

REMARKS

VICE PRESIDENT HUBERT HUMPHREY

UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT

OCTOBER 19, 1965

Good morning to all of you, a very good morning.
And to those of you who speak French as a first or
second language, "Bon Jour!"

It is a new day and good day and a great day for
all Americans. We are on the move here in the
United States -- with creative ideas, bold enterprises,
new undertakings of great promise for our national life.

This is the good morning of a greater day -- a
morning such as Wordsworth had in mind when he wrote:

"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven."

It's about some of the things that are moving in America that I want to talk with you today. They will be a vital part of the world in which you live, and many of you, I hope, will help to shape them and carry them forward.

I shall speak first about something we Americans are undertaking for the first time anywhere in the world, for the first time in all of recorded history.

I refer to the all-out war against poverty, and for opportunity, which is now entering its second year.

In all the many languages of mankind, ancient and modern, there is a word for poverty -- and in all it has the same bitter taste in the mouth.

Many have accepted poverty as inevitable. But, throughout history, men have arisen to protest it in

words of burning eloquence. For example, in the time of Oliver Cromwell three centuries ago John Lilburne roundly declared:

"The poorest he that is in England has a life to live as the richest he."

These were great words, but they could not then nor for centuries later be translated into deeds. When everything was scarce, only a few could live decently and the many had to go short.

Thanks to the miracles of science and technology, that is no longer so here in America. We have the means, and the resources, to rid ourselves once and for all of the scourge of poverty -- if we have the determination, and I believe we do.

We have rolled up our sleeves, and we are getting to work. And we won't stop until they revise the dictionaries, and until you see after "poverty" the designation "obsolete" -- or even "archaic."

I think that, here in the heart of Yankee territory, you'll approve the way we're going about it.

The headquarters of the war against poverty is called the Office of Economic Opportunity.

Note that word "opportunity." It expresses our conviction that, given half a chance, people can do much more for themselves than anyone else can do for them.

Yes, "God helps them that helps themselves," as old Ben Franklin said -- a true Yankee in spirit, even if he was a Pennsylvanian. But the Bible makes it very clear that ye are indeed our brothers' keepers. We have the duty to help others to help themselves.

That's just what we're doing in the poverty program. And, in the best Yankee tradition, we're starting with the most basic thing of all -- education.

There are many figures, many statistics which demonstrate the close relation between inadequate education and poverty. I'll cite only one.

A youngster who drops out before he graduates from high school is twice as likely -- twice as likely -- to wind up among the long-term unemployed as a high school graduate.

Now, many of those who drop out do so because they were behind from the very beginning, and could never quite catch up. These are, for the most part, children who lack in their homes the cultural advantages that more fortunate youngsters enjoy.

Well begun is half done -- so that's why we have, as an important part of the poverty program, Operation Head Start -- eight-week pre-school courses to help under-privileged youngsters get off to a good start from their very first day at school.

This program alone involved over 560,000 youngsters in more than 13,000 communities last summer -- and I understand you have had very satisfactory experience with it here in Vermont.

There's another part of the poverty program that's very much in the Yankee tradition -- the Community Action program. That means encouraging and assisting people in local communities to get together and help each other and themselves.

Your ancestors here in New England didn't need any outside encouragement to do it. As soon as they had cleared a patch of wilderness and built a village, they were busy organizing to help one another.

It's not like that in the asphalt wilderness of our city slums. There's a deep apathy and discouragement and there's a tragic degree of social disorganization.

But we have found that it is possible to get people organized and working together. And when they speak up for themselves, they are heard. It's the squeaking wheel that gets the grease.

I want also to mention VISTA -- Volunteers in Service to America. Here is an opportunity to render the kind of service at home -- in the urban and rural slums of America -- that the Peace Corps does abroad.

I know that some of you will find this the kind of challenge to which you're impelled to respond.

They used to talk of our young people as "the silent generation" -- although here at this University I hear that you speak up freely and often.

I say right here and now that there's nothing silent or apathetic about this generation of young people. Indeed, in the words of President Johnson, it is the "volunteer generation."

There's more to this war on poverty -- and for opportunity -- than I can talk about today.

It's new, it's experimental, it's highly controversial. That's good, in my view. The only way you can avoid being controversial is to sit still and do nothing.

We've been talking for years about the "revolution of rising expectations" as if it were something happening a long distance away -- in Asia, Africa, or Latin America.

Well, we might as well face up to it -- it's also going on right here in the United States.

That's why the war against poverty is an important part -- an increasingly important part -- of the struggle for equal rights for all Americans.

Not all Negroes are poor, of course. Over half of all Negro families are above the poverty line, even by the generous standards we use in America.

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But a tragically high proportion of them are poor -- and poor by any standards.

The decisions of the Supreme Court, the actions of Congress, and the inspired and effective leadership of President Johnson have opened up to our Negro citizens doors which have been closed to them for generations.

But many of them are not yet ready to step through these doors into the America of wider opportunity beyond.

We must help them to do so.

I have talked of problems which concern all Americans. Now I turn to an opportunity of particular interest to the people of Vermont and of New England generally.

Last month the Congress enacted and the President signed into law the Public Works and Economic Development Act.

This Act, like the Area Redevelopment Act of 1961, is intended to help those areas of our country which have not fully participated in the vigorous economic upsurge of the past few years.

This Act builds upon the experience we have accumulated in the four years of the Area Redevelopment Administration. But it adds something new and important.

It encourages neighboring states -- states sharing similar economic problems and aspirations -- to get together and work together.

I know that you in New England have problems. I know that you have hopes, and that you are willing to work hard to achieve these hopes.

I don't need to tell you that you can work much more effectively together than separately -- indeed, I am told that your state officials and the faculty of this University are already thinking in terms of close cooperation with your good New England neighbors.

And, as I'm thinking about good neighbors, I want to say a few words about Canada -- so near this campus that, I'm told, you can see it on a clear day from the chapel tower.

An eminent Mexican once exclaimed: "Poor Mexico!
So far from God and so near the United States!"

I suspect that a similar thought may have occurred to
Canadians from time to time, expressed in French or English
instead of Spanish.

The fact that we share a 3000-mile boundary and that
our two economies -- despite the rapid progress Canada
has made -- are very different in size does give rise to
problems from time to time.

We had one recently in connection with automobiles
and automotive products, but we were able to resolve it
in a fashion satisfactory to both sides. In fact, there has
always been enough statesmanship and vision on both sides
of the boundary to meet the problems as they occur and to
take full advantage of the many opportunities for fruitful
cooperation -- and there always will be.

You here in Vermont can help us particularly to understand the hopes and concerns of French-speaking Canada. You look north to Montreal and Quebec as well as south to Boston. And I understand that many French-Canadians have settled here, and have contributed their energy and vitality to the development of your state.

I have spoken of some of the ways in which, under President Johnson's leadership, we are building the Great Society here at home.

I shall conclude by reminding you that this Great Society isn't intended to stop at the water's edge.

President Johnson made that clear once again when he spoke last month at the Bicentennial Celebration of the Smithsonian Institution.

The Great Society, he said, "is not just an American dream. All are welcome to share in it. All are welcome to contribute to it."

And he declared on that occasion that he will present to Congress in January a new program designed to assist the educational efforts of the developing nations and regions and to help our own schools and universities increase our knowledge of these nations and their problems.

I wish that one of your own most eminent citizens had been alive and present in the distinguished audience that heard the President's words. I refer, of course, to Senator Morrill.

Just as he sought, through the land-grant colleges which the Morrill Act established, to make higher education available to the hard-working many as well as the privileged few, so President Johnson is proposing that we help to

widen and deepen the educational opportunities of the poorer peoples of the world.

Yes, this is a great morning, in our nation, and in the world. In the words of the old Negro spiritual, it's a "great getting-up morning."

It's a time to get up and get going. There is scope and purpose for all of your energy, all of your ability, and all of your idealism.

Most of you have an important advantage over me. You are young, whereas I only feel young. I envy you the world you will live to see, and I envy you even more the opportunities you will have to share in building it.

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