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YOUR GENERATION AS CITIZENS

Long before George Bernard Shaw commented that youth was so wonderful that it was a shame it had to be wasted on the young, the adult generations of the world were focusing much of their attention on the sins and successes of the younger generation. Each coming generation is told of how things were in the olden days, and how many wonderful opportunities they have that were never available to their parents.

But perhaps, as no generation before you, do the members of this young generation stand in a new era. Most of your parents can remember when outer space was something relegated to the comic pages and Buck Rogers. But to you, rockets and satellites and spacemen are everyday occurrences. You are living in an age of so much scientific and technological innovation that we can hardly keep up with it all. Frozen TV dinners, LSD, Batman, the mini skirt--all these are a part of the world in which you live.

But the temper of our times is not always pleasant. Our newspapers and radios bombard us with the daily crises by which we are surrounded. Crime, race relations, riots, demonstrations, and poverty are blights on the well being of this nation and its people.

Perhaps it is a combination of these two factors--achievement and failure--that has made you the most aware group of young people in our history. During the 1950's, we were all supposed to be alarmed at the apathy of the young people. They were passive, quiet, and rarely became involved in issues of national significance. No one can accuse you of that! The cold war, the bomb, world hunger, all these problems find their way into your discussions and your classrooms.



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YOUR GENERATION AS CITIZENS

A Draft Speech Prepared According to the Instructions of
The Honorable Robert Dole

The attached has been prepared for the personal use of
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the author or the Legislative Reference Service.

Jebby Phillips
Writer
Government and General Research Division
March 21, 1967

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This awareness is an essential ingredient for the twentieth century. There was a time when a nation could focus its attention on the confines of its own borders, and not become involved in the intrigues surrounding other nations. That time is gone forever. With the advent of the airplane, and especially the jet, the most remote areas of the world are just hours away from our own shores. And, as America has assumed a place of leadership in the free world, we can no longer be content with being self-centered.

What does all this mean to you? It means a great deal. It should tell you what kind of citizens this country needs. The art of being a "citizen" began in ancient Greece, when men like Aristotle were helping to create the first real democracy. But today, "citizenship" has become out of date somehow. Rarely do you hear someone speak of being a good citizen. But that is just what this country needs. Citizenship is the responsibility as well as the freedom of our form of government.

Citizenship is the best exercise of the rights and duties given us by the Constitution of the United States. It entails such things as voting, participating in community affairs, reading the newspaper to keep abreast of current events, and respecting the rights of others.

All too often, however, people get the idea that citizenship begins suddenly at 21. Till then, you are just sort of a hanger-on--with no real part in the life of the community and country around you. Nothing could be farther from the truth. As long ago as the eighteenth century the German philosopher and poet Goethe said that the fate of a nation rested upon the opinions held by its young people. This means that you do have a definite role to play in present-day America.

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There are two keys to your playing that role--information and participation. Attorney General Ramsey Clark once wrote: "The citizen who does not know his rights has little advantage over the subject who has none." What he is telling us is that without a firm knowledge of the rights accorded us in the Constitution, we are little better than those who live under tyrannic rule and have no rights to know about. But in order to be an effective citizen, you need to know more than what is due you. You have all met the kind of person who cares only about what he gets, and never for what he gives. Such people are not only boring, they are also dangerous. In short, we must be aware of our responsibilities as well.

But there is a third thing we need to know--what is going on around us. Why is knowledge of current events so important? It is important because of the right to vote. You are expected to choose Representatives, Senators, and Presidents, on the basis of their record and their views. What a farce that vote becomes if we know nothing about what these men have done or what they think. Also, knowing what is going on ensures your rights. Only by knowledge of existing conditions can we form an intelligent defense against the subtle erosion of our freedom. Then, too, it is important to know what is happening so that you may take action if you so desire. Let me give you an example. A housewife in the West read in the papers that hunters and ranchers were killing and raiding the herds of wild ponies, and that they were gradually being wiped out. She began action that resulted in legislation enacted by Congress giving protection to those wild animals by the national park service.

And this points up the significance of participation. If that woman

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had read the paper, and lamented over the extinction of the ponies, without doing anything about it, these animals would be gone by now. But she coupled her knowledge with action, and out of that combination came constructive action. But to participate you don't have to start a national campaign. There are many things you, as young people, can do to participate.

One of the first I would suggest is to become involved in political activity. Such groups as the Young Republicans or the Young Democrats are excellent places to begin your role in the American way of life. Or if such an organization is not available to you, then volunteer your services to the party of your choice. Political parties are always glad to have young people help with the many tasks involved in politics. This is a good way to exercise your responsibilities and to discharge your duties.

Other community oriented activities are also a good way to find an active role in worthwhile efforts. This Methodist Youth group has provided all of you with an excellent method of helping yourselves and others. Volunteers in the hospitals, in the orphanages, in the churches--all these things are an integral part of the qualities a good citizen needs. This action is the partner of knowledge. Without knowledge, action is reckless and meaningless. But without action, knowledge is an empty exercise. The good citizen needs both.

What I have tried to do in these few minutes is to give you an idea of the roles you can play as a good citizen. Don't wait til you are 21, don't put it off til tomorrow. Begin now to cultivate the attitudes and actions that will last throughout your life. Only if this nation can produce these kinds of citizens--responsible and free--can she survive. Without them, and without their careful defense of the liberty we love, then we are

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doomed to lose that freedom. As Daniel Webster once said "God grants liberty only to those who love it, and are always ready to guard and defend it."