

Address by
Honorable Hubert H. Humphrey
Vice President of the United States
At
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan
June 12, 1966



"Yours is the opportunity to prove in the world what the generation of your parents has already begun to prove in America: That the course of history is not a mindless juggernaut we are powerless to control, but a fresh challenge susceptible to courageous action in each generation."



Hubert Humphrey feels a kinship with college students.

I like to be where the action is.

I was raising Cain with the system before you were born. And as I am just beginning to get started, I don't doubt that I will be raising Cain when you are running things, too.

In fact, I wish I were being graduated today. I might have a better idea where my next job is coming from.

Today, I speak in a relatively new role. I speak for management.

As management's spokesman, I wish first to thank you for service to your nation.

The View From Management

In all these years of study, I am sure you thought you were improving your position to compete in the years ahead or to enter a profession. But you today are more than college graduates.

From management's viewpoint, you are valuable national resources.

More Americans are in college this year than all the Americans alive when our nation was founded. More Americans are in graduate schools today than all the Americans who bore arms during the Revolution. Those are lots of resources.

And we will need them all.

For, by the time one of you is likely to stand in this place at some future Commencement, the American people will number more than 300 million—and the people in the world almost too many to even think about.

And I need not recite for you the future needs and problems of those people.

You will be in charge. You will be responsible for our national security and my medicare.

You will be responsible for the education of my grandchildren and the freedom of my great-grandchildren.

So I propose to take a look at you and have a talk with you.

About Your Parents

But first, about your parents. . . .

It may be hard to believe but, in another century's history books, the very people who have been helping with your tuition may be ranked among the greatest radicals in modern history.

Some of your parents might flinch if you told them there were radicals in your family. But they have been nothing less.

Theirs is the first generation in all of history which, by its own hand, has surrendered the privilege of telling its offspring: This is how things are; this is how they always have been; this is the way the world goes.

Your fathers and mothers were born children of hills and valleys. Today, they see the galaxy itself.

They have created amazing new systems of management, science and technology.

They have fought and won wars.

They have designed and created international political and economic institutions that they hoped might help keep the peace.

They have revitalized an economy that was faltering and made it vibrant and successful.

They have found new and better systems to care for people.

Looking Backward

And I have been right in the midst of it with them, just as I am with you.

I am not going to bore you with tales of the Great Depression, or of World Wars, and of the hardships your parents faced.

Nor will I recount the struggles that took place in our country to achieve the measure of well-being and social justice we have reached today.

But I can tell you, it has been no picnic. It has been no improvised "happening."

It has taken involvement, and hard work, and study, and self-doubt, and passionate disagreement, and finally, understanding and motion.

Progress has ridden no fast express. It has been a local all the way.

Thus, as older generations welcome you aboard, I think you ought to know that they've not been cooling their heels waiting for you.

The generation of your parents has lived amid the floodwaters of history. Most of them have known genuine hardship. Many of them have lost loved ones on other continents. Their old horizons have gone far off in space, yet they have followed, cautious but willing. The world has come to their dinner table, and at times has seemed to stay a long while, yet they remain hospitable.

They have made history. Yet to many of you, I know, it seems "the heavy hand of history."

Remember this: The challenges they have faced didn't leave room for some of the niceties of today.

They have had to meet trouble in large sizes.

They have had to feed and clothe and house and transport and produce and educate and struggle in big portions, just to overcome the clear and present perils of their time.

Individualism has been the backbone and concern of their work. Yet, to serve the individual, they have had to build on a scale which has seemed at times to dwarf the individual.

By and large they have been, I believe, a resourceful and courageous generation.

Looking Forward

And now, to you, I know, it seems they have hidden their history.

Over the battlefield they have laid out the golf course.

For those of you who have grown up within putting distance of a country club or within walking distance of a second car, it is hard, I know, to recognize many vestiges of their radicalism.

But they were radicals. They broke through.

They made the beginnings, the great beginnings, of a better America.

"Where's the action now?" you ask.

And I reply: There's plenty of action. Roll up your sleeves and have some.

There's work to be done right here in Michigan—in all the 50 states of our union. And there's work to be done in the world.

Not merely to protest injustices, but to do something about them—that's where the action is.

That's why God gave youth to the young. Otherwise He might have given it to the elderly.

Your parents had to fight desperately, at your age, to stave off poverty at home and violence abroad—and they in large part succeeded.

Yet the challenges you face are far greater, and far more exciting, than those they faced. The scale of effort to be required of you will be far greater than that required of them.

A Matter of Fact

For the fact of our time is this: The poverty our nation knew in the Great Depression . . . the peril that mankind knew in World War II—these are nothing compared to the poverty and peril that surround our strong, rich America in the world today.

There are desperate conditions of injustice and hunger and disease throughout most of the human family.

There are, in human society, conditions which not only bring a sense of shame and insufficiency to those of us who live in such a blessed land . . . but conditions which can lead to the eruption of the little disorder, which can grow to the small war, which can build to the cataclysm which could destroy rich and poor, black and white, believer and non-believer—all of us alike.

That is where the action is.

This is the environment in which you will be in charge.

This is the human adventure on which you embark.

Young America's Response

I believe you sense the full measure of what you face.

I feel a sense of concern and of involvement among you.

I have seen you in the Peace Corps, helping strangers.

I have seen you marching down dusty roads on behalf of fellow Americans whose skin doesn't happen to be white.

I have seen you, in VISTA, lifting the forgotten to a place of self-respect in life.

I have seen you, standing calm, resisting the temptation of violence, for what you believe in.

I have seen you, wearing your nation's uniform, fighting bravely for a cause far more difficult to understand than any we have defended before.

I have seen you speaking out, from deep personal conscience, without thought of personal popularity.

You perform remarkably well in the system your parents built, yet I know that you are probing relentlessly to find your own personal relationship to it . . . desperately seeking identity in a society of bigness.

Labels Lack Meaning

For your generation, the old labels seem to have little meaning.

Whether you are part of the "New Left" or the "New Right" or the "Out" or the "In," your concerns are far more for basic humanity than they are political.

And I think it is a mistake to see in either your protests, your reservations, or your dissent, much that can fit into the traditional political categories.

Indeed, if much of our political history seems to have escaped you, you are not too troubled by the loss. You are deeply and personally caught up in what matters today.

You set high standards for yourselves, and you judge yourselves harshly.

And you show a remarkable degree of serious introspection for the children of prosperity.

The Search For Identity

And I sometimes fear that, in your introspection, you may come to believe you are alone.

I tell you now that when you stand alone, you are not alone.

When you speak out and act alone in America, you are more a part of this land and more a source of its strength than are all of the multitude who stand in silence, no matter how vast they may seem.

"The most dangerous enemy to truth and freedom amongst us," said Ibsen, "is the compact majority."

Oppose that compact majority, and you are sure to collect a few bruises. But I have found that the best remedy for a bruise is to collect a few more.

The more you speak out, and the more you act, the more you are going to discover that you are lending courage to a surprising number of people whose feelings will come to the surface in response to yours.

That's the meaning of leadership—to inspire others, to help them free themselves of their own needless fears.

True freedom in any land is a relentless, never ending process of self-discovery among its people.

This you will preserve, for our own land, not because it is your inheritance; nor because some destiny says you must; but because your own free search for individual identity in the living present, demands it.

The strongest bulwark of liberty is man, free and in search of himself.

Serving Those In Need

A good number of your generation have already learned this lesson, in search of themselves in places and causes far distant from East Lansing, Michigan.

It is your opportunity to carry that lesson into forgotten corners of our country—and of the world—where people have never had any reason to learn it, or believe it.

We face today the incomparable opportunity—in the red dust of South American villages, in the neon minefield that is Watts, California—to stimulate the will to seek identity and to discover one's course.

You will be tempted to chart your progress by Gross National Product or by trade indices, or by other quantitative measures, some of which you distrust today.

But may I suggest that you also measure your progress by whether those you help—those who have known in their lives nothing but despair and defeat—by whether they can begin to have faith, by whether they can begin to have hope, by whether they can begin to find themselves.

The Opportunity To Make History

Yours is the opportunity to prove in the world what the generation of your parents has already begun to prove in America: That the course of history is not a mindless juggernaut we are powerless to control, but a fresh challenge susceptible to courageous action in each generation.

It's good to study history, but it's even better to make it.

I hope you will be sensitive to that opportunity.

I hope you will waste no time in seizing it.

The story is told that Pericles of Ancient Greece in his later years came across a young lawyer of Athens who was deeply devoted to causes, who wished to change immediately what was wrong in the world.

Pericles chastized the young man for being too bold and brash—for concerning himself with things better left to older men.

The older man patronizingly said: "Of course, I understand for I, too, was over-eager in my youth. But, now that I am older, I have learned better. Take my advice and do not become so involved."

To which the young man replied: "I regret I did not have the privilege of knowing you when you were at your best."

We are at our best when we dare most. The difference between competence and greatness is the ability to do the impossible.

The American Song

Despite the fact that I represent management here today, I will tell you this: If you do not choose to follow precisely the trails that others have blazed, then I do not think we ought to count the future unsafe in your hands.

In your search for identity and self-knowledge, you will have much to discover before you determine what is worthwhile, and what is worthless.

But in a land of individuals, better the mystery of the search than some counterfeit security. In a world society desperate for change, better your dedication to it than your fear of it.

It is the special blessing of this land, that each generation of Americans has called its own cadence, and written its own music—and our greatest songs are still unsung.

REMARKS

VICE PRESIDENT HUBERT HUMPHREY

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

EAST LANSING, MICHIGAN

JUNE 12, 1966

Dr Hannah
Boards of Trustees
U. H. Flap
Mich State U
& Intern. Affairs

Hubert Humphrey feels a kinship with college students.

∟ I like to be where the action is.

∟ I was raising Cain with the system before you were born, and as I am just beginning to get started, ~~and I imagine~~ I don't doubt that I will be raising Cain when you are running things too.

∟ In fact, I wish I were being graduated today. I might have a better idea where my next job is coming from.

Today I speak in a relatively new role. I speak for management.

As management's spokesman, I wish first to thank you for service to your nation.

In all these years of study, ~~I am sure you thought~~ you were improving your position to compete in the years ahead or to enter a profession. But you today are more than college graduates.

From management's viewpoint, you are valuable national resources.

More Americans are in college this year than all the Americans alive when our nation was founded. More Americans are in graduate schools today than all the Americans who bore arms during the Revolution. ~~Those~~

~~are lots of resources.~~ *These are ~~many~~ invaluable resources.*

And we will need them all.

↳ For by the time one of you is likely to stand in this place at some future Commencement, the American people will number more than 300 million -- and the people in the world almost too many to even think about.

↳ And I need not recite for you the future needs and problems of those people.

↳ You will be in charge. ↳ You will be responsible for our national security and my medicare.

↳ You will be responsible for the education of my grandchildren and the freedom of my great-grandchildren.

↳ So I propose to take a ^{good} look at you and have a talk with you.

↳ ^{a few words} But first, about your parents . . .

It may be hard ^{for you} to believe but, in another century's history books, the very people who have been helping with your tuition may be ranked among the greatest radicals in modern history.

↳ Some of your parents might flinch if you told them there were radicals in your family. But they have been nothing less.

↳ There is the first generation in all of history which, by its own hand, has surrendered the privilege of telling its offspring. This is how things are; this is how they always have been; this is ~~the~~ way the world goes.

↳ Your fathers and mothers were born children of hills and valleys. Today they see the galaxy itself.

↳ They have created amazing new systems of management, science and technology.

↳ They have fought & won wars;
↳ They have designed & create international political and economic institutions in the hope of keeping the peace.

They have revitalized and rebuilt
a vast economy.

- 5 -

↳ They have found new and better systems to care
for people. — ~~all this~~, & more —

↳ And I have been right in the midst of it with
them, just as I am with you.

~~now~~ am not going to bore you with tales of the Great
Depression, or of World Wars, and of the hardships your
parents faced.

↳ Nor will I recount the struggles that took place in
our country to achieve the measure of well-being and
social justice we have reached today.

↳ But I can tell you, it has been no picnic. It
has been no improvised "happening." It wasn't easy

↳ It has taken involvement, and hard work, and
study, and self-doubt, and passionate disagreement, and
finally, understanding and decision.

Progress has ridden no fast express. It has been a local all the way.

~~Thus~~, as older generations welcome you aboard, I think you ought to know that they've not been cooling their heels waiting for you.

The generation of your parents has lived amid the floodwaters of history. Most of them have known genuine hardship. Many of them have lost loved ones on other continents. Their old horizons have gone far off in space, yet they have followed, cautious but willing.

The world has come to their dinner table, and at times has seemed to stay a long while, yet they remain hospitable.

yes, your parents
~~They~~ have made history. Yet to many of you, I know, it seems "the heavy hand of history."

Remember this: The challenges they have faced didn't leave room for some of the niceties of today.

↳ They have had to meet trouble in large sizes.

They have had to feed and clothe and house and transport, and produce, and educate and struggle in big portions, just to overcome the clear and present perils of their time.

↳ Individualism has been the backbone and concern of their work. Yet to serve the individual, they have had to build on a scale which has seemed at times to dwarf ~~the~~ individual.

↳ By and large they have been, I believe, a resourceful and courageous generation.

~~And now, to you, I know, it seems they have~~

~~hidden their history.~~

Some say they have hidden their history

Over the battlefield they have laid out the golf course.

For those of you who have grown up in putting distance of a country club or in walking distance of a second car, it is hard, I know, to recognize many ^{than} vestiges of radicalism.

"Where's the action?" you ask.

And I reply: There's plenty of action. Roll up your sleeves and have some. *There's work to be done.*

L Your parents had to fight desperately, at your age, to stave off poverty at home and violence abroad -- and they in large part succeeded.

h Yet the challenges you face are far greater, and far more exciting, ~~than those they faced.~~ The scale of effort to be required of you will be far greater than that required of them.

~~For the fact of our time is this:~~ The poverty
our nation knew in the Great Depression . . . the peril
that mankind knew in World War II -- these are nothing
compared to the poverty and peril that surround our
strong, rich America in the world today. *This is the most
exciting yet the
most dangerous of times.*
There are desperate conditions of injustice
and hunger and disease throughout most of the human
family.

There are, in human society, conditions which
not only bring a sense of shame and insufficiency to
those of us who live in such a blessed land . . . but
conditions which can lead to the eruption of the little
disorder, which can grow to the small war, which can
build to the cataclysm which could destroy rich and poor,
black and white, believer and non-believer -- all of us
alike.

↳ That is where the action is.

This is the environment in which you will be in charge.

↳ This is the human adventure on which you embark.

But I believe you sense the full measure of what you face.

↳ I feel a sense of concern and of involvement among you.

↳ I have seen you in the Peace Corps, helping strangers.

↳ I have seen you marching down dusty roads on behalf of fellow Americans whose skin doesn't happen to be white.

↳ I have seen you, in VISTA, lifting the forgotten to a place of self-respect in life.

∠ I have seen you, standing calm, resisting the temptation of violence, for what you believe in.

∠ I have seen you, wearing your nation's uniform, fighting bravely for a cause far more difficult to understand than any we have defended before.

∠ I have seen you speaking out, from deep personal conscience, without thought of personal popularity.

∠ You perform ^{remarkably} remarkably well in the system your parents built, yet I know that you are probing relentlessly to find your own personal relationship to it . . . desperately seeking identity in a society of bigness.

∠ For your generation, the old labels seem to have little meaning.

? ∠ Whether you are part of the "New Left" or the "New Right" or the "Out" or the "In," your concerns are far more for basic humanity than they are political.

And I think it is a mistake to see in either your protests,
your reservations, or your dissent, much that can fit
into the traditional political categories.

Indeed, if much of our political history seems to
have escaped you, you are not too troubled by the loss.
You are deeply and personally caught up in what matters
today.

You set high standards for yourselves, and you
judge yourselves harshly.

And you show a remarkable degree of serious
introspection for the children of prosperity.

~~But~~ And I sometimes fear that, in your introspection,
you may come to believe you are alone.

I tell you now that when you stand alone, you
are not alone.

~~When you speak out and act alone in America,~~
you are more a part of this land and more a source of its strength than are all of the multitude who join in silence, no matter how vast they may seem.

"The most dangerous enemy to truth and freedom amongst us," said Ibsen, "is the compact majority."

If you Oppose that compact majority, and you are sure to collect a few bruises. But I have found that the best remedy for a bruise is to collect a few more.

↳ The more you speak out, and the more you act, the more you are going to discover that you are lending courage to a surprising number of people whose feelings will come to the surface in response to yours.

↳ True freedom in any land is a relentless, never-ending process of self-discovery among its people.

↳ This you will preserve, for our own land, not because it is your inheritance; nor because some destiny says you must; but because your own free search for individual identity in the living present, demands it.

↳ The strongest bulwark of liberty is man, free and in search of himself.

↳ ~~A good number~~ ^{many} of your generation have already learned this lesson, in search of themselves in places and causes far distant from East Lansing, Michigan.

↳ It is your opportunity to carry that lesson into forgotten corners of our country -- and of the world -- where people have never had any reason to learn it, or believe it.

↳ We face today the incomparable opportunity -- in the red dust of South American villages, in the *rice paddies*, *of Asia, in the* neon minefield that is Watts, California, -- to stimulate the will to seek identity and to discover one's course.

⌞ You will be tempted to chart your progress by Gross National Product or by trade indices, or by many other of the quantitative measures ~~you so distrust today.~~

~~Keep your distrust of these things.~~

But may I suggest that you also
Measure your progress by whether those you help

-- those who have known in their lives nothing but despair and defeat -- ~~by whether they can begin to have faith, by whether they can begin to have hope, by whether they can begin to~~ find themselves.

⌞ Yours is the opportunity to prove in the world what the generation of your parents has already begun to prove in America. That the course of history is not a mindless juggernaut ^{that} we are powerless to control, but a fresh challenge susceptible to courageous action in each generation.

*History we can and
do make our own history --
We are its masters, not its
slaves.*

I hope you will be sensitive to that opportunity.

I hope you will waste no time in seizing it.

↳ The story is told that Pericles of Ancient Greece in his later years came across a young lawyer of Athens who was deeply devoted to ^{many} causes, who wished to change immediately what was wrong in the world.

↳ Pericles chastized the young man for being too bold and brash -- for concerning himself with things better left to older men.

↳ The older man patronizingly said: "Of course, I understand for I, too, was overeager in my youth. But now that I am older I have learned better. Take my advice and do not become so involved."

To which the young man replied: "I regret I did not have the privilege of knowing you when you were at your best."

Despite the fact that I represent management here today, I will tell you this: If you do not choose to follow, precisely, the trails that others have blazed, ~~then~~ I do not think we ought to count the future unsafe in your hands.

In your search for identity and self-knowledge, you will have much to discover before you determine what is worthwhile, and what is worthless.

But in a land of individuals, better the mystery of the search than some counterfeit security. In a world society desperate for change, better your dedication to it than your fear of it.

It is the special blessing of this land, that each generation of Americans has called its own cadence, and written its own music -- and our greatest songs are still unsung.

#

[Transcript]
June 12, 1966

1966 Commencement Address

Michigan State University

Vice President, Hubert H. Humphrey

Thank you Dr. Hannah. Dr. Hannah, members of the Board of Trustees, distinguished faculty of Michigan State University, this graduating class of the year 1966, families that are here today, and the loved ones of these graduate and my fellow Americans.

I couldn't help but have a wave of emotion come over me as I came into this stadium today. Not only, Dr. Hannah, because of the friendly and cordial reception that was accorded us, but also, because I can remember some rather difficult days for Minnesotans on this field. I was at the University of Minnesota last evening. I didn't confide in them that I was to be here today. There are a certain number of risks that a man in public life should take, but he ought not to go beyond good sense and good reason. But I am very happy to be here on a peaceful and very pleasant occasion, and to pay my respects as a fellow American to one of the great Universities of this Nation and indeed of the World, and to pay a note of long overdue and much earned and merited respect to the distinguished President, Dr. Hannah of this University.

It's difficult to know what to say on an occasion such as this, particularly if you have been on what we call the "Commencement Speaking Journey" or Tour, and I guess one of the reasons that you have Vice Presidents is to fill in on Commencements...and I like it, I want you to know that.

Hubert Humphrey feels a kinship with college students. I sort of like to remind every member of the faculty and the Trustees that I once was a college professor. I do this because of the precarious nature of tenure in politics. It seems to me that one might, on an occasion like this, advance his own case, but I like to be on a college campus for many reasons: young people, yes; the cultural environment, yes; but in a very real sense it's because, as we say in modern parlance, that's where the action is. And I want to direct my remarks today primarily to our student friends and the graduates. Let me just say to you that I was raising Cain with this system of ours before some of you were even born. And as I'm just beginning to get started I imagine I will be raising Cain with it when you are running things too. So, don't protest too much because I may start myself. I can't help but feel that I wish I were being graduated today. The truth is I might have a better idea where my next job was coming from; but today I am going to speak to you in a relatively new role for me. I speak for management. Now, as management's spokesman, I want first of all to express my thanks to you, my fellow students, for your service to your nation. In all of these years of study, I'm sure that you thought that you were improving your position to compete in the years ahead, or to enter your profession. But I must tell you that today you're more than college graduates. From management's point of view, you're a very, very valuable national resource.

More Americans are in college this year than all of the Americans alive when our Nation was founded. And more Americans are in the graduate schools today than all of the Americans who bore arms for our revolution. These are mighty valuable resources...these Americans of ours who are in college. And we need every one of them with our burdens and responsibilities, for by the time that one of you is likely to stand in this place in some future commencement, the American people will number about some 300,000,000, and the people in the world will almost be too many to even think about. And I don't think that I need to recite for you what these figures mean in terms of future needs and problems of the people at home and throughout the world. But I do want to say this to my friends of the graduating class...you will be in charge and you will be responsible for our national security and my medicare. And you will be responsible for the education of my grandchildren and the freedom of my great grandchildren. So I propose to take a good look at you. I want to know what you have to offer and I want to have a talk with you.

Now just let me take a few moments to talk about your parents...you have, let me talk about them for awhile. Being the father of a daughter and three sons I have some idea of what goes on. Two sons in college, one about to enter and a daughter who is the mother of three, and I've heard them talk about their parents when they didn't think I was listening. I'm far enough away from them today so I can get even. Now it may be hard for our young friends in a university to believe, but in another century's history books the very young people who have been, the very people I should say, who have been helping with your tuition may be ranked among the greatest radicals in modern history. Now some of your parents might flinch if you told them that there were radicals in your family...so don't tell them. But they have been nothing less. There's the first generation in all of history which, by its own hand, has surrendered the privilege of telling its offspring, "This is how things are," and, "This is how they've always been" and "This is the way its always going to be" and "This is the way the world goes". Those radicals, your parents, fixed that. Your fathers and mothers were born children of the hills and valleys and today they see the galaxie itself. They have created amazing new systems of management and of science and technology far beyond the wildest imagination of a graduating class of 25 years ago. They have fought and won wars. They have designed and created international political and economic institutions that they hoped might help keep the peace. And these parents have revitalized and rebuilt an economy that was faltering and made it the most vibrant, the most successful economy on the face of the earth. They have found new and better systems to care for our people. They have done all of this and more and they've done it in a short time.

Now, I've been in the midst of all of this with them, just as I am with you. So I say to the graduates, it's been quite a time that we've lived through. I'm not going to bore you with details of the great depression, I do that with my own family, or world wars or hardships that your parents faced; nor will I recount the struggles that took place in our country to assure and to achieve the measure of well-being and social justice that we have reached today even though this is one of the miracles of our time, but I can tell the graduating class this...it was no picnic. It hasn't been any instant operation or any improvised happening. And as we say, "It weren't easy." It was a rough fight. It has taken involvement and hard work and study and

self-doubt and self-examination and passionate disagreement and finally understanding and decision. I can't help but note that while our great nation pays proper respect to the right to dissent and we know that a free society must have discussion, may I also say that a society with any sense of responsibility must also have decision...and it's in the deciding that character is tested and that maturity is revealed. Progress has been not easy and progress has ridden no fast express. It has been a "local" all the way. Start and stop. Halting and faltering. So as older generations welcome this graduating class aboard, I think you ought to know that this older generation hasn't been cooling its heels waiting for you. The generation of your parents has lived amid the floodwaters of history and most of them have no ingenuine hardship, and many of them have lost loved ones on other continents. Their old horizons have gone far-off into space, yet they have followed, cautious but willing. The world has come to their dinner table and at times they seem to stay for a long, long while; yet, this older generation remained patient and hospitable. Yes, I submit that your parents have made history. Oh I know some of you may think its the heavy hand of history but it's been history. And remember this, the challenges that they faced didn't leave room for some of the niceties of today. They have had to meet trouble head-on in large sizes. They have had to feed, clothe, house, transport, produce, educate, and struggle in big proportions, just to overcome the clear and present perils of their time. Now individualism has been the backbone and concern of their work; yet, to serve that concept of individualism and the individual they have had to build on a scale which seemed at times to dwarf that individual, to lose him in bigness. By and large they have been, I believe, a resourceful and courageous generation. But some say that my generation, the generation of your parents have hidden their history or maybe didn't even recognize that they made it. Over the battlefield they've laid out the folf course so as almost to remove the remembrance of history. But for those of you who have grown up in putting distance of a country club or in walking distance of a second car it is hard, I know, to recognize the vestiges of their radicalism...but they have been radicals...they broke through...they made the beginnings, great beginnings for a better America. But I know the young people ask what I said in the beginning, "Where's the action?" Well, I want to tell you right now, there's plenty of action. Roll up your sleeves and go to work and have some of it. Try it for size. There's work to be done right here in Michigan. And there's work to be done in these 50 states of our Union. And there's work to be done in this world. Not just to say that there's work to be done, not merely to be discouraged because there's work to be done, not merely to protest the injustices, but to do something about them. That's where the action is. And that's why God gave youth to the young otherwise he might have given it to the elderly.

Now your parents had to fight decisively at your age to stave off poverty at home and violence abroad. And I think it's fair to say that in a large part they succeeded. But that's child's play compared to what we face now. We face greater challenges that are far more exciting and far more dangerous. And the scale of the effort required of this graduating class will be greater than ever required of their parents. The poverty that our nation knew in the great depression, the peril that mankind knew in World War II, these are as nothing, compared to the poverty and the peril that surround our strong rich America in the world today. An island of plenty in a desert of want.

There are desperate conditions of injustice and hunger and disease throughout most of the human family, and there are in this human society of ours conditions which not only bring a sense of shame and insufficiency to those of us who live in such a blessed land, but I submit, conditions which can lead to the eruption of a little disorder which can grow into a small war; which can build to the cataclysm which could destroy rich and poor, black and white, believer and non-believer, all of us alike. An exciting world, but a dangerous one. And that's where the action is. And that's why people today are better educated, need to be better educated, as we know, then ever before. To develop a higher degree of sensitivity, a more precise judgement, a more rounded sense of maturity and responsibility.

I've spoken of the environment in which this class will be in charge. This is the human adventure on which you, the graduates, embark. But I believe that you have the sense, or should I say that you sense the full measure of what you face. I feel a sense of concern and involvement among our young people. I've seen them in the Peace Corps, helping strangers. I've seen them marching down dusty roads on behalf of fellow Americans whose skin doesn't happen to be white. I've seen them help register the voters that for all-too-long were denied the right of the franchise in this, a free nation. I've seen this generation, this volunteer generation I call it in VISTA...Volunteers In Service To America, lifting the forgotten to a place of self-respect in life. I've seen our college graduates giving of themselves in schools where young people have been deprived of a good education because of racism or inadequacy of resources; and I've seen the young of this generation standing calm, resisting the temptation of violence for what they believe in. Yes, my young friends, I have seen you wearing your nation's uniform, fighting bravely for a cause far more difficult to understand than any we have defended before. And I have seen these same brave men in uniform performing acts of compassion that would be the marvel of any peaceful society. The soldier of today is more than a fighting man. He's a builder. He's a peacemaker. He's a lifesaver. I've seen our young men speaking out from deep, personal conscience without any thought of personal popularity. And I say to this generation, you perform remarkably well, in the system that your parents built, yet I know that you are probing relentlessly to find your own personal relationship to it, desperately seeking identity in a society of bigness. For your generation, the old labels that we put on everything seem to have little meaning. Whether you are part of the New Left or the New Right or the Outs or the Ins, your concerns are basically humanistic...even more than political. And I, for one, think it's a mistake to see in either your protests, your reservations or your dissent much that can fit into the traditional political categories. Indeed, if much of our political history seems to have escaped this generation, you are not to be troubled by the loss because you are deeply and personally caught up in matters today. I think you set reasonably high standards for yourselves. And you judge yourselves harshly. And you show a remarkable degree of serious introspection for the children of prosperity. But I sometimes fear that in your introspection you may come to believe that you stand alone. I tell you today that when you stand alone, you are never alone. Because you are more a part of this land, and more a source of its strength than are all of the multitude who join you in silence no matter how vast they may seem. The most dangerous enemy to truth and to freedom amongst us, said Ibsen, is the compact majority. Now if you oppose that compact majority, and you can be sure that you will collect a few bruises, but I've collected a few along life's way myself, and I have found that the best remedy for a bruise is to go on out and collect a few more...you'll forget the pain of the first

blow. The more that you speak out responsibly, thoughtfully, and the more that you act the more you're going to discover that you are lending courage to a surprising number of people whose feelings will come to the surface in response to yours. That's the meaning of leadership...to inspire others, to get them to release themselves from their own timidity and fear. True, freedom in any land is a relentless, never-ending process of self-discovery among its people and this you will preserve for our own land. Not because it is your inheritance, not because some destiny says that you must, but because your own free search for individual identity in the living present demands it. The strongest bulwark of liberty is man free and in search of himself. What am I? Who am I? Why? These ever, non-ending questions. Many of your generation have learned this lesson in search of themselves in places and causes far distant from East Lansing. It is your opportunity to carry that lesson to the forgotten corners of our country and of the world. For people have never had any reason to learn it or believe it. We face today the incomparable opportunity in the red dust of South American villages, in the rice paddies of Asia, in the vast areas of Africa, in the neon mine field that is Watts, California, to stimulate the will, to seek identity, to know one's self, to find one's place in a changing society and to make that place meaningful, and to discover one's course. You will be tempted to chart your progress by Gross National Product or by trade indices or by any other quantitative measures some of which you distrust. But may I suggest that you also measure your progress by whether those you help, those who have known in their lives nothing but despair and defeat, can begin to have faith because you helped; can begin to have hope because you offered hope; can begin to find themselves because you gave a helping hand. So I say to the young Americans of this generation, yours is the opportunity to prove in the world what the generation of your parents have already begun to prove in America...that the course of history is not a mindless juggernaut that we are powerless to control, but in fact is a fresh challenge susceptible to courageous action in each generation. You see, I'm one who believes it's good to study history but it's better to make it. And we can and do make our own history, good or bad. We are its masters if we will it, and not its slaves. So I ask this young generation to be sensitive to that opportunity of making your history and waste no time in seizing the opportunity.

Now the story is told that Pericles of ancient Greece in his later years came across a young lawyer of Athens who was deeply devoted to many causes like many of our young people are, and who wished to change the world immediately and to rectify all that was wrong with the world now. And Pericles chastized the young man for being too bold and too brash, for concerning himself with things better left to older men. And the older man patronizingly said to the young man, "Of course I understand, for I, too, was over-eager in my youth. But now that I am older I have learned better. Young man, take my advice and do not become so involved," said Pericles, to which the young man replied, "Pericles, I regret I did not have the privilege of knowing you when you were at your best." And we are at our best when we dare. When we see injustice and are determined to correct it. When we make up our minds that the difference between an average person and a great one is the ability to perform the impossible. And those who are privileged to have an education are the agents of the impossible. They are required to do what others have not been able to do. So despite the fact that I represent management here today, I must tell you this...if you do not choose to follow precisely the trails that others have blazed and chartered

for you I, for one, do not think we ought to count the future unsafe in your hands. In your search of identity and fulfillment and self-knowledge you will have much to discover and it will be great fun. Before you determine what is worth while and what is worthless, the important thing is the adventure, to be in it, to be where the action is, and add something to it. In a land of individuals, better the mystery of the search than some counterfeit security. In a world society desperate for change and betterment, better your dedication to it than your fear of it. It is the special blessing of this land of ours that each generation of Americans has called its own cadence, has written its own scenario, and, indeed, has written its own music. And I say to the graduates of 1966...our greatest songs are yet to be sung; because this America is not today. This America is the tomorrow for you and for millions and millions of people. And it is for the tomorrow that you must live and prepare yourself. And what that tomorrow will be can only be decided by you, because whether you know it or not, you will be and you are in charge. Take good care of yourself and take good care of what we leave you. Thank you.

*JEK edited
version*

Address to the U.S. H.
DRAFT COMMENCEMENT SPEECH BY THE VICE PRESIDENT ON ASIA
17 May State University
June 12, 1966
I

I want to talk to you today about Asia and about America's role in Asia -- that great arc of nations from the Indian subcontinent to the northernmost island of Japan.

Violence in this part of the world casts dark shadows over the Class of 1966 this spring.

Yet Asia is far more than the Vietnam conflict. And our involvement in Asia is far more than some temporary fluke of history.

If there is anything we need in order to comprehend the present, it is perspective on the present. Most of all, in this spring of 1966, we need perspective on Asia -- on its history and the history of our relationship. Such perspective can give us guidelines for wise choices -- and a solid base on which to build realistic hopes.

Let me try to suggest the ingredients of perspective by posing

Mr. Reilly

DRAFT COMMENCEMENT SPEECH BY THE VICE PRESIDENT ON ASIA

I

I want to talk to you today about Asia and about America's role in Asia -- that great arc of nations from the Indian subcontinent to the northernmost island of Japan.

Surely no part of the world casts a darker shadow over the Class of 1966 this spring. Once again man's yearning for peace is mocked by the reality of war. Once again grim headlines tell of lives and treasure lost, of hopes and plans abandoned.

Yet Asia is far more than Vietnam. And our involvement in Asia is far more than some temporary fluke of history.

If there is anything we need in order to comprehend the present, it is perspective on the present. Most of all, in this spring of 1966, we need perspective on Asia -- on its history and the history of our relationship. Such perspective can give us guidelines for wise choices -- and a solid base on which to build realistic hopes.

Let me try to suggest the ingredients of perspective by posing three questions. First, who and what is Asia? Second, how did we get involved with Asia? And finally, can we achieve our goals in Asia?

I I

Who and what is Asia?

Asia means people -- more than half of mankind -- brown people, yellow people, white people, and every shade imaginable.

Asia means civilizations -- venerable, inventive, artistic, and deeply rooted cultures -- from the valley of the Indus to the North China Plain, from the Khmer monuments of Angkor to the Forbidden City of Peking and the temples of Nara and Kyoto.

Asia means religions -- the great compassionate religious and ethical systems of Islam, Hinduism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Christianity.

And in the modern era -- the past hundred years or so -- Asia means revolution.

It was a revolution that was long in coming but inevitable once East met West with full force. In previous centuries people and goods had seeped back and forth between the buffered civilizations of West and East. But the first Portuguese ships that reached the Indies carried both Bibles and cannons -- Western learning and Western technology. And with their coming the revolutionary process had begun.

Earlier this year my plane stopped briefly at Mactan Island in the Philippines. It was here that the explorer Magellan was killed in ¹⁵²¹~~1499~~ after his fantastic feat of navigation. It should not really surprise us that the island's capital still bears the name not of Magellan but of Lapu Lapu -- the local chieftain who slew the foreign intruder.

Revolution is seldom peaceful, never easy. For Asia the last two centuries of the Western impact -- and the transformation it

produced -- have been often turbulent, bitter, and humiliating.

Take three unique ingredients of modern western history -- the spectacular rise of nationalism, capitalism, and science.

Bring them to bear on proud older cultures, either through direct colonial rule -- as with the British in India, the Dutch in Indonesia, or the French in Indo-China -- or through enclaves and spheres of influence -- as with all the Western powers in China.

Little wonder that the effect would be disruptive on Asian societies -- as well as sometimes constructive. Little wonder that the results would engender resistance and resentment among Asian peoples toward the Westerner -- as well as curiosity and sometimes friendship.

And little wonder that the history of Asia in the modern era is the history of Asia's response to the West -- an unfolding revolutionary process of which the end is by no means in sight.

It is a process that seeks first of all to expel the foreign colonial master -- and has largely succeeded in doing so.

But independence is only a fragile beginning, not an end, as a multitude of nations have discovered in recent years. With independence comes the struggle for nationhood in the full sense of the word -- the struggle to create national unity out of religious and linguistic and even geographic fragmentation; the struggle to create national power, in order to maintain stability within and to deter and resist any would-be aggressors without; and the struggle to create both wealth and justice -- to create a society of expanding opportunities and hope.

The revolutionary process is clearly turbulent and uncertain. It is also fraught with dangers: the danger of unbridled competing nationalisms, the lure of false prophets and demagogues, the temptation of illusory short cuts that lead to new tyranny, the passions aroused by unfulfilled expectations.

Nearly fifty years ago a new specific danger was added to this process: the doctrines of Marx and Lenin -- offered as an explanation of Asia's past, a plan of action for Asia's present, and a blueprint for Asia's future.

Though always a tiny minority, the agents of Marxism-Leninism were able in parts of Asia to ride the tide of nationalism and anti-colonialism. With the perseverance and discipline of the zealot, they produced an impact far beyond their numbers.

Today we see in mainland China the tragic result of one Asian revolution that lost its way -- a revolution that was captured by a disciplined Communist minority. The high price of that tragedy is, for the people of China, a life of isolation in the world's most rigidly totalitarian state, and for the people of Asia, a profoundly disturbing neighbor.

And today we see in the Indo-China peninsula the tragic result

of another Asian revolution that lost its way. Here the people of Vietnam, who have known little but warfare for a quarter of a century, not only find half their country ceded to a Communist minority regime in Hanoi; at the same time they also face a determined effort by this regime to force South Vietnam under Communist rule through subversion and aggression.

III

I come to my second question: How did we get involved with Asia?

The question may sound naive. Yet I frequently hear the statement from those who should know better that "America has no business in Asia."

In part such a view stems from frustration in the face of Asia's complexity; how much easier to withdraw and let nature take its course. But in part this view also stems from a misreading of history.

We are all in some degree both heirs and captives of history.

And our involvement in Asia is no recent aberration but rather a rooted fact of history.

In one sense, of course, America is simply something funny that happened to Columbus on his way to Asia.

In a deeper sense, we are and have been a Pacific power from the days of New England's clipper ships in the late 18th century.

Before long, our traders and entrepreneurs were joined by our missionaries -- not simply evangelists, but doctors and nurses and teachers and engineers and agricultural specialists. By the mid 19th century American ships had opened up Japan, and American citizens were the leading participants in what later became the greatest export of people and technology ever attempted from one civilization to another -- much of it focused on China.

In the process, we became catalytic agents of transformation.

In the process, too, we became unwitting participants in Asian history -- and in revolution.

Our merchants, missionaries and scholars were followed by our diplomats, our navy -- and our actual acquisition of a piece of Asian territory, the Philippine Islands in 1898. We claimed our right to equal access to Asia's markets and to special immunities for our citizens. And when our Pacific power was openly assaulted by Japanese aggression, we went to war in Asia.

America's role in Asia today is a direct product of the century that preceded World War II and of the war itself. For with the end of that war and the dissolution of the Pacific colonial empires, the responsibilities of victory imposed on us a stabilizing role in Japan and Korea. And with the beginning of the Cold War, the Communist victory in China, and the outbreak of the Korean War, American power was

the only shield available to the fragile and newly independent nations in the arc of non-Communist Asia.

This was not a role we had sought. This was not the peace for which we had yearned.

Nor is it a role we seek to perpetuate today. But the peace still eludes us. For there are those in Asia who still pursue their objectives by force of arms -- by aggression and subversion. And ^{there} ~~their~~ are others who seek our help in meeting this challenge.

IV

I come to my final question: Can we achieve our objectives in Asia?

What, in simplest form, are these objectives?

First, we seek to provide a shield of defense for those who ask our help: to assist free nations that are willing to help themselves in their deterrence of and resistance to all forms of aggression.

Second, we seek to assist free nations that help themselves in the great tasks of nation-building: to join with other donor states in a war on poverty and ignorance and disease in Asia -- to create the sinews of freedom.

Third, we seek to strengthen the forces of regional and sub-regional cooperation within free Asia -- so that fragmentation may give way to unity on the basis of Asian initiatives.

And finally, we seek to build bridges -- to keep open the door of communication -- to the Communist states of Asia, in particular Communist China. Their isolation breeds unreality, delusions, and miscalculation. For the moment we expect denunciation and hostility in response to our initiatives; but we look to the day when the leaders of Asian Communism -- like their former colleagues in Europe -- will come to recognize the self-destructiveness and wastefulness of their present bellicose policies.

Let me add one point about what we do not seek: we do not seek alignment, except from those who chose it; we do not seek satellites; we do not seek territory or military bases for all time.

Our objectives are best served by one result in Asia: the emergence of nations fiercely dedicated to their own national independence, to the well-being of their people, and to the pursuit of peace.

I return now to my question: can these objectives be achieved?

My answer is yes. But much depends on our actions as a nation -- and on the understanding that infuses those actions.

In the struggle for a peaceful, strong, and developing free Asia, our assets in the region are very great.

In Japan, at one end of Asia's arc, we have a staunch ally, a highly developed nation, our second trading partner, an immense potential force for leadership in the diplomacy and development of Asia.

On the South Asian subcontinent, at the other end, we have a close friend in India, the world's largest democracy, and in Pakistan -- both nations dedicated to freedom and bravely embarked on programs of development.

And in the Southwest Pacific, completing the triangle, are our comrades in Australia and New Zealand who deeply share our commitment to the future of Asia.

Elsewhere -- in Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand, Burma, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia -- we find allies or friends who are deeply committed in differing fashions to independence and development. We respect their commitment -- and we respect their differences.

But what of the states of former French Indo-China?

Here, of course, is the present focal point of war and revolution in Asia at its most ugly and intense. And here we are tested as never

before; for here we face a situation of external aggression and subversion against a post-colonial nation that has never had the breathing space to develop its politics or its economy.

In South Vietnam, both defense and development -- the war against the aggressor and the war against despair -- are fused together as never before. Vietnam challenges our courage, our ingenuity, and our ability to persevere. If we can succeed here -- if we can help sustain an independent South Vietnam, free to determine its own future -- then our prospects, and the prospects for free men throughout Asia, will be bright indeed.

We know this; our friends and allies know it; and our adversaries know it. That is why one small country looms so large today on everyone's map of Asia.

So our assets in the region are great -- and Vietnam is the critical test that will be with us for some time to come.

~~before~~; for here we face a situation of external aggression and subversion against a post-colonial nation that has never had the breathing space to develop its politics or its economy.

In South Vietnam, both defense and development -- the war against the aggressor and the war against despair -- are fused together as never before. Vietnam challenges our courage, our ingenuity, and our ability to persevere. If we can succeed here -- if we can help sustain an independent South Vietnam, free to determine its own future -- then our prospects, and the prospects for free men throughout Asia, will be bright indeed.

We know this; our friends and allies know it; and our adversaries know it. That is why one small country looms so large today on everyone's map of Asia.

So our assets in the region are great -- and Vietnam is the critical test that will be with us for some time to come.

But Asia will not disappear with a Vietnam settlement. Nor will our objectives and responsibilities in Asia disappear. The peace of Asia and the development of Asia will surely dominate our national agenda for the rest of this century. So will our relations with the nations of Asia -- most important of all, our relations with mainland China.

Such problems will demand of us special qualities of mind and spirit and understanding as a nation.

We will have to learn far more about Asian history and Asian cultures than any of us now know. Our specialists, both inside and outside government, are far too few; our Europe-oriented generalists are barely informed at all.

We will have to learn to speak and read Asian languages. Our schools and colleges are woefully limited in their offering of Chinese

~~But~~ Asia will not disappear with a Vietnam settlement. Nor will our objectives and responsibilities in Asia disappear. The peace of Asia and the development of Asia will ^{be on} ~~surely dominate~~ our national agenda for the rest of this century. So will our relations with the nations of Asia -- most important of all, our relations with mainland China.

It is for these reasons that I consider President Johnson's Johns Hopkins University address of April 7, 1965, an historic formulation of American purposes in ~~Vietnam and Asia~~. In that speech ^{he out lined} ~~he said that~~ our commitment to the defense of the independence of South Vietnam was firm, that our quest for a peace settlement would be unremitting, and that our ~~immediate as well as~~ our long-term concern with the welfare of the peoples of Southeast Asia, ^{He ~~also~~ expressed our willingness to ~~take~~} ~~could be tested by Asians ready to~~ ^{join Asians in} take initiatives in cooperative ventures to enrich the lives of their peoples. The President pledged \$1 billion as a United States contribution to projects that might be developed.

and Japanese-- not to mention Vietnamese, Thai, Indonesian, and the languages of India.

We will have to become more sensitive to the differences among Asian nations as well as their similarities. We used to think that "all Asians look alike" (as Asians tend to think of Westerners); some of us still seem to assume that all Asian nations act alike. If there is one thing I have learned in my exposure to Asia it is that Laos is not like Japan, Thailand is not like Vietnam, and Taiwan is not like India.

We should also be sensitive to the pride, dignity and nationalism of Asian peoples and nations. Like most people, Asians would prefer to rule themselves badly than to be well ruled by some foreigner. The same goes for advice and initiatives. Otherwise good ideas inevitably lose some of their appeal if carried through Asia wrapped up in an American flag. Asians prefer Asian initiatives, proposed by Asians. So would we.

In that speech, too, President Johnson envisaged participation by North Vietnam in constructive social and economic arrangements once Hanoi had decided to stop the shooting. And last February, he again appealed to the "men of the north" to stop aggression and to join in devoting the human and material resources of the area to processes of development that could help fulfill the unsatisfied wants of the people of the region.

Termination of war alone would be a major contribution to the process of accelerated social and economic development in Asia. But there are other basic problems which face most of the countries in the area:

In Asia, per capita income averages at something under \$150 per year.

Population growth averages at about 2 1/2 per cent -- or at a rate that will require investment of a very large part of national savings in merely taking care of the non-productive parts of the population, the very young and the very old.

Finally, we should learn to suppress our national enthusiasm for quick solutions. Asia's problems are extraordinarily complex and intractable; they will be with us for some time to come, and we should force ourselves to practice some traditional Asian patience.

Ladies and gentlemen of the graduating class: I congratulate you on what you have done here, and I welcome you to the outside world. I tell you in all frankness that your life is not going to be easy; but I also tell you that I cannot imagine a more challenging time in which to be living. At the heart of that challenge is the continent of Asia. I urge you to learn about it and think about it. I commend it to your good minds, your courage, your compassion, and above all, to your sense of perspective.

Much of the region is also vulnerable to fluctuations in prices of commodities sold in the industrialized economies of the world.

And in many parts of Asia the climate for investment is uncertain while the requirement for foreign capital is almost unlimited.

These problems demand the attention of countries in the area as well as countries outside which are able to help. Happily, there have been some significant constructive developments. *since the President's speech.* At the end of November, for instance, 31 nations signed the Charter of the Asian Development Bank. Sixty per cent of the capital for this Bank has been subscribed by countries within the Asian area, thus demonstrating their collective readiness to play a role in meeting their own development needs. As non-regional subscribers, the United States was joined by 11 other donor countries, including such nations as Austria, Sweden and Finland.

Another promising development of the past year has been the emergence of Japan as an important donor to the needs of Asia. Japan

countries and a greater sense of community among them.

War is always cruel and sordid. But the spectacle of war in Vietnam should not obscure for us the fact that behind the smoke and uproar is the testing of an issue vital to all of Asia, and indeed to the world. In Vietnam there is taking place a confrontation of systems in which Peking and Hanoi are pitted against the system to which belong South Vietnam, the United States and the countries of the non-communist world.

In that confrontation, a review of free Asia's achievements should give us solid grounds for hope.

Consider South Korea, where exports have increased by 500 per cent in the past three years; consider Taiwan, which has been transformed from an aid-receiving to an aid-giving country and enjoys a rate of economic growth higher than even that of Japan; Malaysia and Thailand, where ambitious development plans are being launched with

promising possibilities of heavy reliance upon private investment by Japan and the community of industrialized nations; and even Indonesia, where an economy in acute economic distress has come to rely upon leaders determined to harness resources of that potentially rich country for resumption of a responsible place in the world economic community.

All of these developments are striking evidence that, notwithstanding the boasts of the Communists in Vietnam that they represent the wave of the future, the real achievements that are taking place within Asia have occurred in areas that have chosen to throw in their lot with a system that relies upon freedom, competition, and respect for national integrity as the basis for genuine and enduring social and economic progress.

As we strive to deal with the immense problems -- and the promise -- of a vibrant, modernizing interdependent Asia in the years ahead, we Americans will be called upon to show special qualities of mind and



Minnesota Historical Society

Copyright in this digital version belongs to the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, link to, or email content, however, for individual use.

To request permission for commercial or educational use, please contact the Minnesota Historical Society.



www.mnhs.org