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MID-YEAR COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS
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THE CHALLENGE OF THE NEW ERA

Yesterday in Washington I participated in the inauguration of a new government -- one which, I deeply believe, will measure up to the enormous challenges and opportunities facing us all at home and abroad.

Today here in Ann Arbor I am delighted to participate in another inauguration, one which marks new beginnings for all of you as you move ahead to take up your own individual roles in this dangerous yet promising new era in American history.

In recent months there has been much discussion and concern about our future as a nation and a people.

Although in most walks of our national life we have not been doing as well as we are capable of doing, I believe we are now on the threshold of a new national thrust of energy, conviction and accomplishment.

In the years ahead I am convinced that our potential for good far outweighs the formidable dangers we face, that you are extraordinarily fortunate to be starting your adult lives in this period, that the problems we face, although vast and unfamiliar, can be mastered, and that this process of accomplishment can be one of the most exciting and worthwhile tasks any generation has ever tackled.

The new generation of problems calls for a new generation of people. The challenge to young Americans has never been greater since the day when a 32-year-old Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence. It is fitting that our newly elected President is the youngest in our history, and the confidence, conviction, and idealism with which he

approaches domestic and world affairs reflect this fact. Happily for many of us, this does not necessarily eliminate everyone over 43 from public service. But it does mean that regardless of birthdays, the prime requisite will be an ability to get in step with the pace of events, the rate of change, and the speed of history.

In today's world we must gear ourselves to the momentum of change or be left behind by events. In many areas, old methods and old attitudes must give way to the new.

In the most effective possible way we must learn how to combine a willingness to be venturesome with a sense of responsibility, of history, tradition and moral values.

We are confronted with a whole new world and entirely new sets of relationships within that world -- from medical science to space law, from labor-management relations to the critically complicated challenge of disarmament. Views and assumptions which a previous generation of Americans have taken for granted are being jolted abruptly, and the jolts will continue to come thick and fast.

My own generation faced a similar although more limited challenge in the early thirties when the sudden collapse of our economy shocked us out of our easy assumptions that money, at least for the fortunate few, grew on trees. Our response was bold, pragmatic, and creative. Ultimately, we found the means of releasing again the limitless capacity of the American people and their economic system for new records of material accomplishment and individual opportunity.

Admittedly, the present challenge involves far more than jobs, pay increases, and material comforts. Now for the first time in our history, our destiny is tied to that of hundreds of millions of other human beings whose objectives, hopes, and fears appear different from our own, but who, like ourselves, are contending with new forces of massive strength and uncertain direction.

Yet I believe there is every reason for measured confidence in our capacity to meet this new challenge with honor and success.

The first essential step is to understand the forces with which we must contend, and throughout America a major re-examination is already underway in earnest. During the recent months I have seen it and felt it not only on college campuses like Michigan, but in crossroads and byways around the nation, in busses and in supermarkets, in grocery stores, in the State Department, and on Capitol Hill.

The re-examination in regard to America's relation with the world strikes me as particularly hopeful. The vastly oversimplified views of the world struggle which most of us accepted without serious question a decade ago are now giving way to a much more sophisticated and realistic consideration of what we are up against.

Let us review briefly the stages of American thinking about world affairs which succeeded one another in the 1950's.

A little over ten years ago the North Korean Army, armed and directed by the Kremlin, struck without warning across the Southern border. Suddenly we found ourselves face to face with the hard, aggressive military aspect of world Communism.

Before this invasion occurred, we had comfortably assumed that Soviet military power, although great, was not likely to be used in outright aggression. As a result, our military forces had been reduced well below the danger point.

In our hurry to redress this error, we rushed to the other extreme: Constructive, creative programs such as the Marshall Plan and Point Four were downgraded. Foreign policy became centered on military force and military alliances.

Since matters of military policy, in the public mind, are largely the concern of the experts, generals, admirals, and heads of government, this helped create an almost fatalistic national mood. The

challenge of world Communism had suddenly emerged as largely a military challenge. As a practical matter, therefore, the ordinary citizen felt little direct responsibility. What indeed could he do except pay his taxes cheerfully and hope that our military authorities really knew their jobs?

With Stalin's death in 1953 we gradually moved towards broader interpretation of the world contest. As Mr. Khrushchev threatened to "bury" us economically rather than militarily, we began to look beyond the very real Soviet military threat to the economic aspects of the world conflict.

Thus we became increasingly conscious of the burgeoning Soviet economy, its rapid growth rate, and its concentration on heavy industry.

Although this broader view of the world challenge was a long step toward reality, it still left the individual American in the role of an anxious, but not yet directly involved, bystander. Global economic problems, like modern military problems, are infinitely complex. In the minds of many, if not most, Americans they seem to belong to the great corporations, the great labor unions, and to the distant federal government. And so, while accepting in a general way the dangers which confront us in world affairs we were inclined to view them as beyond our power to influence or even fully to understand.

Unless I am sadly mistaken we are now rapidly developing a broader more sophisticated, and more personal view. We are beginning to suspect that the future may not necessarily belong to the nations which can produce or set off the most rockets or even make the most bathtubs.

We are beginning to understand that the contest goes beyond both guns and butter to the fundamental question of the meaning, promise, and relevance of our free democratic society.

In its broadest and most realistic sense, we are coming to see that the struggle is between two widely varying interpretations of the

meaning of life: one which believes in the inherent dignity of the human individual, the other which believes that man was born to serve the state.

Consequently, our attention is shifting from the question of how our society can survive, to what we Americans have to offer. Without neglecting the essential military mechanics of survival, the pertinent question is not simply How but Why.

As members of a free society, we must strive not only for survival but to maintain the right of future generations to continue to live in open societies.

The point about a free society is that it is an open society, not a vacant one. It is open for inventiveness in statecraft as well as in science, for controversy in public as well as in private, for competition in ideas as well as in goods, for incentive for leadership as well as for leisure.

Obviously our free society faces some formidable disadvantages when it is called upon to share the world with closed totalitarian societies, particularly so when those closed societies have announced their determination to demolish it. But our free and open society is the only kind of society that gives meaning and purpose to life, and if we are to keep it, we must see that our individual, family, college, and professional lives are freer, more constructive, and more active than the lives we might lead if we lived in a closed totalitarian society.

For people do manage to exist in closed societies. Long before the Soviet Union and Communist China, hundreds of millions of people had lived their full span of years in closed societies.

In such a society the risks are very great, for no one knows when the police will knock at the door at night, or when the leadership will decide to snuff out a few more lives in a sudden burst of terror.

Although we may marvel at their ability to do so, millions of people manage somehow to exist under conditions which appear to us suffocating.

If we were free to ask them, and they were free to tell us, what differences would there be which both we and they would recognize?

The common lot of the 800 million people who live under Communist rule consists of hard physical work in return for the bare essentials of life, uncritically believing what the newspapers say, avoiding controversy, sticking resolutely to safe thoughts and simple comments, concentrating on the safe and the unspectacular, never probing, arguing, writing, speaking.

As members of an open, free society, how can we successfully compete with a closed, totalitarian society of this kind?

Only by living by significantly different values and for significantly different goals. Only by learning to make use of the freedom that our open society provides to do the things others cannot do because of their closed one.

We must accentuate the use of that marginal element in our lives which really is different from theirs -- that goes beyond the essentials of eating, sleeping, and keeping alive, to the individual, distinguishing element that enables us to be different.

We must concentrate as free individuals in making use of our margin for living free lives, the margin which the threat of fear, eavesdropping, secret police, and regimentation stifles in the closed society.

Essential to this process is a clear understanding of the revolutionary changes which are taking place in the world beyond our own shores, and a vigorous communication of this understanding to our children.

Whether or not free societies such as ours continue to exist and prosper in tomorrow's world will depend not only on defenses, and the vitality of our economy, but even more perhaps on our deep convictions with regard to human freedom, and our moral commitment to the rights of the individual and on our capacity and willingness to think and act in the great democratic tradition.

The conflict between the closed Communist societies and our own open one is far more than a conflict between rival defense establishments, rival economies, rival espionage systems, or rival Summit negotiators. It is a conflict that touches directly the lives, the energy, the sense of purpose, and the faith of each one of us.

The task of working the world out of its Cold War impasse may, of course, prove to be beyond human capacity. At best, much of it depends on influences and events beyond our control.

Our capacity to achieve a meaningful existence rests squarely on our capacity to generate sufficient power to assert ourselves constructively and responsibly as individuals.

Moreover, freedom itself cannot be indefinitely confined by national borders and cold war battle lines. Is it possible that behind the ruthless, totalitarian leadership of Communist China, humanistic sparks may still be smouldering and that out of the ashes may again arise the creative genius which made possible the long miracle of Chinese civilization?

Can the Kremlin open the laboratories of the Soviet Union to the inquiring young minds necessary for scientific achievement while still denying the right to think about, and absorb, the great truths of human history?

Those who believe truly and deeply in the worth of the individual and the power of the ideal of freedom cannot accept as inevitable the denial of freedom for any portion of the human race.

But whatever we do, let us not become so preoccupied with the forces and counterforces within China and Russia, that we neglect to do the great and good things we are able to do among the majority of mankind for whom Communism is still an unappealing foreign ideology.

All of the major civilizations of the non-Communist world have been built on the proposition that man is more than a chemical accident. All religions are committed to that proposition.

We know that man is surrounded by belief and lives for a purpose. We have no need to discover or invent new principles or ideologies to live by. Indeed we have only to reach back to the values of the past and merge them with the opportunities of the future.

If we reanchor ourselves to the great ideas of all time, we will have more than enough of the moral strength we need to make judgments, to set our course, and to persevere.

Moreover, we will once more have standards for self-judgment.

We will see more clearly than we have in the past that our national economic growth will not be maintained by half-empty factories and uneven employment.

We will realize that the promise of America cannot be fulfilled through a half-hearted fulfillment of our national commitment to human rights and individual dignity for all.

We will understand that in the context of the challenge of the 20th century, we have not been put here on earth merely to build better bathtubs than the Russians.

I do not suggest that the path ahead is easy. On the contrary our tasks will be gruelling, difficult, and at times thankless ones.

Yet we have all we need for the task before us, and I am confident that the rewards of living in the days ahead will be measured by the sense of achievement, patriotism, and personal accomplishment that will go to those Americans who involve themselves in participating

in the long-term effort of moving our national policies into constructive, active, positive channels.

This is the exciting promising kind of world into which my generation was born -- a world where, on three continents, Ghandi, Wilson, and Sun Yat-sen represented triumphant moving forces of wider freedom and more significant life.

In your parents' and my lifetime, this world has been put on the defensive by the impact of two world wars and the revolutionary forces which have accompanied and followed them.

Today two-thirds of the people of the world are in the throes of the greatest revolution of all time: Men and women once doomed to endless poverty, misery, and disease are reaching out for more dignity and expanding economic opportunities.

We are now challenged to understand the nature of this revolutionary world, to recapture the power and purpose of our own great democratic revolution, to explore the destructive, negative forces at work in Communist societies, and to put ourselves in touch with the aspirations of the people in between -- the men and women and children of Asia, Africa and Latin America who are looking for America to recapture the vision of Jefferson, Lincoln, Wilson and Roosevelt.

This is not simply a challenge to your generation, it is a direct challenge to each of you individually.

I have suggested that as a member of our free society you have not only the opportunity but the responsibility carefully to consider the major questions of our time, to develop an understanding of the promise of American society, the massive capacity of our industrial system, the need for improved and expanded education, and for increased racial understanding.

I have also suggested that the thoughtful citizen can no longer limit his interests and his experiences to the narrow confines of his

own country. Human freedom today is increasingly indivisible and the great truths which have shaped our attitudes and policies in the past are universal truths. If we are to preserve freedom in America, we must work to expand it throughout the world.

If you should accept this advice, you will have an opportunity to become a constructive force in your community and you will have the satisfaction of active participation in the great human adventure.

Yet in all fairness, I should warn you that the course which I have suggested will subject you to criticism, and not all of it will be rational or restrained.

It is a clear certainty, for instance, that on occasion you will find yourself described as "controversial".

However, in this respect at least you will find yourselves in excellent company. For no American leader from George Washington to the present day who expressed a worthwhile view, or who was concerned with the primary direction and purpose of our society and the means by which we can best apply our strength and resources, has managed to escape this charge.

As Woodrow Wilson once told the graduating class at Annapolis:

> "There have been other nations as rich as we; there have been other nations as powerful; there have been other nations as spirited; but I hope we shall never forget that we created this nation, not to serve ourselves, but to serve mankind. No other nation was ever born into the world with the purpose of serving the rest of the world just as much as it served itself."

As we recapture that sense of purpose at all levels of American society, we may find restored to us the quiet wisdom of that ancient faith which has come down through the ages in Romans 5:3-4: "We glory in tribulations; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope."