

YOUNG PEOPLE IN GOVERNMENT

Sunflower Girls' State
Lawrence, Kansas

June 12, 1966

It is certainly a pleasure to stand here today, confronted by the most beautiful audience in all the world-----women-.

I want to discuss youth in ^{Government} ~~in~~ in a non-partisan way *about youthful enthusiasm generally*.

As you no doubt realize, a sympathetic view of youth is not to be found in all adult circles. An example of this is the story about a young man riding on a train beside a prosperous-looking passenger twice his age who sported a huge watch chain across his vest. When the young man casually asked the time of day the other refused to oblige him.

"Well, if you have a watch, why can't you just tell me the time?" the youth protested.

"Because," said the older man in one staccato breath, "because, if I tell you the time, you'll ask me my name and my business and then to be courteous I'll have to ask your's, although I'm not at all interested; then you'll want to know where I live, and I'll have to ask you where you live; and then you'll offer me a drink, and I'll have to offer you one;

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and when I get off at my station you'll get off there, too; and I'll have to ask you home for dinner, and you'll accept; and then you'll flatter my wife, and maybe even fall in love with my daughter and then Heaven knows what will happen--and I DON'T WANT ANY MAN TO MARRY MY DAUGHTER WHO DOESN'T OWN A WATCH."

Although I, as a representative of the older generation, understand this point of view in a vague sort of way, I am not actually ensnared by it. On the contrary, I happen to have a keen recollection of my youthful experiences, and I also happen to have a few strong prejudices growing out of those experiences.

One of my prejudices is in favor of youthful enthusiasm. I recall a magazine cartoon in which an octagenarian was depicted, telling a copy of teen-age associates, with an air of great annoyance, "Yes, I was young once, but it was the greatest mistake of my life!" Well, I have a different reaction. I was young once, too, and although I can't take credit for the fact, I wish I could, because it would have been one of my greatest achievements.

There is a school of thought, prevalent in adult society, which regards the young with a suspicious eye. The young, they say, have a nasty habit of laughing at important issues, and dressing up like Comanches, and ^{in cities of} not catching the commuter train to work in the morning

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like respectable folk. They listen to strange, orgiastic music and dance entirely too much. Oh, clearly, they are wicked--wicked!

I never understood this point of view in my youth and, strangely enough, I don't appreciate it today. Granted, I regard the purpose and intention of rock-and-roll music as a mystery of gigantic proportions, which I can never hope to solve. But then, my understanding of religious worship in the Far East is equally as limited, and I've never felt obliged to criticize the millions who engage in that practice.

Young people are different from their elders, beyond a doubt. But difference is not villainy, and my prejudices lead me to suspect that if youth is involved in some extraordinary custom which bewilders my sense of importance, I will do well to adjust my sense of importance to cope with the situation, rather than demand that youth cease and desist from its activities.

In keeping with this point of view is another of my beliefs: That youthful enthusiasm is an important ingredient in the proper management of governmental affairs. That is to say, the wheels of government not only turn slowly, they sometimes fail to turn at all in the absence of youthful enthusiasm.

The newspapers reported certain extraordinary results following the change in administration, back in 1953, when a new set of leaders took over the Executive Branch in Washington, and a new set of lesser executives were appointed to oversee the many divisions and sub-divisions of the Government.

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I do not refer to this event for the mere purpose of glorifying the party that took control in 1953. I do so rather for the purpose of saying that many young people came to Washington in that year, bringing with them new ideas, a new spirit, and new enthusiasm. The results were generally recognized as beneficial to the Government.

Prior to 1953, many Federal officials had held the same posts and carried out the same tasks for years and years to the point where all the excitement was gone from the jobs, so far as they were concerned, and nothing remained ahead but the happy prospect of retirement. Now, that is a dangerous state-of-affairs in government. For the fact is that the world keeps changing, constantly, and the younger you are the more sensitive you are to change. Whenever a company becomes loaded down with executives unmindful of change in popular opinion, that company is sure to lose money. Whenever a government is so afflicted, it loses ground in the constant struggle for its place in the sun.

because

America is in no position to be losing ground today/too much relies upon us. Too much must stand or fall on the strength of American programs and policies. For that reason, youth is needed-- American youth, raised in the spirit of freedom, dedicated to the maintenance of freedom, hand-in-hand with the progress of the age.

My attitude toward youth may not in fact be typical of my generation. On the contrary, the traditional adult reaction to youth is to advise it sharply to get in step, and put an end to its nonsense.

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We hear much today of black leather jackets and motorcycles and switchblade knives, all associated with the highly-publicized, neurotic "teen-age rebel"--an extremist who terrorizes the community. While by no means minimizing the necessity for coping decisively with this type of person, I would merely like to say that my observations lead me to conclude that he is outnumbered, at least 30-to-1, if not 3000-to-1, by people his age who don't terrorize anybody, and who grow up to be respectable, hard-working citizens. The thought that this menace should be regarded as "typical" of an age-group is, indeed, an insulting and wholly mistaken impression, so far as I am concerned.

Perhaps I am particularly prone to appreciating youthful enthusiasm as a result of my association, from time to time, with so much adult cynicism. My friends, if I were to have the choice of working with the most extreme optimist, or with some ordinary, every day, garden-variety of cynic, I would choose the optimist. Why? Because no matter how extreme, the optimist is obviously on the right track. Despite all natural pitfalls, economic pitfalls, political and sociological pitfalls, the old world is lumbering forward in the most extraordinary march of progress imaginable. It is a world made for optimism and the only people who can function properly within its scope are the optimists.

I realize, of course, there are many who argue to the contrary; who point out that there is much to be discouraged about. The frightening aspect of the international situation, with all its potential for

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hideous results, has made millions of converts to the cause of pessimism during the past decade. There are even those who make a philosophy out of this dreary observation and work overtime to convince us that all is lost. While the optimistic hail the technological progress of our era as a milestone in man's fight against natural obstacles, the pessimistic contend that technological progress is nothing more nor less than a giant hoax, a cruel joke, a paradoxical circumvention of man's hopes and dreams; for whenever one invention nullifies a natural obstacle in the path of man's battle for mastery of the elements, another invention is conceived providing an even more portentous obstacle. To the pessimistic the scientific development of armaments rules out the propriety of hope and enthusiasm about all other issues. Is this a sound viewpoint? I think not. What it seems like to me is pessimism on a grand scale, and that is uncalled for.

The world about us today is a wonderful one in many respects. It is a world where miracles occur daily. Back during the glory days of British military and naval might, when England was fighting successfully for commercial supremacy all over the world, it was said that an Englishman would wake up every morning burning with desire to know what great victory his army or navy had won the day before. He was seldom disappointed. And in the same way, we today are in the position of waking up every morning, expecting to read of some new scientific advance; nor are we often disappointed. Take, for

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example, the recent advent of long-distance dialing, instituted by the telephone company. So accustomed have we become to revolutionary mechanical changes that this flabbergasting innovation went into effect with surprisingly little fanfare. But when you stop to consider that simply through the power of a steady forefinger you are now capable of contacting somebody anywhere in the nation, is that not worthy of astonished comment?

~~I gather from your expressions that you are not particularly astonished. All right then, take~~ ^{FOR} ~~another~~ example of communication,

Consider our travel facilities on land and sea. The first expedition to circle the globe left Spain 434 years ago. The trip took three years, and when the remnants of the crew got home in 1522, their leader was dead and only one of five ships that began the journey was still afloat. By 1915, following completion of the Panama Canal, around-the-world travel had become sufficiently different in nature to begin attracting people with time to spare, and today businessmen can make the trip without interrupting their business. And with the advent of space travel, there is a strong possibility we will soon be able to tell our friends--"Last year we went around the world; next summer we're going some place else."

Nor, for that matter, is it necessary to get so far out as space to encounter revolutionary scientific development nowadays. At long last it appears that one of the eternal dreams of the ages, the

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transformation of salt water and seaweed to civilized use, is on the verge of practical application. Inasmuch as a major portion of the earth is covered with these heretofore useless elements, think of the colossal amount of economic development this discovery will provide. And it is merely one of a number of similarly astounding innovations.

✓ Just recently I was reading of the Ford Motor Company's latest creation: a scooter-like vehicle without wheels. In a civilization which has based its mode of land travel for centuries on the wheel, who but a starry-eyed youth could have considered anything different?

Another recent invention of an extraordinary nature is the airborne version of the same thing; that is to say, an airplane without wings, known as the "flying platform," or "flying washing machine." This brain child of youthful imagination can be driven like a bicycle, hundreds of feet above the earth, suspended on a shaft of air.

But these are mere child's play when compared to space flight. Nor do they, for all their spectacular aspects, overshadow such recent earthbound pioneer exploits as those in the field of medicine, for indeed the medical pioneers of our era have taken the world by storm to the same extent as did the geographic explorers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The development of antibiotic drugs has relieved the misery and suffering of literally millions of persons and the benefits derived

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from the recent advent of the Salk vaccine are wondrous to behold. Such a short time ago citizens in every corner of the world lay prey to the blight of poliomyelitis, which local health departments could do no more to combat than to close a few swimming pools in the summer-time. Then suddenly Dr. Salk's vaccine appeared, and the dreaded crippling tendencies of this formidable enemy of man were nullified to an overwhelming extent.

It is my impression that of all classes of society, youth is the quickest to recognize our scientific advances as harbingers of a brighter future. For this reason, we must accept, indeed encourage, the presence of youth in government, with the object of keeping the spirit of government in line with the spirit of youthful enthusiasm so clearly associated with the world of tomorrow.