappers, car wash workers, who had managed to be first in their classes of several hundred.

After you read these biographies you couldn't help saying, "America, God had shed his grace on thee!"

Congratulations over, we went into the State dining room where there was a lemonade bar, and drinks circulating for the older ones. And here is where I think our own planning broke down, because our marvelous galaxy of guests should have had name tags to identify themselves.

Standing in line to meet them, students and guests, I did see such people as George Ballanchine, Director of the American School of Ballet; and Herb Bloch, the cartoonist; and Helen Hayes, one of the greatest of the stage; and ^{William}~~William~~ deKoonig, a painter; and Harper Lee, one of my favorite novelists, To Kill a Mocking Bird; Walter Lippmann, the columnist;

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and Maria ^{Mannes} ~~Manice~~, the writer; and Dr. J. Robert Oppenheimer.

How happy all of those young scientific students would have been to have talked to him!

And Dr. Glenn Seaborg, the same there; and ^{Alan} ~~Allen~~ Sheppard, perhaps they hadn't had enough chance that morning to talk to him; Ben ^{Shahn} ~~Shawn~~, the artist; and John Walker of the National Gallery of Art. I'm sure all the aspiring young art students would have been thrilled.

And I had seen so many more acceptances, which I am not sure I recognized myself - Robert Penwarren, the novelist; Edward Durell Stone, the architect; ~~What~~ we should have done was asked them all to wear name tags. ~~Even~~ those most distinguished names in art, literature, drama, space, government and education, can get lost and unrecognized in the crowd.

As I found out when I introduced Miss Hayes, no less, to one of the young students, and her answer was, a very sweet, polite "Oh, I'm so glad to meet you Miss Hayes. My grandmother is named ~~Miss~~ Hayes." After that I didn't make the same mistake any more. I would beam and say, "Oh, I know you'll be so thrilled to meet Miss Helen Hayes, 'cause I expect you have seen her on the stage many times." Or, "This is Harper Lee. I expect you have read her book To Kill a Mocking Bird." At any rate, I cued them in from then on, but I know they missed a lot of the richness of the evening simply from not knowing who was there.

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After awhile, parents and many of the grown people, ^gsaid goodby and where Lynda Bird was hostess on the lawn ~~for~~ the red striped tents were set up, for hamburgers and soft drinks, ^gand then entertainment.

And this was one of the best times for mixing and mingling, I later heard, because Leonard Bernstein had a group of some 20 or 30 students around him, listening, entranced. This is what it's all about as far as I'm concerned; besides the recognition of excellence, the opportunity for these ~~great~~ young ^{of great potential} ~~potential~~ people, to meet with those who have already achieved great things for America. That would be something for them to remember always.

Lyndon had been in the West wing for a briefing session on Southeast Asia with Cabinet Members. He had strolled out to mingle with the young people, and then he turned around, went back in the West wing and brought out Bobby Kennedy with him. As the newspapers put it - "...then something prompted him to return and bring out Mr. Kennedy." Of course, what prompted him to return is simply because he's a generous and understanding man, and he knows that Bobby Kennedy has a rapport with young people and that a lot of ^{his} interests has been toward young groups.

^gDoris Powell arrived about eight o'clock. This is a house guest I have looked forward to so eagerly. I got her settled in the room that the Wests had just vacated and told her to join us right soon on the little balcony, ^goff the Yellow Room to watch the entertainment on the lawn below.

A. W. and Mary¹⁰ellen and the children and I, ^gtook our seats and watched

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Sidney Poitier introduce the Jerry Mulligan Quartet, one of the jazz favorites of today. Among their numbers was Blues for Lynda, a composition of their own.

And then José Ferrer did readings from Shakespeare - not too much Shakespeare and a good deal of memories of José Ferrer.

And then Nicholas deVirgilio, of the Metropolitan Opera Company, was supposed to sing three arias, one from Puccini, but about that time Lyndon arrived, hungry, and we went in for dinner, with me excusing myself before we got around to dessert, and going back out on the porch, too late, alas, to hear Leonard Bernstein, but in time for the Kingston Trio, old favorites of Lynda Bird's, whose music on records I have been hearing since she was 13.

It was a delightful sight down below, as MaxineCheshire wrote, "The Kingston Trio's finale, sent their jazzy guitar renditions echoing down across the elipse for tourists strolling around the Washington Monument."

I couldn't stand it any longer up there, and I said, "Come on, Lyndon." So we went down and lay on the grass, on our elbows, and watched the rest of the entertainment and the young folks. Then greeted a lot of the young folks and I had a chance to tell the entertainers how much I enjoyed it. Particularly Sidney Poitier, whom I remember from Raisin in the Sun. He played the rebellious son, and I told him I felt like mama, with that little

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pot of ivy that she carried from dwelling to dwelling, ~~and to dwelling~~. "This is my little piece of self-expression," mama said.

I just wish I would have been able to hear Leonard Bernstein's Chopin.

I went to bed early, with the self-satisfied feeling that this had been a good day, and I was glad to have under my roof, Doris and the Moursunds. But the slightly unfulfilled feeling that I myself had not added to the young folks meeting, ^{all} all that I could have.

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