

AMERICA'S THIRD CENTURY OF HOPE

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It has been almost two years now, since American troops were called back from Southeast Asia. I think we have been a little numb since then. Our troops came home. There was a series of Communist take-overs immediately in an area we had sworn to protect.

All across the Asian world, our allies began to question our intentions. Some realigned themselves, to deal with the new facts of life in their part of the world.

The story of what happened after we left Southeast Asia is beginning to trickle out. In Cambodia, especially, the fall of the government brought on a bloody period of mass reprisal. The Communists appear to have murdered hundreds of thousands of people -- perhaps as many as a million and a half.

In America, during the period immediately after the war, we began to go through a period of lowered self-confidence.

According to the Harris Poll, the people's confidence in their institutions went downhill to a spectacular degree. Every institution suffered -- the White House,

the Congress, the military services, medicine, big business, and higher education. These and many more appeared in the polls to have lost the confidence of the people.

Of course, this puts the issue backwards. Our institutions are nothing but ourselves, acting as individuals who join together to achieve a common good. All the polls really show is that we passed through a time of lowered confidence in ourselves.

In this mood, we ended our second century as a nation. But sometime during the Bicentennial Year, America's opinion of herself began to turn around. The Harris Poll

released March 14, begins with these words: "For the first time in a number of years, confidence in the leadership of the nation's major institutions -- particularly the White House, Congress, and the Supreme Court -- has begun to rise." Confidence in the Presidency has tripled. Confidence in the Congress has doubled. With the exception of the media and advertising, all the institutions have begun to come back from an all-time low.

I believe this means the crisis of self-respect is passing. We are on our way back. The two-hundredth Fourth of July probably was the turning point. We were forced to look back on our history, and see that we have had far more terrible times as a nation, and that we have

come through. That is the kind of realization adults make. You just have to have lived long enough to test your optimism. And we may well have lived long enough as a nation to leave the starry-eyed and fragile optimism of the young behind us, and to take on the resolute hopefulness of the adult.

America passed that Bicentennial Fourth of July in an atmosphere of sober optimism. I think a lot of people who had participated in our recent round of doubt and self-criticism suddenly realized they were patriots at heart. Not the shallow, flag-waving kind of patriot, but believers in something much quieter --

and far more lasting.

I think we don't need to worry about America. We have our troubles, but our sense of values is sound. Our values are being refined by adversity. We are learning, although we are learning by making some bad mistakes.

For a time, I thought America was going to turn isolationist after the Vietnam War. I feared we were going to pull back from our allies. But I do not believe that is going to happen. We still have no concrete sense of how we are going to act effectively as a force for good in this world, but I do believe we will find a way.

We are still somewhat confused about what our policy will be, but underneath that, there is still a bedrock moral sense in the American people which rebels at idea we are helpless in the face of worldwide injustice and cruelty. I get letters every day from people in North Carolina, proving this is true. The letters cry out against repression, torture, and violations of human dignity overseas. And they say, "Senator, please do something about this." They say: make America stand up for what she has always represented.

of his government.

And when he dreams of the one place on earth where he could say what he wants, and go where he wants, without fear of a secret police -- it is America he dreams of.

And still, in too many corners of the world, there are human beings who feel the lash of civil barbarism, of government by terror. Such people dream, I am sure.

They dream of an unbelievable country in which the arm of authority does not always hold a club above the people's heads. And when they dream so, they dream of America. Ours is that unbelievable nation.



I know what America stands for.

Somewhere in this world, right now, there is a man scratching out a meager living, in a country with no tradition of economic freedom, and with no resources to make that kind of freedom possible.

And when that man stands up from his plow, and wipes away the sweat, and allows himself to dream for just a moment of a place he could prosper by his effort --- it is America he dreams of.

And somewhere in this world at this moment -- perhaps in one of the nations of Eastern Europe -- there is a man who stops what he is doing, suddenly sick of the repressiveness

If the world could wake up from its nightmare,  
this country is what it would wake up to. We think  
everybody hates us. But recently, when we were suffering  
the coldest winter in memory, individual citizens of  
West Berlin collected \$575,000 in small donations to  
be sent to the Americans hardest hit by the cold.

That is a small thing, but I think it is a sign of  
the good will many people have for us. The Berliners  
said the money was a token of gratitude for the help we  
gave them thirty years ago.

We need to hear these reassuring things. They are  
signs all is far from lost. Such a sign, I believe, is

our President's challenging the Soviet Premier to  
debate the principles by which our societies live.

Where we go from here in foreign policy I am not  
certain. We have, I believe, made a good start in  
bearing witness for our way of life. In the future,  
we will need to find new and creative ways to relate  
to other nations. I believe we will have to have a  
realistic sense of what we can and cannot do about  
repression in foreign nations. We cannot overestimate  
how much we can do, and how quickly. Neither can we  
stand helplessly by.

But I believe we can accomplish much. We as a people

have displayed such a genius for self-government, for solving great problems, that we are the wonder of the earth. Again and again, we have met and prevailed over the problems of mistaken direction and mistaken judgement, and we shall prevail again.

If there is anything which should be called American know-how, it is not the knack of building machines, but the knack of confronting problems which have ruined government after government, and defeated nation after nation. And I know where that kind of expertise comes from.

The key is found in something I said earlier.

I said that America's confidence in her institutions

is nothing more than our own confidence in ourselves.

We are our institutions. Our governmental institutions are not created by any outside force. We do it. Our schools do not come into existence by themselves. We have them because people care. Louisburg College came into being by the vision and labor of human beings, and it continues and thrives for the same reason.

The point I am making is this: America works from the grass roots up. It does not work from Washington, down. If the way to a new foreign policy is to be found, to sustain us over the years to come, it will really have to be derived from the spirit of the people. We are a nation

which operates by consensus. Unless a leader sums up that consensus in his policy, he cannot lead very long. There are many nations in which a government can impose its will upon the people, but America is not one of them.

This means that the greatest burden is placed on those who educate, for the responsibility of government lies with us all. It lies with the many, not the few.

That is why I was so displeased to see the Harris Poll indicate, over the years, that one of the institutions declining in the people's confidence was higher education. And that is why it was so heartening to see the latest poll. Along with the others, higher education is on the

rise in public esteem. Or, to put it the way I think it should be: we are regaining confidence in ourselves as educators.

This is the most hopeful sign of all. There are some who want education to stay away from the teaching of values. But I feel all education involves the transmission of values.

I said, to begin with, that America's values were solid, even if our sense of direction became temporarily confused. But these values are the result of education -- education from one's parents at the kitchen table, or from a minister, or from a beloved teacher. And that kind

of education needs to be strengthened. The whole structure of our institutions depends on it, because those institutions are nothing more than our collective will.

Louisburg college is made for that kind of transmission of values. It is small, religiously affiliated, and old enough to have a sense of tradition. I believe the school and others like it would try to inculcate a kind of self-respect in our young people which will manifest itself in future Harris Polls.

I wish we would put less emphasis on the picture of the individual as the victim of society, and as the pawn of those institutions I have been talking about. I wish we would emphasize the ideal of the individual as a



competent member of society, responsible to himself  
and to others for the kind of society he decides to  
create. I hope our young people are through spelling  
"America" with a "k." To do that is to see yourself  
as a victim, or to call yourself a name -- for there  
is no America but ourselves.

I have a bumper sticker on my car which sums it all  
up very well. It says, "Improving America begins with me."  
I think that in her third century, America will see much  
improvement, although we will have our usual share of trial  
and crisis. America's institutions will regain their  
rightful place in the respect of the people, which is just

another way of saying we will regain our self-respect.

We have gone down a long, dark corridor. I believe we are emerging into the light. But the light that leads us is not that which the editorial writers used to call "the light at the end of the tunnel." It is the light each and every one of us, in the privacy of his heart, carries within himself.