

ON CHALLENGES TO TODAY'S YOUTH

I want those of you who are graduating from Northeast Academy to know that you are tonight in the presence of some very distinguished persons. Those persons are your parents and certainly they are some of the most remarkable people ever to walk on earth.

These are the people who within just five decades have increased expectancy by approximately 50%— who while cutting the working day by a third, have more than doubled per capita output.

These are the people who have given you a healthier world than they found. And because of this you no longer have to fear epidemics of flu, typhus, diphtheria, smallpox, scarlet fever, measles or mumps. And the dreaded polio is no longer a medical factor, while TB is almost unheard of.

These remarkable people lived through history's greatest depression. Many of these people have known what it is to be poor, to be hungry and cold. And because of this, they determined that it would not happen to you, that you would have a better life.

Because they were materialistic, you will work fewer hours, earn more, have more leisure, travel to more distant places, and have more chance to follow your life's ambition.*

But they will tell you, as I do, that all the battles have not been won and that young people today are offered a challenge that is greater than any ever offered to mankind before. For as we know, ours is an age of technological magic.

In spite of the accomplishments of your parents, our young people will in their lifetimes be given the chance to do mankind more good than all past generations of human beings combined have been able to do. Our young people will conquer still other diseases that now plague us. They will find ways of further extending man's active lifetime. They will build cities yet undreamed of. They will invent things so miraculous that they are to us inconceivable. They will solve problems yet unheard of. They will develop techniques which are beyond the limits of our imaginations. They will write, paint, and compose in idioms yet undevised. They will find ways of living on those unlivable parts of our planet. And they will travel into outer space as often as we go to the seashore.

Yet today's young people will also have to be more careful than we of past generations have been. For if they are careless, they can also do mankind more harm than has ever been done. The resources they will have at their command can destroy our world as well as develop it. Our young people will have to be careful not to squander our natural resources as we of earlier generations have done. They will have to be careful not to destroy our natural playgrounds, not to pollute beyond rescue our air, rivers, lakes, and oceans. And they will have to learn not to destroy each other in wars caused by having too much pride in our superiority. Instead, they will have to learn to be humble in the face of our greatness and not abuse or exploit those many peoples on this earth who are more unfortunate than we are. Men must learn to live together and to help one another and to conserve instead of consume if the promise of our young men and women is to be fulfilled by them.

Those of you who are about to graduate today must confront the challenge of this promise. Some of you will go on to earn higher degrees. Some of you will enter the world of business. Some may be artists. Some certainly will join the professions. And some of you may enter the field of government.

Some of you will be highly successful in your careers; some of you will not. Yet each and every one of you will in some way contribute to the future of mankind be it a happy or sad one. So each and every one of you should take some time to think seriously about what contribution you will make.

Every man wants his life to be worthwhile; yet we cannot all be great men. We cannot all be president, Picassos, or corporation executives. The question then of how a person can be certain of living a life that is worthwhile regardless of what you accomplish or what success you attain in your chosen career is an important one.

There is one way, however, that I think will ensure the worthiness of your honest efforts to be good men and women. When Solomon became king of Israel, he asked the Lord for a wise and understanding heart. Solomon knew that that was the key to making his life worthwhile. He knew that no amount of fame, no amount of power, and no great number of conquests could bring the benefits of a wise and understanding heart. Only with that can a man use his power and his knowledge and his conquests for the benefit of humanity.