

REMARKS

VICE PRESIDENT HUBERT HUMPHREY

FFA CONVENTION

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It's always a pleasure to be with my friends of the FFA.

You are the younger generation. You are the people who will build the future. You are the people who will practice good citizenship and responsibility.

You exemplify what is right with young people in America.

But there are other young people who would not at all be at home in this convention.

What is the younger generation coming to?

Our universities are turning out the brightest, best-educated graduates in history. But at the same time we face a national problem of school dropouts.

The juvenile crime rate increases year-by-year. But at the same time our young people volunteer by the thousands for the Peace Corps, for VISTA, for public service.

Our country is a young country. It always has been.

The average age of the signers of the Declaration of Independence was 45. And that includes Benjamin Franklin, who was 70 at the time. Thomas Jefferson, who drafted the Declaration, was only 33 then.

Today the average United States Senator is less than 58 years old. The average Representative is about 50.

The average newcomer to the Congress is 44, the youngest Senator 32, the youngest Representative 25. Ten million young people were able to vote for the first time in 1964. Today more than one-half of the electorate is less than 35, and by 1966 more than one-half of the people will be less than 25. Our own President held his first Presidential appointment at 27 and his first political office at 29.

In America, more than any other place in the world, man can rise as rapidly as his talents let him. Youth is no barrier. You can feel it in the vigor, the vitality in the streets of American cities . . . in the competitive spirit of American business . . . in the productivity of the American farm.

The author Thomas Wolfe wrote it a generation ago:

"To every man his chance, to every man regardless of his birth, his shining golden opportunity -- to every man the right to live, to work, to be himself and to become whatever thing his manhood and his vision can combine to make him."

And so we ask: Will today's young American be able to keep America safe and free? Will he be able to extend the benefits of mankind to a world filled with injustice and despair? Will he be filled, as Americans in the past, with the desire to make things better?

Today we are in a period of unprecedented prosperity. I cannot help feeling that prosperity is a more severe test of character than adversity. Though young people today enjoy luxuries my generation never knew, they are also exposed to pressures and frustrations we never encountered.

Young Americans today live in a world that has the capacity to destroy itself. And you know that the detonators are in the hands of the older generation.

You are also conscious of the fact that, in our affluent society, there are more people of your age than there are jobs to go around. The number of workers 18 and 19 years old is expected to increase by half a million this year -- twice the increase of last year. Before 1970, more than 3 million young people will enter the labor force each year.

Those without training and skills will face a bleak future. The unemployment rate for the young already is more than three times as high as for older workers. We are past the time when a living, even a humble one, can be made without anything but willing hands.

Our country does not owe anybody a living, but it does owe its young people at least the opportunity to work. Government and private industry are now alert to this problem, and we are doing everything we can to help. There are Youth Opportunity Centers, the Poverty Program, the Job Corps, the Neighborhood Youth Corps, the Community Action Programs.

Of course, youth must be willing to work, and most of them are. I have spoken to thousands of young people at Job Corps camps and other training centers. Many come from broken homes; many are barely able to read and write. Almost all have been bitterly disappointed in their short lives. Yet most are determined to pick up their second chance, acquire new skills and face the world with hope.

Even more impressive are the thousands of young Americans who have an acute conscience about their own generation and want to help the less fortunate. They are intelligent, courageous, well-informed young people, willing to work long hours for little or no pay to correct what they feel is injustice.

Some of the student protests, picketing, marches, and sit-ins have caused dismay among the older generation. Frankly, I have shared this dismay because some of the issues, in my view, have been false. But I must admit that America today might be a better place if the people of my generation had shown the same awareness.

Fiery speeches and angry placards on the campus are, to my mind, far less dangerous to our nation's future than the silence that stifles new ideas. Age in itself is no guarantee of wisdom.

In a world changing as rapidly as ours, there can be as many old fools as young fools.

Young Americans who get into trouble, who rebel against the established order, are often the most alert.

Who of our older generation has not been a rebel?

I have been one, and so has our President. Lyndon Johnson was a school dropout who left his native Texas to work with his hands in the fields of California. But he returned to enter college and begin his career as a teacher in a Mexican-American public school. His former students still remember him as a man who gave them knowledge and encouragement to face a world that all too often seemed stacked against them.

He has said: "No one knows better than I the fires that burn in the hearts of young men who yearn for the chance to do better what they see their elders doing not well . . . or not doing at all."

Today's young people -- as students, as citizens, yes, even as demonstrators -- are showing that they, too, want to do better. Of course, we have our beatniks. There have been beatniks in every age. Some of them are now listed among the world's leading artists, writers and musicians. Gauguin was a beatnik. So were Van Gogh and Edgar Allan Poe.

But I am less concerned with the eccentricities of genius, which can flower in the most unlikely soil, than I am with the mass of our young people today. I don't find them a "beat" generation at all, and I have met them by the thousands across this great country.

Our young people are a healthy and wholesome generation, less hypocritical, more frank than we were at their age. They speak more openly about sex, religion, politics and other subjects that used to be taboo.

In the age of computers, satellites and almost instant communication, they are also more intelligent and competent. For this is the age of excellence.

Not long ago, I visited the nuclear aircraft carrier Enterprise and I was amazed to find boys under 20 manning consoles of multimillion-dollar radar equipment. Those boys were responsible for the safety of American pilots and million-dollar aircraft miles away at sea. At Loring Air Force Base, I talked with a boy working under a jet plane. I said: "I understand you are pretty good at keeping these planes in tip top shape."

He said: "No, Mr. Vice President, we're not pretty good. We're the best." And they are.

No fewer than one-quarter of the members of our armed services are under 20. They are the finest young men this country has ever produced.

A poll in a national news magazine recently asked American students how far they would go -- beyond mere talk -- to support a cause in which they believed. Some 93 per cent said they would sign a petition; 72 per cent had already done so. Some 87 per cent said they would contribute money; 58 per cent had already done so. Forty-three per cent were even ready to go to jail.

More than 10,000 young volunteers are now serving in the Peace Corps. Another 3,000 have already returned after tours of duty. But most significant, more than 100,000 have asked to take part in this bold and idealistic experiment. When VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America -- the domestic Peace Corps) was launched, more than 3,000 inquiries were received from young people on the first day of business. The President has called this generation the Volunteer Generation.

I think you know by now that I have faith in your young generation.

Your generation is not complacent. It does not turn inward to seek its own security.

Your generation is filled with a spirit that says: Change what is wrong . . . give of yourself . . . be involved . . . be committed . . . do not be satisfied with mediocrity . . . take part in life.

And it is this spirit our nation will need for survival, and for leadership, in a time when man possesses more power, more knowledge, more potential for destructiveness or for human fulfillment than in all time before us.

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Most of you were not yet born when this nuclear age began. You, in your lifetimes, have it within you to make this age mankind's final chapter, or to make it the preface to a new era of human expression and happiness.

I believe our future is in good hands. It is in your hands. Make the most of it.

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