Address by

Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy

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When I enrolled at Harvard University as a freshman some 20 years ago, I was struck by the depth of the tradition around me. Harvard is the oldest university in the United States; it was founded more than 300 years ago. The University's original building, still standing, was once a headquarters for George Washington during our Revolutionary War. And the knowledge that I had been preceded by ten generations who went on to become the leaders of my country was a source of deep pride.

To come to this University, one of the oldest in the world, and recognize that it predates Harvard by 250 years and even the times of Christopher Columbus is a source of some humility for us but also of a renewed appreciation for the common sources and the common love of learning which characterize your University and mine and your nation and mine.

This great institution is a symbol of what is and must be enduring about mankind and I am pleased and honored to have this opportunity to join with you.

But I do not come today to talk of the past, as rich as your heritage of nearly 600 years has been. However long and illustrious its past may be, the life of the true university is in the future. The ambitions, the sensitivity, and the responsibility it can breed in its students will shape the success or failure, war or peace, prosperity or misery of tomorrow.

And the importance of the university experience is magnified daily. In the early years of this university, it was possible to wrestle for decades with the deep and divisive problems of the reformation. Later, mankind could take a century to digest the astonishing revelations of Copernican Astronomy.

But today, there is no such time. The number, importance, and rapidity of the problems that bedevil mankind increase by the day. They are larger. They are more urgent. And they are incomparably more numerous. Yesterday, we sought telescopes good enough to see all the planets. Today, we seek vehicles good enough to reach them. Yesterday, we fought wars which destroyed cities. Today, we are concerned with avoiding a war which will destroy the earth. We can adapt atomic energy to produce electricity and move ships, but can we control its use in anger? Automation provides us with wondrous increases of production and information, but does it tell us what to do with the men the machines displace? Modern industry gives us the capacity for unparalleled wealth--but where is our capacity to make that wealth meaningful to the poor of every nation?

These are not problems to be mulled over and adjusted to for a century; they must be solved in a single generation, in this generation--or sooner. How we respond to those problems--and the new ones that surely will come hard on their heels--will determine the shape of the world.

These problems are not for individuals to solve unaided. They are not even for individual nations to solve unaided. As our problems grow more complex, our world grows smaller, and our need for solutions becomes common.

Satellite communications connect television screens in Japan with television cameras in England and the distance of half a world loses its meaning. The supersonic airplanes now under development will make it possible to fly from New York to Germany in the interval between breakfast and lunch. But the resulting need for increased international understanding is not a problem for Americans alone. The same planes will fly you to America with the same speed, and we will call on you to understand us, also.

Just as distance comes to be measured in hours and even minutes, ideas must come to be measured by their merit, not their national origin. As the framework pulls together, so must its occupants. We become, whether we choose it or not, citizens of the world. What we can choose--and what you here have a responsibility to choose--is to become world citizens who can make tolerant judgments, educated judgments concerning problems not only of our own lives and lands, but of men everywhere.

In my country, as here, I think there is substantial cause for optimism about how we will fulfill this responsibility. In the United States, young men and women are increasingly concerned with the society around them--both at home and abroad. Thousands work on behalf of civil rights or the underprivileged. Large numbers are constructively involved in politics and public service. And you all know of the idealism and the dedication of the young Americans serving in the Peace Corps.

On this brief visit to your country, I have observed similar idealism and similar involvement by German students, whether in the spirited support of the young for unity in all Europe as well as in Germany, or in your own Peace Corps.

These concerns, by young people in your country and in mine, stem in part from the intensified concern of our countries as a whole for the problems of society. And these concerns also stem from your training. You come here to be educated not merely as intellectual tradesmen, but as humane and thoughtful men and women. I know you feel these concerns as part of this university's legacy to you.

So there is no need for me to come and exhort you to develop such concern for your fellow men whether in Germany or in the developing countries of the world. What I would like to do instead is ask whether you will continue to feel those concerns and even more importantly whether in your later lives you will act on behalf of those deeply felt concerns.

There is a danger, growing out of this very university experience, that you will not do so! The very education which has helped expand your awareness of the problems of other men is the same education which prepares you for a place in society far removed from those problems.

The carpeted office of the medical specialist has little relationship to the ailing peasant child in Latin America. The philosopher's study is a century away from the homes of the German poor. The research laboratory cannot produce concern over training in a faraway country.

As the skilled and professional people of your nation and the world, you will be moved out of the contact with the large number of people in the world whose principal worries are hunger and hope. You will be equipped to live, work, think and travel in the very latest day of the 20th century. You will read and hear about poverty and tyranny; you will be aware, concerned, and sympathetic. But will you also work to lend your talents to the service of your society--and of all societies on this shrinking planet?

One of the most energetic figures of my country's history, Theodore Roosevelt, declared in 1899 that, "our country calls not for the life of ease, but for the life of strenuous endeavor. The Twentieth Century looms before us, big with the fate of many nations."

That prediction may be even more valid and even more far-reaching now than when it was spoken. There has, perhaps, never been a time in the history of the world, when the gap between college and community has been smaller, when the need for active involvement by young people has been stronger, and the opportunity for them to do things of significance has been greater.

This was a point which President Kennedy recognized and emphasized. "I ask you to decide," he was fond of saying to university students, "I ask you to decide, as Goethe put it, "Whether you will be an anvil or a hammer."

The opportunity is greatest in public service. The governments of our countries need and deserve the enlistment of the best minds of the coming generation. As problems grow, the challenge of leadership grows.

But even if you choose a private profession, there is still broad opportunity for participation in the affairs of your society. The English and German words "Idiot" both come from the Greek for a person who did not participate in public affairs. But our words university and <u>universitat</u> both come from the latin for "all together."

The point is there is a need for individual participation. All of us have to participate. All of us are needed. The question is whether to be a critic or a participant. The question is whether to bring a candle to the barricade or to curse the darkness.

At this great institution of learning, I think the choice must be for light.