

REMARKS BY VICE PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON  
PREPARED FOR DELIVERY UPON ACCEPTANCE OF DISTINGUISHED  
SERVICE AWARD  
CAPITAL PRESS CLUB  
WASHINGTON, D. C., SATURDAY, MAY 18, 1963

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

I can respond to your generosity tonight in two ways -- and two ways only.

First, I can express my deep and heartfelt thanks, and

Second, I can pray that I shall always conduct myself in such a way as to justify and merit your confidence.

It is only through the second response that I can -- in any manner -- approach levels of adequacy. Of this, I am deeply conscious. The purpose of this meeting tonight is not to touch off a round of mutual, backscratching, congratulations. It is, instead, to review what has been done by some people in the hope that we can inspire ourselves and others to do even more.

I am very proud -- and I do not apologize for my pride -- that you have included me in the company of those who are being honored tonight. At the same time, however, I am aware that this dinner does not represent the last chapter in a book or even the last page of a chapter. When we are involved in the field of human rights, we cannot consider the volume closed until those rights are so secure that no one even thinks of challenging them.

ROLL OF ACHIEVEMENT

At this moment in the history of our country, it is possible to call a roll of successful achievements in the struggle for equality of opportunity and human understanding. That roll can and should be called frequently because it is essential in times of strife and turmoil to remind ourselves that progress is possible and our goals some day will be achieved -- if we have sufficient dedication.

But we would be doing ourselves and our country a disservice if we assumed that those successes meant that full and complete justice has been achieved. Quite the contrary! Justice is not a partial thing which can be measured in terms of percentages. Any degree of injustice is complete injustice. And until we achieve complete justice, we can regard progress only as a series of steps towards the goal. Each step should hearten us; but should not lull us into self-satisfaction that the job has been done.

Some months ago, the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity, which I have the honor to head, released some statistics on minority group employment. They were "good" statistics in that they demonstrated a substantial improvement in the hiring practices of some of the firms that come under one of the Committee's programs. It was a report of solid, substantial progress.

A Negro editor wrote an editorial for his newspaper the following week. Commenting on the figures, he said something like this:

"When somebody points out how far I have come, I am the ungrateful kind of SOB who points out how far he has got to go."

Some people considered the comment to be ungracious -- and perhaps it was. But that point did not bother me. The thought that loomed largest in my mind was that the comment was valid -- and that the editor was absolutely

(more)

(more)



A SOBERING THOUGHT

A massive Federal effort, backed by all the prestige of the executive agencies of the government, had succeeded only in bringing the editor (speaking figuratively) part way along the road to a goal where he had a right, as a human being, to be without any federal effort at all.

This is a sobering thought which I commend to those of my fellow Americans who sometimes feel that efforts at progress should be abandoned because the presumed beneficiaries of these efforts do not express deep gratitude.

The truth of the matter is that there is nothing to be grateful for -- except, perhaps, the discovery that decades of inequality have not succeeded in quenching the flame of conscience in the breast of our fellow man.

We are not trying to "do something" for a group of people that will give them an extra edge in life. All we are trying to do is to eliminate deprivation so this group will have an opportunity to compete with their fellow Americans on terms of equality. And should we succeed, I am confident that they will take care of themselves -- as they want to any way.

But the sands of time are running out. The hours are short and we have no moral justification in asking for an extension or a continuance.

As a prudent (at least, I hope I am prudent) man, I know that frequently in life I have had to settle for progress short of perfection. I have done so because -- despite cynics -- I believe that half a loaf is better than none. But my acceptance has always been conditioned upon the premise that the half-loaf is a step towards the full loaf -- and that if I go on working, the day of the full loaf will come.

It seems to me that in the field of human rights, we are well past the stage where half a loaf will do. No one in this audience is so unrealistic as to expect to awake tomorrow morning in a perfect world. But, nevertheless, progress must come faster and I believe it will come faster as sensible men and women realize that they cannot afford -- morally or economically -- to abandon the field to the forces of unreason.

PROGRESS MUST BE FASTER

Progress must come faster because otherwise there are millions of individuals -- human beings entitled to their rights -- who will never receive justice even though some day justice may come to their group.

Progress must come faster because otherwise the tragic headlines which speak of the breakdown of law and order will increase rather than diminish. (And I hope we relearn the lesson that issues which are not settled by justice and fair play will sooner or later be settled by force and violence).

Progress must come faster because otherwise we will not achieve the unity which we must have if freedom -- freedom for all of us -- is to survive.

And, finally, progress must come faster simply because it is right -- and has been too long delayed.

UNDERSTANDING EAR

I think that one of the greatest barriers to progress is the fact that we don't talk to each other enough -- or rather that we don't listen to each other enough with an understanding ear. We leap to conclusions too rapidly; we seize upon half truths without looking at the full picture; we accept slogans without looking behind those slogans to the essential reality.

For example, it is said repeatedly that no law can enforce human understanding or implant reasonable attitudes among human beings. With this statement, I agree. It is valid. It is also beside the point and totally irrelevant to the issues that divide our country today.

(more)



May 30, 1963

REMARKS OF VICE PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON  
MEMORIAL DAY, GETTYSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

On this hallowed ground, heroic deeds were performed and eloquent words were spoken a century ago.

We, the living, have not forgotten -- and the world will never forget the deeds or the words of Gettysburg. We honor them now as we join on this Memorial Day of 1963 in a prayer for permanent peace of the world and fulfillment of our hopes for universal freedom and justice.

We are called to honor our own words of reverent prayers with resolution in the deeds we must perform to preserve peace and the hope of freedom.

We keep a vigil of peace around the world.

Until the world knows no aggressors, until the arms of tyranny have been laid down, until freedom has risen upon every land, we shall maintain our vigil to make sure our sons who died on foreign fields shall not have died in vain.

As we maintain the vigil of peace, we must remember that justice is a vigil, too -- a vigil we must keep in our own streets and schools and among the lives of all our people -- so that those who died here on their native soil shall not have died in vain.

One hundred years ago, the slave was freed.

One hundred years later, the Negro remains in bondage to the color of his skin.

The Negro today asks justice.

We do not answer him -- we do not answer those who lie beneath this soil -- when we reply to the Negro by asking, "Patience."

It is empty to plead that the solution to the dellemas of the present rests on the hands of the clock. The solution is in our hands. Unless we are willing to yield up our destiny of greatness among the civilization of history, Americans -- white and Negro together -- must be about the business of resolving the challenge which confronts us now.

Our nation found its soul in honor of these fields of Gettysburg one hundred years ago. We must not lose that soul in dishonor now on the fields of hate.

To ask for patience from the Negro is to ask him to give more of what he has already given enough. But to fail to ask of him -- and of all Americans -- perseverance within the processes of a free and responsible society would be to fail to ask what the national interest requires of all its citizens.

The law cannot save those who deny it but neither can the law serve any who do not use it. The history of injustice and inequality is a history of disuse of the law. Law has not failed -- and is not failing. We as a nation have failed ourselves by not trusting the law and by not using the law to gain sooner the ends of justice which law alone serves.

If the white over estimates what he has done for the Negro without the law, the Negro may under estimate what he is doing and can do for himself with the law.

-more-