

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS
NORTHEAST ACADEMY
LASKER, NORTH CAROLINA
MAY 26, 1972
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ON VIEWING IN PERSPECTIVE THE
PAST, PRESENT, & FUTURE

We Americans who are over thirty tend to think of ourselves as the descendents of our cultural past. Although we live in the present, we tend to draw our values from our forefathers. The ideals of great Americans like Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson mean a lot to us. We value patriotism, freedom, bravery, free-enterprise, self-reliance, the bill of rights, respect for our leaders, and all those other virtues that have played such a large role in making America the great nation it is today.

Our young people value these ideals too, but while we tend to think of ourselves in terms of our past, our young people tend to think of themselves in terms of the present. The past is not especially meaningful to them. Our young people are interested in now. They are the now-generation. They have their own concerns, their own wants, their own ideals, and their own life-style. Their concerns, their wants, their ideals and life-style--whether we want to admit it or not--are the result of the conditions of life that our young men and women have grown up in.

They are not the conditions that we who are over thirty grew up in, and if we honestly look back on our own lives, we will remember that we too had our own concerns when we were eighteen. The things that concerned us then are not the things that concern us today. When we were eighteen, we too had our own life-style, our own ideals, and our own wants. And we did not always agree with our elders.

But what all of us--both young and old--tend to forget is that our great forefathers also lived amid the conditions of their times; that they too had their own concerns and their own life-style. Of course, we honor those great men for the contributions they made to the American way of life, and we should continue to honor them and their contributions. But if we had to ask ourselves if these great men would live today as they lived then, we probably would have to answer, "No."

We must admit that times are not the same; we must admit that we simply cannot live in the past and survive. Yesterday's problems have long been solved; yesterday's ideals have, in many ways, long been attained; and yesterday's wants have long been fulfilled. This is a new day with its

own problems, its own ideals, and its own concerns.

But we must also realize that we cannot live in the present and survive either, for today's now is tomorrow's yesterday, and anyone who is to be a leader in our society must do his best to make Americans aware of the fact that we really live our lives in the future. A generation of people that concerns itself solely with the problems of today lives as much in the past as a generation that dreams of yesterday.

Someone once wrote that there are two ways of looking at this world of ours. We can see it as the twilight of evening or as the dawn of morning. We can think of anything as either a descendent or an ancestor. And although it is good for a man to realize that he is the heir of all the ages, it is even more important for him to realize that he is the ancestor of all the future. For the world of tomorrow will be the result of what we do today.

So I want to urge everyone here today--the young and the old--not to be preoccupied with either preserving the past or confronting the present. Neither of these ways of looking at the world are as important as thinking about

what the future will be like and what each and every one of us can do to make it better. We are never too young or too old to make a contribution to the betterment of mankind.

But if we are to match the contributions of our forefathers with those of our own, we must have the courage to avoid idolizing the past and being overcome by the present. We must have the courage to face the future, to face it squarely, to meet it head-on.

Bravery, of course, is never easy. And the kind of bravery I am talking about is even more difficult than usual. When a person risks his life to save another, he does not expect to have to do the same thing again tomorrow. But when you commit yourself to bettering the future, you commit yourself to a continuous struggle, to continuous acts of bravery.

You know, what you are or what you do today is not nearly as important as what you can someday be or what you can someday do, for we do not have to continue living as we are if that way of life will bring about an unlivable future. So as these young people leave this platform today, I would ask them to think of themselves

as pioneers in a new world, the world of tomorrow that they will have a hand in making. I would ask them not to let either the heritage of our past or the concerns of the present blind them to the challenges of the future.

And I would ask them to be brave, for the bravest are surely those who have the clearest vision of what is before them, whether it be glory or danger, and yet go out to meet it. It is in this way, and only in this way, that we will keep America great, for this remember is not only the land of the free but also the home of the brave.