

A MOMENT TOUCHED WITH GLORY

Address by

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Today is Earth Day, a kind of secular Ash Wednesday devised for a society that has indeed in ways become too self indulgent for its own good. Our sins are many, and they are gross, and they are in surpassing measure the sins of affluence. It is not to be surprised that a penitential mood has descended upon the society, a measure of Baptist fervor and Byronic despair. If -- and this would be surprising -- a period of actual penance -- not only of remorse for past wrongdoing, and the proclamation of future good-doing, but of actual abstinences from a variety of the technological excesses of the age -- one does not for the moment doubt that a restoring and deeply healthful and healing period is ahead of us.

I welcome it, and I salute the young people of the nation, and those who have inspired and advised them, in forcing us, not by threat but by example, to pay some attention to the way we live and the things we do.

I should like in these remarks, however, to pursue a slightly different theme. More candidly, an opposite one.

I have grown concerned, as I suspect many have, with the atmosphere of self-accusation and even self-abasement that pervades and in ways dominates our national life at this moment. I do not for a moment question that we have it coming to us. Too much of our past -- near and far -- has

been characterized by a kind of mindless self congratulation and the overestimate of national power that traditionally has invited the wrath of the Gods and brought the mighty low. It is a wise people that tempers its pride with humility, that reminds itself that to act is to err -- in some measure, however small -- and that the unavoidable consequences of great actions are some measure of great wrong. That is the life given us, and there is no escape. But neither is there any excuse for becoming preoccupied with wrongdoing and remorse, no excuse for sliding into the "politics of cultural despair" which seem almost upon us at this time.

There are, I think, historical analogues for the national mood of this moment. Any number of societies such as our own -- and our own as well -- have gone through periods of intense discontent, self examination, and even self condemnation, only in retrospect to see these as having been periods of enormous cultural vitality and -- which is the more relevant point to the remarks I shall make today -- political vitality and innovation.

Edwardian England was such a time. So also that fin de siecle period in France, a period almost of political anguish in the Third Republic, and yet one today looked back to, and with reason, as la belle epoch. In our own nation it seems to me that the early years of Woodrow Wilson's

*to me classic then.*

*and they suggest things are not perhaps so bad*

administration had much the same quality: years in which a sense that the nation was not responding to crisis with anything like the measure of urgency and profundity that the times required ~~were~~<sup>was</sup> accompanied by achievement of the very highest and most permanent order.

I am prepared to suggest that we may be passing through just such an historical epoch. One which is characterized by intense dissatisfaction at the time, but which in the retrospect of history is seen as an era of definitive innovation in the social institutions of the republic.

In this context -- by way of evidence, argument -- I should like to discuss events that have been taking place in Washington with respect to the great and noble commitment which the nation made during the course of the 1960's to put an end to poverty in American life.

It was just such a commitment, yet at the close of the decade I believe it fair to say that there was wide agreement that the commitment had faltered. More accurately, that the measures taken to meet that commitment, had somehow not done so. More importantly were not going to do so.

Clearly, in any such undertaking, this is a moment of serious crisis. It was a crisis that faced the administration when it took office, just as

it faced the Congress, the various government agencies charged with the enterprise, the poor themselves, and the nation at large.

Any number <sup>of</sup> /courses of action or inaction presented themselves.

It would be interesting and even useful to discuss them, but I have a somewhat different point to make. What distinguished periods of great social creativity, or so it seems to me, is not the degree or intensity of activity alone ~~particular~~, especially received patterns of ~~behavior~~ <sup>activity</sup>, but rather the emergence of fundamentally new modes of analysis from which patterns of ~~behavior~~ <sup>activity</sup> flow. These are the great dividing points in political and social history: it is at such moments as these that historians record the end of an old era and the beginning of a new one.

I believe that such an event has occurred with respect to the primal responsibility of a concerned and competent society, namely the problem ~~of~~ <sup>of</sup> poverty and inequality.

The nation has moved -- or is moving -- from a services strategy to an income strategy.

This proposition was, in effect, proclaimed by President Nixon in his State of the Union Message which opened the era of the 1970's. I should like briefly to examine it.

A services strategy, in rough terms, is one which seeks to make up presumed deficits in the behavior of one set of persons by providing them the counsel, advice, and example of another set of persons with presumed surpluses of such behavior. The terms of trade are, in essence, advice in return for deference. Or at least that is how it most often begins. It most often ends otherwise, however, and this is the second of the two fundamental problems associated with the services strategy in combating a problem such as poverty and inequality.

The first problem is that the strategy doesn't work. At least it doesn't work in terms that can be fairly clearly shown to be such, and which operate within time frames that make sense in a political democracy. In the long run, as Keynes said, we are all dead, and that long run tends to be rather short in the case of political careers. The reason it doesn't work is elemental. We don't know enough about human behavior to make it work. (For my part I am not sure how much a good thing it would be if we did, but in any event we don't.)

This is a view which laymen -- that disdainful term of a services society -- tend to resist, but is increasingly the social scientist's reluctant task to affirm. The sources of human behavior elude manipulation, in the mass surely, and for the most part in individuals as well.

Take so simple a question as reading. Why can't Johnny read? The answer is nobody knows. Recently Eleanor J. Gibson began her Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award paper, published in the American Psychologist, with just such an observation.

Despite decades of concern on the part of educators, parents, and proponents of homespun wisdom, we seem to know little more about how to teach reading than our great grandparents did. In fact we do not even know why it has to be taught. Why doesn't it just grow, like language?

As I say, no one knows, and the same observation may be made about endless issues of human behavior in which individuals and groups differ one from the other.

But there is, as I suggested, a second problem having to do with a service strategy. It is that out of the most selfless beginnings, vested interests of the most troubling kind seem to evolve. The purveyors of services acquire an interest in the maintenance of demand -- even the expansion of demand -- for their particular product as much as does any commercial interest, and this typically is exacerbated by the conviction of the service class that it is uniquely absolved from anything so sordid as self interest. I wish this weren't so, but I fear it is.

An example might be had from the early programs of the Office of Economic Opportunity, the agency charged with our nation's commitment to put an end to poverty.

Making it first clear that I have never seen what might be called a cash-flow analysis, let me nonetheless argue that in altogether disproportionate degree ~~x~~ those early anti-poverty programs involved the hiring of middle class persons to provide services ~~x~~ to the poor. Some of these services were of a fairly questionable order. Rather too many persons were set up in what Martin Mayer has called the "grievance business". But most of the services were of the most honored and exceptional kind. <sup>um</sup> Medical services, legal services, teaching services, counselling services, and such like. <sup>^</sup> Nonetheless, observe what was taking place. During the first five years of the anti-poverty program, the Federal government continued to collect income taxes from persons with incomes below the poverty line. From 1965 through 1969 roughly \$1.5 billion of tax was paid by persons whose income was below the poverty levels. During this period, roughly half of all income taxes were paid by persons with incomes under \$10,000. Now to what I would expect would be a very troubling degree indeed, the service programs of the ~~anti-poverty programs~~ <sup>war on poverty</sup>



involved a transfer of income from the poor and the working class to the distinctly non-poor members of the middle class. Admitting, indeed insisting, that a good many poor persons got employed also, the really good jobs in a service program must by definition go to college graduates, so that whether they knew it or not, and whether they liked it or not, the poor were paying considerable indeed for the advice they were getting.

It was a bankrupt strategy, and by the end of the decade the time clearly had come for a new departure.

And this is how the income strategy arose. Not by chance, and not at all as a result of the actions of any individual, but rather by a process of analysis in which a great many persons in and out of government found themselves engaged.

The premises of an income strategy are threefold.

First, the single most powerful determinant of behavior and well being in society is the level and security of an individual's income. It is as simple as that, and much as a certain folk tradition may resist the truth of the statement, it is without question the single most powerful finding social science or common sense have ever come up with.

Second, the most efficient role government can play with regard to the social system is that of adjusting inequalities of income, in particular, in ensuring a minimum income for those most in need.

Third, the provision of adequate income makes unnecessary the elaborate secondary markets wherein the poor are required to obtain the goods and services -- housing, clothing, food ~~in~~ whatever that other persons obtain in a general market. Thus the segregation of the poor is avoided, as well as their deprivation.

Probably the most basic domestic decision the President made on taking office was to opt for an income strategy with respect to the problem of poverty and inequality.

It was an option early in evidence. In April 1969 the President proposed that the Federal government stop taxing persons whose income was below the poverty level. A simple enough idea in the context of a mode of analysis that makes it simple. \$650 million per year was involved in the administration proposal. It would have been far more attractive to a traditional mode of analysis to put the money into some new service program. Certainly it would have been more visible. But just as certainly an income strategy dictated that the money should be left in the hands of the low income persons who had managed to earn it, and that is what the administration proposed.

Next something important happened. Congress agreed. Not because of the rhetoric of the administration proposal, but because the mode of analysis was making itself felt there as well. The country was changing its mind about something fundamental. That is what I mean about eras changing.

There followed in fairly steady succession a series of proposals to expand job training, minimum wage coverage, unemployment insurance duration, and similar income programs begun in past years. Programs for minority business enterprise and minority employment were devised that were fundamental innovations. Then came the Family Assistance Plan, the single most important piece of social legislation to be sent to the Congress in a generation (or really two generations as we count them today) and the social initiative which will almost surely define the beginning of a new era in American social policy.

The legislation is by now familiar and need not be described in detail. It establishes a floor under the income of every American family with children. It provides incentives for work and opportunities for work training, job placement, and child care.

The Family Assistance Plan is not an incremental change, a marginal improvement in an old program. It is a new departure in social policy, emerging from a new mode of analysis of social processes.

(If I may be allowed an aside, it is something more than just that. The Social Security Act, the only comparable legislation in American history, was after all mostly a compendium of ideas we had got from Lloyd George who had got them from Bismarck. With Family Assistance the United States takes its place as the leading innovator in the world in the field of social policy. Soon, I expect, we shall be seen as an exporter of social programs to Europe, reversing a century in which the flow has been from Europe to us).

The principles of the program are simple.

First, income assistance is not to be conditioned on dependency. Unlike the welfare system of what soon, we hope, will be the past, it is not a system that creates a class of dependent persons and then sustains them in their dependency. It is just as Congressman Wilbur Mills described it, a program that assumes that persons are normally self sufficient, and helps through those times, when the barn having burned down, they are not. "All we're doing here," he told the House Rules Committee, "is pitching in and helping this man help himself."

Second, it provides incentives to work and to maintain fundamental family ties, in contrast to a system that had evolved with just the opposite incentives.

Third, it does not create a new service class to carry out the program, but to the contrary will be administered with the same sense of large scale, nonmoralistic efficiency that is the distinctive contribution of American culture to the style of post industrial society.

As you of course know, just last week the Family Assistance Plan passed the House of Representatives by the heavy margin of 243 votes to 155.

There is hardly a limit to the credit that I, for one, feel is deserved by Congressmen Wilbur Mills and John Byrnes for the leadership in the House Committee on Ways and Means, and on the House Floor in bringing about passage of Family Assistance. Their experience, their energy, their attention to detail combined with a clear grasp of the significance of the bill before them, ~~combined with~~ <sup>and</sup> the confidence of the House in their integrity and judgment, were indispensable. John Gardner and the Urban Coalition, business men such as Joseph C. Wilson and Ben W. Heineman, labor organizations such as the A.F.L. - C.I.O. and without exception the major religious organizations of the nation came together in an alliance at once singular and spectacularly effective in helping to see that what needed doing was done.

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But there was also at work the power of analysis, of a new way of looking at old problems, and this fundamentally is what has changed.

Family Assistance now goes to the Senate where the Committee on Finance, of which Senator Russell B. Long is chairman, and Senator John J. Williams is ranking minority member. The administration has the greatest confidence that the bill will receive the same attentive, serious, and in the end favorable consideration in the Senate as it did in the House.

On Monday, Senator Abraham A. Ribicoff, a member of the Committee, announced that he would be offering amendments to the bill as passed by the House. Let me say that the Administration will receive any such proposals with the attention and respectful consideration that they will deserve. The bill now before the Senate was amended by the Ways and Means Committee, and it was improved by that Committee. We do not have the least doubt that it can and will be improved yet further by the Senate.

I would like to plead, however, that the Senate recognize the severe restraints on the Federal budget that simply limit the amount of resources that can be applied to the program at this time.

No one likes the idea that money is so short now, and will continue to be for the first half of the decade. Few expected this to be the case, and many have difficulty even now accepting what has emerged as unavoidable fact. In January the administration took the unprecedented step of publishing a five year budget forecast, in the 1970 Economic Report. We forecast over the five year period that there would only be \$22 billion excess of new revenue over existing claims, and that this would only begin in Fiscal Year 1973. This week Charles L. Schultze, the distinguished former Director of the Budget under President Johnson, now with the Brookings Institution, published a projection which, in the words of Business Week "adds considerable detail to Administration figures, and amply confirms them." A middle range of defense expenditures, according to Schultze's group would produce \$23 billion; a low level \$36 billion; and a high level none at all.

By comparison with the recent past, this means a period of very stringent budgeting, especially if we are to meet other priority needs in areas such as health and education. (Let me note here that the President has sent to Congress a message on Economy in Government proposing

that a number of unnecessary government programs be discontinued in order that funds now used for them may be available for genuine priorities. If Congress could act on that measure we would all be in a somewhat easier situation.)

But to repeat, we await Senate action on the Family Assistance Plan with confidence. The present measure does not exhaust those things which men of good will would like to do. It simply reflects what we are now able to do. To go further now would imperil this whole bold, breathtaking enterprise. No one could want to do that.

That there is yet more to be done we do not doubt, and we shall particularly welcome the discussion of goals the nation should meet. Senator Ribicoff's suggestion that the national government formulate goals in this area to be attained by the 200th anniversary in 1976 is a good idea, and very much in line with the President's own thinking. In this way we can best hope to match specific measures to the availability of specific resources for attaining them.

There is a deal of drudgery in this route, but in the end there is triumph. Poverty will have ceased to be a condition in which any American could live as a normal experience. It is the kind of thing history remembers you for.



But in the short term something not less important will have happened.

I return to the theme with which I began. We have been in a time of deepest trouble. Inward, not outward trouble. The issue has been confidence in ourselves. In our competence, and perhaps most of all in our goodness.

We need to show ourselves what we can do. We need a success. Family Assistance gives us an opportunity. And we had better use it.

For if we lose this opportunity, I do not know. I simply cannot see when it will come again. It really is quite extraordinary. Here we are in the depths of despond, pervaded with a sense of our inadequacy, even our unfitness. Yet at this very moment it is within the power of that great majority of the American people who love their nation, who wish to see it healed and whole, it is within our power to enact a social program such that generations hence we will be seen as an anguished and often agonizing people who were somehow touched with glory. Others would say, and I would not deny, that recognizing it or not, what posterity will in fact be contemplating is a generation of Americans who for all their failings were deserving of God's grace, and who in a moment of near despair as to their righteousness did splendidly do His work.