

## THE GREAT SOCIETY

BY LYNDON B. JOHNSON

I HAVE COME today from the turmoil of your capital to the tranquility of your campus to speak about the future of your country.

The purpose of protecting the life of our nation and preserving the liberty of our citizens is to pursue the happiness of our people.

Our success in that pursuit is the test of our success as a nation.

For a century we labored to settle and to subdue a continent. For half a century, we called upon unbounded invention and untiring industry to create an order of plenty for all our people.

The challenge of the next half century is whether we have the wisdom to use that wealth to enrich and elevate our national life—and to advance the quality of American civilization.

Your imagination, your initiative, your indignation will determine whether we build a society where progress is the servant of our needs, or a society where old values and new visions are buried under unbridled growth.

For in your time we have the opportunity to move not only toward the rich society

and the powerful society, but upward to the Great Society.

The Great Society rests on abundance and liberty for all. It demands an end to poverty and racial injustice—to which we are totally committed in our time. But that is just the beginning.

The Great Society is a place where every child can find knowledge to enrich his mind and enlarge his talents. It is a place where leisure is a welcome chance to build and reflect, not a feared cause of boredom and restlessness. It is a place where the city of man serves not only the needs of the body and demands of commerce, but the desire for beauty and the hunger for community.

It is a place where man can renew contact with nature. It is a place which honors creation for its own sake, and for what it adds to the understanding of the race. It is a place where men are more concerned with the quality of their goals than the quantity of their goods.

But, most of all, the Great Society is not a safe harbor, a resting place, a final objective, a finished work. It is a challenge constantly renewed, beckoning us toward a destiny where the meaning of our lives matches the marvelous products of our labor.

I want to talk to you today about three places where we can begin to build the great society—in our cities, in our countryside and in our classrooms.

Many of you will live to see the day, fifty years from now, when there will be 400 million Americans; four-fifths of them in urban areas. In the remainder of this century urban populations will double, city land will double, and we will have to build homes, highways and facilities equal to all those built since this country was first settled.

In the next forty years we must rebuild

---

LYNDON B. JOHNSON (LL.D. '64), born in a small cottage near Stonewall, Texas, now lives in a large house on the south side of Pennsylvania Avenue in our nation's most carefully planned and beautiful city. This is President Johnson's commencement address at The University of Michigan on May 22, 1964, at what seems to have been the world's largest academic ceremony and President Johnson's largest audience—about 90,000 people. John Kenneth Galbraith of Harvard, concerned as President Johnson is, about cities dying in the middle and spilling into the countryside, has urged that everyone begin by reading this address. The rumor that British economist Barbara Ward had a hand in the writing (*Business Week*, May 20, 1964) is unfounded.



the entire urban United States.

Aristotle said: "Men come together in cities in order to live, but they remain together in order to live the good life." It is harder and harder to live the good life in American cities today.

The catalogue of ills is long: There is the decay of the centers and the despoiling of the suburbs. There is not enough housing for our people or transportation for our traffic. Open land is vanishing and old landmarks are violated.

Worst of all expansion is eroding the precious and time honored values of community with neighbors and communion with nature. The loss of these values breeds loneliness and boredom and indifference.

Our society will never be great until our cities are great. Today the frontier of imagination and innovation is inside those cities and not beyond their borders.

New experiments are already going on. It will be the task of your generation to make the American city a place where future generations will come, not only to live, but to live the good life.

A second place where we begin to build the Great Society is in our countryside. We have always prided ourselves on being not only America the strong and America the free, but America the beautiful. Today that beauty is in danger.

The water we drink, the food we eat, the very air we breathe, are threatened with pollution. Our parks are overcrowded, and our seashore overburdened. Green fields and dense forests are disappearing.

A few years ago we were concerned about the Ugly American. Today we must act to prevent an Ugly America.

For once the battle is lost, once our natural splendor is destroyed, it can never be recaptured. And once man can no longer walk with beauty or wonder at nature his spirit will wither and his sustenance be wasted.

A third place to build the Great Society is in the classrooms of America. There our children's lives will be shaped.

Our Society will not be great until every young mind is set free to scan the farthest reaches of thought and imagination.

We are still far from that goal.

Today eight million adult Americans—more than the entire population of Michigan—have not finished five years of school. Nearly 20 million have not finished eight years of school. Nearly 54 million—more than one quarter of America—have not finished high school.

Each year more than 100,000 high school graduates, with proved ability, do not enter college because they cannot afford it.

And if we cannot educate today's youth, what will we do in 1970 when elementary school enrollment will be five million greater than 1960? High school enrollment will rise by five million. College enrollment will increase by more than three million.

In many places classrooms are overcrowded and curricula are outdated. Most of our qualified teachers are underpaid, and many of our paid teachers are unqualified.

We must give every child a place to sit and a teacher to learn from. Poverty must not be a bar to learning, and learning must offer an escape from poverty.

But more classrooms, and more teachers are not enough. We must seek an educational system which grows in excellence as it grows in size.

This means better training for our teachers. It means preparing youth to enjoy their hours of leisure as well as their hours of labor. It means exploring new techniques of teaching, to find new ways to stimulate the love of learning and the capacity for creation.

THESE ARE three of the central issues of the Great Society. While our government has many programs directed at those issues, I do not pretend we have the full answer to these problems.

But I do promise this.

We are going to assemble the best thought and broadcast knowledge from all over the world to find those answers for America. I intend to establish working groups to prepare a series of White House conferences and meetings—on the cities, on natural beauty, on the quality of education, and on other emerging challenges.

From these meetings and from these stud-



ies, we will begin to set our course toward the Great Society.

The solution to these problems does not rest on a massive program in Washington, nor can it rely solely on the strained resources of local authority. They require us to create new concepts of cooperation—a creative federalism—between the national capitol and the leaders of local communities.

Woodrow Wilson once wrote: "Every man sent out from his university should be a man of his nation as well as a man of his time."

Within your lifetime powerful forces, already loosed, will take us toward a way of life beyond the realm of our experience, almost beyond the bounds of our imagination.

For better or for worse, your generation has been appointed by history to deal with those problems and lead America toward a new age.

You have the chance never before afforded to any people in any age. You can help build a society where the demands of morality and the needs of the spirit, can be realized in the life of the nation.

Will you join in the battle to give every citizen the full equality which God enjoins and the law requires—whatever his belief,

or race, or the color of his skin?

Will you join in the battle to give every citizen an escape from the crushing weight of poverty?

Will you join in the battle to make it possible for all nations to live in enduring peace—as neighbors and not as mortal enemies?

Will you join in the battle to build the Great Society—to prove that our material progress is only the foundation on which we will build a richer life of mind and spirit?

There are those timid souls that say this battle cannot be done; that we are condemned to a soulless wealth. I do not agree. We have the power to shape the civilization we want. But we need your will—your labor—your hearts—if we are to build that kind of society.

Those who came to this land sought to build more than a new country. They sought a new world. I have come here to your campus to say that you can make their vision our reality. Let us from this moment begin our work so that in the future men will look back and say: It was then, after a long and weary way, that man turned the exploits of his genius to the full enrichment of his life.