

way that's going out there now, too. America has done what it always does: stand up and try to help people. The operation is superb. I just hope that there will be a peaceful resolution, so they can all go back to their homes, which is what they want to do.

Hey, thanks a million for being with us on this trip. We appreciate you fellas being along, too.

Q. Thanks for inviting us.

The President. Well, that's all right.

Note: The exchange began at 8:45 a.m. while the President was en route to Ann Arbor, MI. In his remarks, the President referred to author Dan Jenkins; Richard L. Armitage, Special Negotiator for the future status of U.S. access to military facilities in the Philippines; and John H. Sununu, Chief of Staff to the President. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks at the University of Michigan Commencement Ceremony in Ann Arbor

May 4, 1991

President Duderstadt, thank you all very much. Thank you for that warm welcome. I want to salute the president, salute Governor and Mrs. John Engler, Representatives of the Congress—Pursell, Upton, and Vander Jagt, and distinguished Regents, and especially I want to pay my respects to our fellow honorary degree recipients. Barbara and I are very grateful for this high honor. Before this, there wasn't one lawyer in the family, and now we have two.

The last time I was in Ann Arbor, we commemorated John Kennedy's unveiling of the Peace Corps. And as your commencement program indicates, Lyndon Johnson introduced the Great Society in a University of Michigan commencement address.

Today, I want to talk to you about this historic moment. Your commencement—your journey into the “real world”—coincides with this nation's commencement into a world freed from cold war conflict and thrust into an era of cooperation and economic competition.

The United States plays a defining role in the world. Our economic strength, our military power, and most of all, our national character brought us to this special moment. When our policies unleashed the economic expansion of the 1980's, we exposed forever the failures of socialism and reaffirmed our status as the world's greatest

economic power. When we sent troops to the Gulf, we showed that we take principles seriously enough to risk dying for them.

But there's another message. There's another message. We also take them seriously enough to help others in need. Today, men and women of Operation Provide Comfort toil on behalf of suffering Kurds. And today, our thoughts and prayers also go to the hundreds of thousands of people victimized by a vicious cyclone in Bangladesh. Our Government has sent aid to that stricken land. Dozens of private agencies have sprung into action as well, sending food, water, supplies, and donations. The humanitarian instinct runs deep in our people, always has. It is an essential element of our American character.

Our successes have banished the Vietnam-era phantoms of doubt and distrust. In my recent travels around the country I have felt an idealism that we Americans supposedly had lost. People have faith in the future. And they ask: What next? And they ask: How can I help?

We have rediscovered the power of the idea that toppled the Berlin Wall and led a world to strike back at Saddam Hussein. Like generations before us, we have begun to define for ourselves the promise of freedom.

I'd like to talk today about the nature of freedom and how its demands will shape

our future as a nation.

Let me start with the freedom to create. From its inception, the United States has been a laboratory for creation, invention, and exploration. Here, merit conquers circumstance. Here, people of vision—Abraham Lincoln, Henry Ford, Martin Luther King, Jr.—outgrow rough origins and transform a world. These achievements testify to the greatness of our free enterprise system. In past ages, and in other economic orders, people could acquire wealth only seizing goods from others. Free enterprise liberates us from this Hobbesian quagmire. It lets one person's fortune become everyone's gain.

This system, built upon the foundation of private property, harnesses our powerful instincts for creativity. It gives everyone an interest in shared prosperity, in freedom, and in respect. No system of development ever has nurtured virtue as completely and rigorously as ours. We've become the most egalitarian system in history—and one of the most harmonious—because we let people work freely toward their destinies.

When governments try to improve on freedom—say, by picking winners and losers in the economic market—they fail. No conclave of experts, no matter how brilliant, can match the sheer ingenuity of a market that collects and distributes the wisdoms of millions of people, all pursuing their destinies in different ways.

Our administration appreciates the power of free enterprise, and our economic and domestic programs try to apply the genius of the market to the needs of the Nation. For example, we want to eliminate rules and redtape that bind the hands and the minds of entrepreneurs and innovators.

Our America 2000 educational strategy challenges the Nation to reinvent the American school, to compete in the race to unleash our national genius.

We've incorporated market incentives into our legislative proposals, so taxpayers will get a fair return on their dollars. Just look at last year's child-care legislation and the Clean Air Act, or this year's transportation bill.

We've proposed a comprehensive banking reform package that strengthens the financial system upon which economic growth

depends. We repeatedly have tried to slash the capital gains, so people with dreams have a chance of achieving them.

And we want to extend this dignity of home ownership to people who live now in government-owned apartments. Home ownership gives people dignity.

And although we have tried to transfer power into the hands of the people, we haven't done enough. In a world transformed by freedom, we must look for other ways to help people build good lives for themselves and their families. The average worker in the United States now spends more than 4 months of each year working just to pay the tax man, and increasing numbers of citizens see that burden as a barrier to achieving their dreams. We've tried to put on a lid on the spending that drives taxes and to concentrate government efforts on truly national purposes. It's only common sense. And if we want to build faith in government, we must demand public services that serve the people. We must insist upon compassion that works.

But the power to create also rests on other freedoms, especially the freedom—and I think about that right now—to think and speak one's mind. [*Applause*] You see—thank you. The freedom—I had this written into the speech, and I didn't even know these guys were going to be here.

No, but seriously, the freedom to speak one's mind—that may be the most fundamental and deeply revered of all our liberties. Americans, to debate, to say what we think—because, you see, it separates good ideas from bad. It defines and cultivates the diversity upon which our national greatness rests. It tears off the blinders of ignorance and prejudice and lets us move on to greater things.

Ironically, on the 200th anniversary of our Bill of Rights, we find free speech under assault throughout the United States, including on some college campuses. The notion of political correctness has ignited controversy across the land. And although the movement arises from the laudable desire to sweep away the debris of racism and sexism and hatred, it replaces old prejudice with new ones. It declares certain topics off-limits, certain expression off-

limits, even certain gestures off-limits.

What began as a crusade for civility has soured into a cause of conflict and even censorship. Disputants treat sheer force—getting their foes punished or expelled, for instance—as a substitute for the power of ideas.

Throughout history, attempts to micro-manage casual conversation have only incited distrust. They have invited people to look for an insult in every word, gesture, action. And in their own Orwellian way, crusades that demand correct behavior crush diversity in the name of diversity.

We all should be alarmed at the rise of intolerance in our land and by the growing tendency to use intimidation rather than reason in settling disputes. Neighbors who disagree no longer settle matters over a cup of coffee. They hire lawyers, and they go to court. And political extremists roam the land, abusing the privilege of free speech, setting citizens against one another on the basis of their class or race.

But, you see, such bullying is outrageous. It's not worthy of a great nation grounded in the values of tolerance and respect. So, let us fight back against the boring politics of division and derision. Let's trust our friends and colleagues to respond to reason. As Americans we must use our persuasive powers to conquer bigotry once and for all. And I remind myself a lot of this: We must conquer the temptation to assign bad motives to people who disagree with us.

If we hope to make full use of the optimism I discussed earlier, men and women must feel free to speak their hearts and minds. We must build a society in which people can join in common cause without having to surrender their identities.

You can lead the way. Share your thoughts and your experiences and your hopes and your frustrations. Defend others' rights to speak. And if harmony be our goal, let's pursue harmony, not inquisition.

The virtue of free speech leads naturally to another equally important dimension of freedom, and that is the freedom of spirit. In recent times, often with noble intentions, we as a nation have discouraged good works. Nowadays, many respond to misfortune by asking: "Whom can I sue?" Even worse, many would-be Samaritans wonder:

"Will someone sue me?" Talented, concerned men and women avoid such noble professions as medicine for fear that unreasonable and undefined liability claims will force them to spend more time in court than in the office or in the hospital.

And at the same time, government programs have tried to assume roles once reserved for families and schools and churches. This is understandable, but dangerous. When government tries to serve as a parent or a teacher or a moral guide, individuals may be tempted to discard their own sense of responsibility, to argue that only government must help people in need.

If we've learned anything in the past quarter century, it is that we cannot federalize virtue. Indeed, as we pile law upon law, program upon program, rule upon rule, we actually can weaken people's moral sensitivity. The rule of law gives way to the rule of the loophole, the notion that whatever is not illegal must be acceptable. In this way, great goals go unmet.

When Lyndon Johnson—President Johnson—spoke here in 1964, he addressed issues that remain with us. He proposed revitalizing cities, rejuvenating schools, trampling down the hoary harvest of racism, and protecting our environment—back in 1964. He applied the wisdom of his time to these challenges. He believed that cadres of experts really could care for the millions. And they would calculate ideal tax rates, ideal rates of expenditures on social programs, ideal distributions of wealth and privilege. And in many ways, theirs was an America by the numbers: If the numbers were right, America was right.

And gradually, we got to the point of equating dollars with commitment. And when programs failed to produce progress, we demanded more money. And in time, this crusade backfired. Programs designed to ensure racial harmony generated animosity. Programs intended to help people out of poverty invited dependency.

We should have learned that while the ideals behind the Great Society were noble—and indeed they were—the programs weren't always up to the task. We need to rethink our approach. Let's tell our people: We don't want an America by the

numbers. We don't want a land of loopholes. We want a community of commitment and trust.

When I talked of a kinder, gentler nation, I wasn't trying to just create a slogan. I was issuing a challenge. An effective government must know its limitations and respect its people's capabilities. In return, people must assume the final burden of freedom, and that's responsibility.

An introductory course in political philosophy teaches that freedom entails responsibility. Most of our greatest responsibilities confront us not in the government hearing rooms but around dinner tables, on the streets, at the office. If you teach your children and others how to hate, they will learn. And if you encourage them not to trust others, they'll follow your lead. And if you talk about compassion but refuse to help those in need, your children will learn to look the other way.

Once your commencement ends, you'll have to rely on the sternest stuff of all: yourself. And in the end, government will not make you good or evil. The quality of your life—and of our nation's future—depends as much on how you treat your fellow women and men as it does on the way in which we in Washington conduct our affairs of state. After all, the opposite of greed is not taxation. It is service.

My vision for America depends heavily on you. You must protect the freedoms of enterprise, speech, and spirit. You must strengthen the family. You must build a peaceful and prosperous future. We don't need another Great Society with huge and ambitious programs administered by the incumbent few. We need a Good Society built upon the deeds of the many, a society that promotes service, selflessness, action.

The Good Society poses a challenge: It dares you to explore the full promise of citizenship, to join in partnership with family, friends, government to make our world better. The Good Society does not demand

agonizing sacrifice. It requires something within everyone's reach: common decency—common decency and commitment. Know your neighbors. Build bonds of trust at home, at work, wherever you go. Don't just talk about principles—live them.

Let me leave you today with an exhortation: Make the most of your abilities. Question authority, but examine yourself. Demand good government, but strive to do what is good. Take risks. Muster the courage to be what I call a Point of Light. Also, define your missions positively. Don't seek out villains. Don't fall prey to obsessions about "freedom from" various ills. Focus on freedom's promise, on your promise.

When John Kennedy talked of sending a man to the Moon, he didn't say, we want to avoid getting stranded on this planet. He said, we'll send a man to the Moon. We must be equally determined to achieve our common goals.

We live in the most exciting period of my lifetime, quite possibly of yours. The old way of doing things have run their course. Find new ones. Dare to serve others, and future generations will never forget the example you set.

This is your day. Barbara and I are very proud to share it with you. Congratulations to each and every one of you. And thank you for the honor.

And God bless the United States of America.

Note: President Bush spoke at 11:22 a.m. in Michigan Stadium, after he and Mrs. Bush received honorary law degrees from the university. In his remarks, he referred to James J. Duderstadt, president of the university; Gov. John Engler of Michigan and his wife, Michelle; Representatives Carl D. Pursell, Frederick S. Upton, and Guy Vander Jagt; and President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. Following his remarks, President Bush traveled to Camp David, MD.