

Speech by Robert Morgan
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I am pleased to be with you tonight and to have an opportunity to speak to such a distinguished group of young men. As a Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Force Reserves, it is my continuing pleasure to be associated with outstanding officers of our United States Air Force, but as I am sure you are aware, most of the time my contacts are on a strictly business or military basis. This is rewarding, of course, and quite enjoyable but nothing is quite as much fun to me as an opportunity like tonight to meet with officers and cadets such as you in an informal atmosphere. For this reason, I commend you for your dining-in programs and the opportunity it gives persons like me to meet with you and share some thoughts with you.

ROTC is important to the defense of this nation, and I do not believe that anything has been said or done in the recent controversies surrounding it that disprove this fact. It might well be that the attacks which have been leveled at it in fact have strengthened the program and made it a more vital and effective force in our nation.

Why do I say this? I think it is dangerous for any organization to become complacent and to fail to reexamine from time to time its objectives and method of operating. The controversy has required us to do this and in turn I believe that ROTC has an opportunity to be even more effective than it has in the past. And of course, I believe that it has a greater opportunity to serve the people of this nation.

It is always amazing to me that we Americans can have honest disagreements among ourselves, such as that debate we have had over the role of ROTC, and emerge with even more vital and effective institutions than we had before. We have seen it happen time and time again. I can't think of another nation which can say the same thing about itself and it leads me to the conclusion that in every sense of the word we are a unique people. And it is this quality of being unique that I want to talk about here tonight.

We Americans are a unique people: our nation was established in order to protect us from the abuses of our own government, and throughout our history, we have made a conscious effort to preserve this protection as the core of our way of life.

Many nations which have been founded since ours have made an attempt to copy this American tradition. Most constitutions now in effect throughout the world—even in the Soviet Union—contain so-called Bills of Rights. But the role of protecting the rights of the individual in many of these nations comes second to enhancing the welfare of the state. In those nations, the duties of citizenship far outweigh its privileges.

We know that in nations behind the iron and bamboo curtains, the lives of citizens are regimented to supply the needs of the state. We know that men cannot choose their occupations there, that men cannot travel freely there, and that men there cannot say what they believe unless what they believe happens to serve the interests of their nation.

We know how Soviet writers are tried for treason, how the Berlin Wall was built to prevent the citizens of East Germany from leaving that country, and how the Cuban and Chinese governments force people into the fields to harvest sugar and rice. To be patriotic in these Communist nations, a person must perform the duties of citizenship whether or not they conflict with his rights. A citizen who fails to perform his duties is to that extent a traitor.

We all know the ridiculous lengths to which these duties are stretched in Communist nations, but we ourselves sometimes marvel at the zeal of citizens there and wonder why our citizens do not respond with equal zeal. When ninety-nine and three-quarters per cent of the electorate in the Soviet Union votes in an election in which there is little choice, we often wonder why our citizens do not turn out in equal numbers to vote in elections which present a large measure of choice. We shrug it off as apathy.

When millions of Chinese march through the streets of Peking chanting slogans from the "little red book" of Chairman Mao's writings, we sometimes wonder why we Americans cannot gather to recite the great maxims of freedom upon which this nation was founded. We shrug it off as indifference.

And when whole nations seem to unanimously believe in the ideologies of Marx, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao, we wonder why we Americans cannot be unanimous in our belief in the ideologies of Jefferson and Jackson, Washington and Lincoln, Patrick Henry and John F. Kennedy, and all those other great Americans who have done so much to mold the character of our land.

We marvel and wonder about these things because we know that our elections represent the will of the people more truly than do those in the Soviet Union, we know that our slogans are as inspiring as those of Mao, and we know that our ideologies are truer than theirs.

Yet, we sometimes conclude from all this that we Americans are not a very patriotic people and that we do not take the duties of citizenship seriously. And others—especially our Communist adversaries—see us act as we do and conclude that we are "paper tigers" and that they will "bury us" in the corruption of our own cult of individualism.

But whenever anyone concludes such things, he greatly misjudges us. We are not paper tigers, and we do not cultivate a corrupt individualism. We are not an unpatriotic people who fail to take seriously the duties of citizenship.

And anyone who thinks we are does not understand—and we ourselves sometimes forget—the uniqueness of our tradition and history, for according to our way of life, a nation has obligations to its citizens before its citizens have duties to it. Our nation exists in order to secure our inalienable rights; it does not exist to promote its own greatness or the greatness of its leaders.

Our constitution was adopted in order to establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity. Our constitution enumerates a citizen's rights and not his duties; and throughout our history, we Americans have often demonstrated our willingness to defend, maintain, and preserve this constitution. And we shall defend it again whenever the need arises.

What those people who misjudge us fail to understand—and what we ourselves sometimes forget—is that our citizens do not have the duty to vote but the privilege of voting, for to be an American means that we are free to vote or not to vote; it means that the choice is ours.

Our citizens do not have the duty to support and respect those in power but more importantly the privilege of supporting and respecting them. Again the choice is ours, for to be an American means that we are free to support our leaders or not to support them.

And our citizens do not have the duty to believe in the ideals upon which our nation was founded but much more importantly, we Americans are free to believe in these ideals or not to believe in them as our reason dictates and not as a ruler dictates.

We must remember that the greatness of America lies in our ability to take our patriotism, our ideology, and our freedom for granted, for only a people whose freedom is not endangered by its government can. The individualism we cultivate is not corrupt; it is rather the high principled individualism which encourages the richness of diversity and the fullness of life.

We must try hard not to forget this greatness of America even when we are sometimes tempted to. If we are to be true to our heritage, we must not let extreme actions like draft-card burning or the waving of Viet Cong flags make us forget that we Americans are free in a way that few people are free anywhere else upon this earth and in a way that no one is free in Communist controlled lands.

We must remember that being a patriotic citizen does not require that we Americans wave our flag in the streets in order to prove that we love it anymore than the love of our wives and children requires that we make a display of them, nor that we chant verses from little red, white, and blue books while we march in our streets.

The only thing that proves whether or not one is truly a patriotic American is the extent of his love of and devotion to freedom—his own and everyone else's. It is not the boom of our rhetoric that matters nor the size of our demonstrations but rather the extent of our respect for the rights of others. The true test of American patriotism is the extent to which we as individuals are willing to go in defending freedom from attack, both from within our land and from beyond its borders.

The depth of this revolution, to be sure, sometimes requires that we be willing to fight to preserve this freedom, but at other times, it requires that we be tolerant of the acts of others when they are exercising freedom and not threatening it. The depth of this revolution, to be sure, requires that we present the case for freedom whenever the need and occasion arises, but it also requires that we sometimes listen to the sincere and honest disagreement of others, for the ability to express our disagreements is one of our greatest freedoms.

Devotion to freedom is a complex devotion; it is not simple minded as is the totalitarian devotion to conformity. For freedom in itself sometimes tends to be divisive and spawn repression. Thus freedom is a tender object which needs to be handled with care. We cannot abuse it - as extremists sometimes do - for freedom is fragile. We cannot repress it - as totalitarians do - for freedom is destructable. We can only love it - as we would a child - and protect it ... and nurture it ... sometimes tolerate it ... but always honor it.

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