

[File - John F. Kennedy - Memorial Speech]
[ca. Oct. 1963]

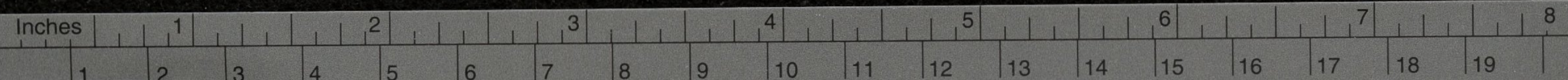
JOHN F. KENNEDY SPEECH

1

JOHN F. KENNEDY IS NO LONGER WITH US. INSISTENT VOICES FROM OUR PULPITS, TELEVISION, AND THE PRESS ARE REMINDING US THAT HE DEPARTED AS A VICTIM OF A DISEASE NOW PREVALENT IN OUR LAND--A DISEASE THAT DEFIES MODERN ANTIBIOTICS, VACCINES, OR DRUGS. OUR PEOPLE APPEAR TO AGREE THAT HE WAS MOST CERTAINLY THE VICTIM OF HATRED, MALICE, AND THE ABSENCE OF UNDERSTANDING. THE GREATEST TRAGEDY IN OUR HISTORY AS YOU KNOW, WAS THE INTIMELY EXECUTION OF JESUS CHRIST. THERE IS A GREAT PARALLEL HERE. OUR LORD WAS ALSO A VICTIM OF HATRED AND DIVISION. YOU HAVE LEARNED IN YOUR ENGLISH CLASSES THAT GOD MOVES IN A MYSTERIOUS WAY, HIS WONDERS TO PERFORM. PERHAPS HE PERMITTED THIS AWFUL ACT AS A MEANS OF SHOCKING US INTO A REALIZATION OF THE NEED FOR A RECONSTITUTION OF OUR NATIONAL CONSCIENCES, SUBSTITUTING LOVE, UNDERSTANDING, AND MUTUAL RESPECT FOR THE PRESENT POISON BEING THRUST UPON US BY OUR EXTREMISTS. THE COWARD WHO WAS ACCUSED OF PERFORMING THIS INFAMOUS ACT MADE NO SECRET OF HIS LEANINGS TOWARD IDEOLOGIES FOREIGN TO OUR OWN; IN FACT, HE BRAZENLY BOASTED OF THEM. THE VERY CITY WHERE IT OCCURRED HAD EXPERIENCED RECENT ACTS OF HATRED AND VIOLENCE. BEFORE WE CONDEMN THAT CITY OR STATE, HOWEVER, LET US FIRST EXAMINE OURSELVES. WE MUST SHARE IN THE TRAGIC EVENT IN DALLAS. WE ARE ALL RESPONSIBLE IN VARYING DEGREES TO WHAT HAPPENS TO OUR NEIGHBORS.

WE CONTRIBUTE TO UGLINESS WHENEVER WE BELITTLE OUR GOVERNMENT. WE INCREASE MEANNESS WHEN WE GIVE ONLY LIP SERVICE TO OUR CHURCH. WE NURTURE MISUNDERSTANDING WHEN WE FAIL TO TREAT OUR NEIGHBORS WITH RESPECT. WE BECOME LESSER CITIZENS WHEN WE NEGLECT TO ASSUME OUR FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR MAKING THIS GREAT DEMOCRACY WORK. WE HAVE ALL BEEN DIMINISHED BY THIS HORRIBLE AND PURPOSELESS VIOLENCE. JOHN F. KENNEDY WAS CLOSER TO YOUNG PEOPLE THAN ANY OTHER PRESIDENT. HE WAS PART OF THIS CAMPUS, BEING THE ONLY PRESIDENT EVER TO VISIT HERE. HE, ALONG WITH HIS WIDOW, STRESSED THE NEED FOR PHYSICAL FITNESS, TRAINING FOR SPECIFIC JOB OPPORTUNITIES, AND AN APPRECIATION OF BEAUTY AND THE ARTS IN OUR LIVES. HE WAS THE HERO OF YOUTH BECAUSE OF HIS PHYSICAL AND MORAL COURAGE. DURING HIS VISIT HERE AT EAST CAROLINA COLLEGE ONE OF HIS AIDES ASKED ME WHAT MR. KENNEDY COULD DO TO HELP US. IN HASTE, I REFERRED TO OUR DESIRE TO BECOME A MEMBER OF THE SOUTHERN CONFERENCE. THIS PLEASED THE PRESIDENT, FOR HE DEVOTED PART OF HIS ADDRESS, IN THE OLD STADIUM, TO OUR ATHLETIC AMBITION.

IF WE LEARN ANY LESSON AT ALL FROM THIS TRAGEDY IT SHOULD BE THE FUTILITY OF CYNICISM AND SMUGNESS, AS WELL AS THE REALIZATION THAT THESE ARE BUT STEPS TOWARD BITTER HATRED. PRESIDENT KENNEDY WAS SYMBOLIC OF THE GENUINE DESIRES OF YOUTH. OUR YOUNG PEOPLE EMBRACED HIM BECAUSE OF



THEIR COMMON HOPE FOR A BETTER AMERICA.

YOUNG AND OLD ALIKE WERE STIRRED BY HIS CHALLENGE TO: "LET THE WORD GO FORTH FROM THIS TIME AND PLACE, TO FRIEND AND FOE ALIKE, THAT THE TORCH HAS BEEN PASSED TO A NEW GENERATION OF AMERICANS . . . UNWILLING TO WITNESS OR PERMIT THE SLOW UNDOING OF THOSE HUMAN RIGHTS TO WHICH THIS NATION HAS ALWAYS BEEN COMMITTED, AND TO WHICH WE ARE COMMITTED TODAY AT HOME AND AROUND THE WORLD."

HIS DEATH SHOULD SUMMON US TO A PROGRAM OF SELF EXAMINATION LEADING TO A GREATER NATION. WE MUST REDISCOVER AND USE THE LOVE THAT CAN BE FOUND IN THE HEARTS OF ALL RATIONAL MEN. WE MUST DEDICATE OURSELVES TO THE REMOVAL OF VIOLENCE AND HATRED FROM OUR NATIONAL LIFE. IF WE FAIL IN ATTAINING THIS GOAL, THE DASTARDLY DEED OF LAST WEEK END MAY WELL BE REPEATED MANY TIMES AND IN MANY PLACES THROUGHOUT OUR LAND. I KNOW THAT YOU AS COLLEGE STUDENTS FEEL THAT YOU HAVE LOST SOMEONE AS DEAR AS A MEMBER OF YOUR FAMILY. LET US HONOR HIM IN HIS REST BY GRASPING A NEW AWARENESS OF THE AMERICAN WAY OF LIFE AND IN HIS WORDS: DO NOT ASK WHAT YOUR COUNTRY CAN DO FOR YOU, BUT RATHER ASK WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR COUNTRY."

