



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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EXCERPTS FROM COMMENCEMENT

REMARKS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE
BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, THURSDAY, JUNE 4, 1970

You are beyond doubt, members of the best educated generation in history. You have or will shortly have material resources that are the envy of the world. You are sophisticated and adventurous in ways our generation could never dream of. And you have proven by your presence here today that you know how to stick with a task until it's done.

You will have no lack of opportunity to put yourselves on the line. We still have not achieved racial and class equality in this country though the foundations of equality have been laid. We have not found a way to get all parts of our society to pull together for common goals. We still assault our landscape with sprawling suburbs, we poison the air and water, we waste our mineral resources, and we have allowed our cities to become centers of crisis by following the philosophy that "bigger" in some way equates with "better."

And -- as I am sure you are aware -- these problems must be tackled by your generation. To be blunt, you're the only young generation we've got. And if you really want to make something of your lives, you will reach for solutions rather than attack the history of the problems.

Your generation has the stuff to do it. The problems that in former years were called insoluble, you call intolerable.

The technical gains made in the recent past -- nuclear power, computers, sophisticated microcircuitry, lasers, the list goes on and on -- are being given to you to apply to the problems of social justice, urban organization, and a decent environment for all.

Some of the more skeptical among you may be saying to yourselves, "just give me one good, recent example of progress in any of those trouble zones you mentioned. Give me a reason for hope."

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Well, there are so many, in fact, that it would be impossible to do more than skim over the top in my brief remarks there today. But take a look at what we have been doing in the Department of Transportation just for an example.

We are mobilizing massive efforts to get air pollution and noise under control. We have financed demonstrations of new kinds of bus engines which not only generate much cleaner exhausts but are also a lot quieter. We are working closely with Detroit and a number of universities to reduce pollution caused by automobiles.

With the cooperation of Health, Education and Welfare we are developing tough, workable standards to cut exhaust emissions drastically by 1975. We have several research projects under way to "domesticate" -- if you will -- the jet engine, so that aircraft will be better neighbors.

At our urging, the petroleum companies are getting the lead out of their gasolines. We are well on our way toward control of the kinds of smog produced by the internal combustion engine. We also have commenced research on the linear induction motor for a tracked air cushion vehicle as a people mover.

And these actions are only the beginning. The Environmental Quality Act of 1970 -- which was the first bill signed by the President this year -- will produce similar results on a broad front for cleaner water, solid trash disposal, and long-range land management.

I hope you will be active wherever problems need solving, wherever they require commitment and dedication till the obstacles are overcome. It is your destiny -- our destiny -- to make a technological society safe, comfortable, and humane.

You have the intellectual power and sense of personal responsibility. Much has been given you, and you will now return the gift of knowledge with interest. Mere affluence will never be enough for people of the quality of your generation.

Now there's nothing wrong with prosperity. The material things in this world can provide a foundation for social justice and perhaps even moral progress. They should be available to any citizen regardless of accent, race, religion, sex or ethnic origin. But they can only be a start toward the good life.

Your generation knows that, as Bob Dylan put it, those who are not busy being born are busy dying. That means you must be reborn everyday by examining the meaning and direction of your lives.

Most people throughout history have never had the opportunity to examine the meaning of life or to commit themselves to anything more noble than the struggle for their daily bread. You will get this chance. But -- don't miff it. Yours is a generation that has the opportunity -- indeed, has already initiated action -- to re-dedicate our national heritage to a higher quality way of life.

If your forefathers and mine defended liberty, your re-dedication to liberty is vital.

As your parents tried to provide an "easy" and "comfortable" life for you -- then you must re-dedicate yourselves to meaningful ease and comfort.

As you have studied for four years, you must now re-dedicate your intellectual curiosity and your academic skills to much more than earning that daily bread.

If there is one thing certain it is that a university degree is really nothing but a license to learn. And in today's rapidly changing society, the man or woman who fails to continue learning is committing moral and intellectual and economic suicide.

When a colleague asked Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes why he was studying Greek at the age of 94, Holmes replied "My dear fellow, it's now or never."

And that's about it. Now or never. Most of you, as graduates of one of the best universities in this country, have already made such a commitment. You will be intellectual and moral activists in the best sense of that word -- open to innovation, tolerant of dissent, suspicious of conventional pieties, tough, resilient, generous in victory and unflinching in defeat.

And I might add I am certain that the course of your lives will demonstrate in every act a respect for the sacredness of the law, for due process, for reason and enlightened fair plan and social justice. You will respect the great religious truths which guard us from savagery and mere pleasure seeking. I believe you will increasingly respect the sacrifices of your parents as you yourselves take on the job of raising families. You will draw strength from the Divine Power that created man out of cosmic dust and nothingness.

Truly your horizons are infinite. As a "starter generation" destined to move the earth, I salute you.

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