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REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION
JOHN A. VOLPE AT THE COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES, BUTLER UNIVERSITY,
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"TOWARD A MORAL SOCIETY"

I am deeply grateful for the honor you have bestowed upon me. I know that I would probably not be here today but for the superb opportunities that were provided me by our free society.

This country was the first to try to achieve both quality and equality, both excellence and opportunity. We were the first nation in the world to declare that a higher education is not a privilege but a benefit that everyone should enjoy -- not just the few who inherit wealth or family power.

President Nixon is a product of this commitment to total democracy. So am I. And so are you. But it will be your destiny to perfect what our generation has only brought to the "lift-off" stage.

All you have to do to know where your destiny lies is to read the front page of any newspaper. Our ancient ideals of moderation, dialogue, and tolerance have recently come under heavy attack by a determined minority.

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A nineteenth century philosopher now long-forgotten described the university as "a place of refuge to inspire tranquil cerebration in the young." Today, such a description is merely quaint. Thanks to certain groups of students, a lot of people in my generation think of today's undergraduate as a firebrand and dynamiter bent upon exploding the foundations of society.

I tell them not to be misled by the loud-mouths and headline makers, the professional rebels and the anarchists.

During the last year about 200 campuses have experienced some kind of student rebellion. Perhaps 100 of these were scenes of significant protest, but in fewer than a dozen cases was there any major disorder. The so-called revolutionary campuses are clearly in the minority in a roster of some 2,500 institutions of higher education in this country.

To further broaden our perspective and assuage our fears, consider that perhaps 70,000 students altogether participated in these revolts -- 70,000 in a college group of seven and one-half million. That is less than 1 percent, and their sympathizers don't even come to 10 percent of the total college population!

Yet this broad perspective is little comfort to the hard-working student who often pays his own way and is then prevented from studying by a handful of disrupters. For his sake, for the sake of scholarship, for the sake of domestic peace, the professional revolutionaries who masquerade as students must be put down. Failure to do so would mean anarchy and public backlash and the destruction of academic freedom.

Educated young people above all must be aware that, to paraphrase President Nixon, when we adopt the principle of any means to an end, often the means become the end. The history of the universities in some other nations over the last century shows what happens then: unlimited student power has produced some of the lowest academic standards in the world.

Therefore, when a college president calls for an injunction to quell violence on campus his position must be carefully considered. It is no moral defeat to employ public power against those who would destroy the foundations of organized society. The university is no enclave in which anything goes. It is not a sanctuary from which any assault on the majority's rights can be permitted.

Having said this, one must admit that college students today are making many just demands. Young adults want to participate in making the rules governing their lives. They want a say in the quality of the courses for which they and their parents are paying such hefty tuition.

How much students will contribute can only be decided on each campus individually in a spirit of reason and compromise. But when they speak of meaningless courses, poor teaching, alienation, war and social injustice, when they demand honest participation, they must be listened to. The ideas and grievances of the nation's brightest young people should not be lightly dismissed under the guise of a fake dialogue.

The dialogue must be real and relevant, and I fervently hope this will be understood by alumni and by all those who contribute to colleges so generously of their time and money. A fine example has been set by Gulf and Western, who stated that this time of turmoil is no time to withdraw support from our universities, and they gave \$1,000,000 to Notre Dame to back their faith in the future of our young people -- indeed, in the future of our nation.

I believe that genuine dialogue will achieve a great deal for all of us. The average man and woman in college today is realistic, sober, hard working, more mature socially and vastly better informed than the youngsters I knew at the Wentworth Institute in Boston. This generation is certainly among the most idealistic, the least materialistic, and the most clearly motivated for social justice that we have ever seen.

Today, we are living in a period of perpetual revolution -- a revolution so complex that it is hard to describe in a phrase, but it is unmistakable.

First, there is the effect of technology -- I didn't say science, which is the search for knowledge -- but technology, its application. Since you were born, about 21 years ago, we have made commercial electricity from the atom, developed three generations of computers, begun the chemical control of human personality, sent three men around the moon, and have now come within a hair's breadth of unravelling the secret of life through molecular biology. The day of genetic engineering is not far off.

Yet technology itself is but a small part of the story, though perhaps it forms the foundation of our time. Equally important are changes stemming from the social fallout of technology and advanced scholarship. Our population is still expanding by almost three million per year. Prosperity based upon scientific management of the economy has become an accepted part of the social cosmos. Higher education enrolls over six million and may be universal within 20 years. Electronic media have transformed our knowledge of exotic places and peoples and placed us at ringside for great events. Our mobility has soared upward with our jets, and we now live on the doorstep of the world.

Finally, the entire planet is becoming an integrated urban society, after roughly 10,000 years as mainly an enterprise of peasants and villagers. By the turn of the century, well over half of the people on earth will be urbanites, with urban habits and expectations. To me, this is the greatest revolution of all.

As a result of all these interlocking factors of technology and urbanism we have a world society that is complex, dynamic, machine-based, competitive, densely populated, secular, consumption-oriented, and in constant flux. No one should be too surprised to find a condition of revolutionary uproar sweeping even through this prosperous nation. Poverty and discrimination are no longer accepted with passive resignation. People are more aware that the squalor of the American ghetto is almost non-existent in the industrial cities of Western Europe, Canada, or Japan.

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They want to know why it persists here. They no longer ask for justice and opportunity they are demanding them, and they are employing means that often slip over the abyss into uncontrolled violence.

Those of you who have studied the history of revolutions -- the French, the Mexican, the Russian -- know that people never protest when they have no hope. But once a man gets a vision of affluence the drums of protest begin to beat. He demands food for his children so their intelligence will not be stunted. He pickets for better schools. He seeks a job with a future. He agitates for a decent house to raise his family in.

For the vast majority of you graduates here today, however, the great questions in your lives are not going to be how to feed the kids or how to get a decent job or how to find a house without holes in the roof or rats between the walls. You will have much subtler problems to solve -- spiritual problems of purpose, direction, and fulfillment. I take it for granted you will be successful. The question is what to do with your success.

Not long ago an issue of Fortune Magazine reported on the aims and attitudes of the prosperous upper middle class -- the group what you will soon be entering. According to the editors, an income of \$25,000 per annum will put you roughly on the threshold of true affluence. Less than that and your wants outrun your income. Above that, you have more money than you know what to do with.

Right now only one American in fifty stands on or beyond that threshold. But by the year 2000, one in four Americans will have crossed that line. That's what the editors of a good Republican magazine said. Frankly, I think they're too conservative. I think our prosperity will grow much faster than anyone realizes.

Anyway, after exploring the consequences of such opulence, the magazine went on and asked the people what had motivated them to get where they were. Out of all the responses, the editors selected the reply of an Indiana housewife as the most typical. She said, "We're very blessed I have all the appliances anyone could want and my husband has a workshop that is out of this world!"

You see why many thoughtful people are asking whether our growing ascendancy over the material world is not matched by decreasing comprehension of what really constitutes the good life. Let's not deny it, the good life should include success and good fortune and material comforts -- and the opportunity to get them should be available to any citizen of this rich nation regardless of accent, race, religion, sex or ethnic origin!

But those of you who have profited from the liberal arts here at Butler know that, as Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." And I would add that the uncommitted life is not worth having.

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We should be committed to social justice. We should support due process and the rule of law. We should do everything in our power to expand the range of choices open to the individual. I believe we should develop more sensitivity toward the social consequences of our personal tastes.

Let me take just one small example from my own field of transportation.

When a family moves out to the suburbs and gets its second car it thinks it has it made. That family is not aware that its choice of living pattern and mode of transportation -- multiplied a million times -- is creating a social disaster for our cities. We forget that our automobility is paid for by urban centers in the coin of ugliness, pollution, decay, and violence. This system must and will be modified as we develop radical new forms of mass transit, and use them as instruments of community design and rehabilitation. To this policy, the President and I are irrevocably committed. We are convinced that the destiny of this country will be decided in the cities.

In spite of all our travails, I have faith in the future of this nation and the principles for which it stands. A great bulwark of that faith is my confidence in you. You have demonstrated a healthy skepticism about the status quo and yet you eschew the blandishments of left and right. Most of you have the capacity for mature judgement on social issues. Many of you have already committed yourselves to a lifetime of learning -- in school and out.

As you go out from this campus tomorrow you will find a world of extraordinary opportunity and promise, a world of innovation, change, progress and hope. We in the Department of Transportation intend to contribute to that world, as you will. We are planning a revolution in transportation that would surprise your fathers and amaze your grandfathers. We are planning for the day of tracked air-cushion vehicles, buses that can be dialed to your home by phone, and automated highways and airways. We expect to help create during the next decade such things as the "Gravitrain" (not gravy train) which swoops of its own weight down underground tunnels and coasts up again on its own inertia and pneumatic force.

Yes, we expect revolutionary new ways to automate and improve air travel across the nation and around this ever-shrinking world. With your help as concerned and active citizens we can achieve a world of swift and sane mobility such as previous generations never dreamed of.

You are conscious, I believe, of your good fortune to be alive at this time in history, and you will accept the obligations of service which that fortune so uniquely imposes. I hope you will be activists in the best sense of that word -- uncompromising toward injustice, tolerant of dissent, generous in victory and unflinching in defeat.

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You have the potential for moral greatness. As the best educated men and women of your age, you simply must set an example of personal probity and civic responsibility. You must uphold the law, for the law is the foundation of liberty. Each of you must dedicate himself also to replace hatred with love, prejudice with tolerance, anger with gentle compassion. If we learn to extend the golden rule, to do more for others than we would expect them to do for us, then we shall not fear revolution.

You could do no better than to take a lesson from the founders of Butler University. Their time also was a deeply troubled one, but their staunch religious faith gave them the strength to persevere in building this institution. If we have expanded our moral horizons it is because we stand on the shoulders of moral giants. So be devout. Walk humbly. Have the courage to acknowledge your elders. Draw strength from the divine power in each of you. With such a panoply of arms, whom shall you fear?

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