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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION
ALAN S. BOYD, AT THE COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES AT MARSHALL UNIVERSITY,
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Cardinal Newman once said: "A university...is a place which wins the admiration of the young by its celebrity, kindles the affection of the middle aged by its beauty, and rivets the fidelity of the old by its associations."

But that, as the poet said, was in another time and in another country -- long ago, and far away from Berkeley, or Columbia, or Berlin, or the Sorbonne.

And nowhere, I suppose, do the sentiments of that eminent nineteenth century English churchman and thinker seem so long ago and far away than at that most ancient and abiding of rituals -- the college commencement.

I must confess that the whole idea of commencements -- and particularly commencement speeches -- has, since at least the day of my own graduation, seemed to me as good an example as there is of the ultimate indignity. The condemned man must walk one last mile; the "commencing" man must sit through one last lecture.

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Yet, here I am -- no more successful in resisting the occasion than you have been.

For what I cannot really resist is the temptation to speak to young people -- to a generation of young people that seems less inclined than any in memory to accept, without scorching scrutiny, the words and the world of an older generation.

Yet I did not come prepared to admit that I am old enough to be part of any generation gap or that you are young enough to insist that one exists.

Life changes so fast these days that the young must always be older than their years and the old always younger just to remain relevant to the world around us.

No sooner do we learn to deal with one environment, one situation, one set of circumstances, than we have to start learning all over again.

We are all inescapably caught up in events and experiences whose pace and scale seem -- in contrast to earlier eras -- so much larger than life.

It is no longer possible for any of us to pursue our dreams alone and apart from the world around us -- if it ever was.

The automobile, the airplane, the telephone, the television set have all but abolished space and time -- and have involved us all in an incredibly complex network of interaction and interdependence.

The experts say we are moving toward a "loss of insulating space."

We can see and sense that trend in every aspect of our lives.

There is the phenomenal growth in the nearness and number of people -- more and more people crowding closer and closer together. There is the fact that anything that happens anywhere in the world is only an instant electronic impulse away -- and in living color at that. Everything and everyone is here and now. In a very literal sense, we are all neighbors.

One of the most crucial consequences of this loss of insulating space -- of this living in increasingly close quarters -- is that those choices we make in common will assume increasingly greater importance in our lives.

Each of us can, for example, buy his own suit of clothes or his own car -- but none of us can buy his own share of clean air, or his own stretch of clear highway.

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There is a whole host of such choices which, in the past, we have left simply to the mechanism of the market place, or to the experts, or to chance -- and which we now have to make together, deliberately, as matters of conscious political decision.

We are beginning to face up to the fact that the choices available to each of us individually depend on how willing we are to make choices in common. Our ability to make any genuine individual choices at all will depend on how sensibly we act in developing our educational and health and recreational facilities; upon our transportation system; upon the quality of the air we breathe and the water we drink; and upon the extent to which all our citizens have ample incentives and opportunities for a decent education, a decent home and a decent job.

I have no doubt we will find these choices difficult to make, for we are used to making most of our choices individually -- and only with extreme reluctance do we make choices in common.

We are equally reluctant to recognize that a great many of our private decisions have enormous public consequences -- consequences we can no longer avoid or ignore.

No family, for example, considers a move to a suburban home with a two-car garage as having any consequences beyond the benefits it brings them. Yet the effect of a hundred thousand such decisions may be the relative decline of a downtown business district; a radical relocation of industrial and retail firms; the isolation of the poor and the disadvantaged within the central city; the removal of valuable land from city tax rolls as more and more freeways are built; and much more.

This same pattern prevails in the spread of air and water pollution -- and, most importantly, in the isolation and exclusion of the Negro American from even the most ordinary opportunities available to almost every other American with a white skin.

In a world where everybody rubs elbows with everybody else, where you can't put your foot down without stepping on somebody's toe, we can no longer refuse responsibility for the public costs and consequences of private decisions.

Old approaches simply will not work in a new and entirely different environment. What worked in a world of economic scarcity, where change was slow, space ample and distance long, will not work in a world of economic abundance, of change so rapid it seems more and more to outrun our capacity to respond, of scarce space and instant access to all parts of the globe.

In a relatively short space of time, we have succeeded in America in creating an economic abundance, a standard of living, a technological wizardry and a managerial genius that have earned us the envy and admiration of every other nation in the world.

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Yet, in the words of one of our most acute social observers: "The teeming, disorganized life of impoverished slums has all but disappeared among the North Atlantic democracies -- save only the United States. ...it can be said with fair assurance that mass poverty and squalor, of the kind that may be encountered in almost any large American city, simply cannot be found in comparable cities in Europe, or Canada, or Japan."

In the generation that has passed since the Great Depression we have reached levels of affluence high enough so that we can afford, many times over, to offer to every American ample opportunity for a decent home, a decent school, and a decent job.

But we have yet to measure up to the standard that Franklin Roosevelt set for us over thirty years ago: "The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much, it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little."

The current issue of Fortune magazine reports on the aims and attitudes of the affluent American. An income of \$25,000, says Fortune, represents the threshold to genuine affluence -- before it is reached, wants tend to outrun income, but after it is reached income tends to outrun. Currently, the magazine estimates, one taxpayer in 50 has crossed that threshold -- by the end of the century, one out of four Americans will have done so.

After a probing exploration and analysis of the goals of these Americans, of what it is that has motivated them to earn this income, of what it is they wanted it for, the magazine selected as the most succinct summary of the aims of these Americans the remark of an upper-income Illinois housewife: "We're very blessed...I have all the major appliances that anyone would want and my husband has a workshop that is out of this world."

There are those who wonder and worry about whether we are, indeed, in danger of being anesthetized by affluence.

There are those who fear we are approaching the point where our growing mastery of means -- of technology, of production, -- is matched by an increasing emptiness of ends.

There are those who are disturbed by what they sense as an increasing equation among too many Americans of the good life with the mere accumulation of goods.

There are those who find our passion for law and order a little less than persuasive when so rarely is it accompanied by a passion for justice.

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There are those who are far less impressed with the prosperity so many Americans enjoy than with the poverty so many Americans endure.

There are those who cannot rest easy with the contradiction of a nation prosperous beyond parallel in the memory of man, but which -- in the words of one commentator -- "offers millions of its youths a kind of experience new in history: the peculiarly ironic and unsettling one of living out an impoverished life in the midst of a country actually perplexed about what to do with its agricultural and industrial capacities. Under these circumstances poverty is not an unavoidable fact of the world, a shared struggle for an entire nation, but a matter of willful carelessness or dishonorable apathy for the majority of us who are comfortable. For those living the threadbare life of migrant farmers or sharecroppers, or attempting survival in the rat-infested ghettos of our cities, it is almost a matter of being singled out for condemnation."

For as long as we have been a nation -- and longer -- one group of Americans has enjoyed infinitely less than its share in the building and the blessings of American society, and infinitely more than its share of poverty and privation, of humiliation and hatred.

I speak of the American Negro.

It is not only the Negro who suffers in our society from poverty and privation. But, as one observer has pointedly put it: "No one is poor in America because he is white. Many people are poor because they are black."

The nine year old white boy in the north Georgia foothills knew the difference when he said: "I'm sure glad I wasn't born colored, but to be rich I think I should have been born some other place."

I have said that in today's world we can isolate neither problems nor people from each other -- neither private nor public decisions.

If we could see no other way, we could see by the flames that lit the skies over many American cities in recent months and years that we cannot separate the future of white America from the fate of black America.

Leveling stores and homes in the ghettos with a torch is not the answer. Nor is leveling the blame. And the one sure way to fail to find the answer is to hang out signs saying, "Business as usual."

Let us all condemn riots; let us never condone violence.

But, above all, let us understand -- and let us act.

Let us understand that, for at least a century, white America has insisted that if everyone would just sit still -- if "outsiders"

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and "agitators" would stop interfering and stirring things up -- time alone would eventually remove the race problem from our midst.

But the Negro knows -- and we ought not to forget -- that time hardens, not heals.

Let us understand how the deep frustration of men long denied can find expression in the incendiary rage of men who will no longer be denied.

Let us understand how those who have suffered sustained and systematic exclusion from American society do not always feel bound by its constraints.

Let us understand that it is not the Negro alone who is warped and wounded by our indifference and our animosity -- for those who would deny the dignity of another must thereby degrade their own.

Let us understand that we cannot expect those in our ghettos to equal the achievements of other Americans when they do not enjoy the opportunities the rest of us take for granted. We cannot ask from them -- as we often do -- the kind of utterly heroic effort few of us who are far more fortunate manage to achieve.

Let us understand -- and let us act. Act to change our attitudes and our institutions. Act in our schools and in our hiring halls -- in our jobs and on our sidewalks -- in our neighborhoods and throughout our nation -- in our society and, above all, in ourselves.

We have passed the point of no return on the racial problem in America. We have reached the point where the ability of each of us to live a full and free life rests, in fact, upon our ability to insure the same opportunities to all Americans.

"Mankind," T. S. Eliot once said, "cannot bear very much reality."

We have a way, indeed, of always wanting to see and savor our world sunnyside up. But things are changing. A new generation of Americans is emerging that -- far more than the old -- seems to insist on seeing and saying it like it really is.

It seems a generation that questions the assumptions of the old as severely and stringently as it questions its aspirations.

It seems a generation that takes with a new seriousness the old admonition of Socrates that "the unexamined life is not worth living."

It seems a generation less frightened by the prospect of the manipulation of man by machine than by the practice of the manipulation of man by man.

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It seems a generation unwilling to respond to new situations by wrapping itself in the security blanket of old stereotypes.

It seems a generation increasingly committed to the creation of a genuinely personal world -- in which all conversations and contact can be conducted person-to-person and man-to-man.

It seems a generation far better able than mine to fashion an environment in which man can live and thrive.

That's the way it seems to me. How it seems to you will have a profound impact on the course of this country in the decades ahead.

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