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to Mrs. Johnson

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS BY MRS. LYNDON B. JOHNSON
NATIONAL CONVENTION OF AMERICAN
HOME ECONOMICS ASSOCIATION
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While we meet here on an evening in June, the horizons of women all over the world are widening from home to humanity -- from our private families to the family of man.

A quiet revolution of emancipation has been taking place in the lives of women everywhere -- from Detroit to Delhi. Millions of women have achieved the right to vote, to own property, to be educated. Technological marvels now can free women from the total bondage of home chores. You, as home economists, have helped to make it so. You have taught American women to master the intricacies of push-button washer-dryers, automatic ranges, and convenience foods. More and more, you will be exporting this know-how to other parts of the world.

With these newly won rights and with a rising standard of living, women can move beyond the struggle for equal status and for material goods to the challenges and opportunities of citizenship. Increasingly, we are going to be concerned with what my husband calls "the Great Society" -- the quality of goals and the achievement of goals which will mean a better life for all.

As American women, we hold a tremendous potential of strength for good. I do not refer to the sense of power that comes from flicking a switch or turning an ignition key. But to the force we exert when we mark a ballot, teach our children, or work for a better community.

The question is: How can we best mobilize this potential? How can the individual woman practice citizenship to the fullest extent, both at home and abroad?

Ernest Hemingway once said, "Talk and write about what you know." One sees change in terms of one's own experiences.

As a girl, my home was in East Texas. It was a place where Spanish moss was draped from age old cypresses, where alligators slithered down muddy banks into dark, enchanted bayous. While we fished through the long summer days, we enjoyed the illusion that time was standing still. But time never stands still. I grew up, went to college and married a tall Texan. My horizons have been broadening and my involvement getting deeper ever since.

In the past few years, my own participation has included travel with my husband to all corners of our own land, to Thailand and India, to Senegal and Iceland, and a score of other countries.

This spring, I have been traveling some by myself. I have been to areas of serious unemployment and limited opportunities, such as Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania and Breathitt County, Kentucky. For me, it helps me see in human terms the objectives of the war on poverty.

Once in a while I ask myself, "What am I doing here?" Perhaps when I visit, it helps draw the curtain open a little more. Perhaps it gives national attention to a local problem. Perhaps it exposes us to ourselves and says, "This is the other side of America. Look! And Act!"

I am only one of 65 million American women. Almost all of us are involved, one way or another, in being the best citizens we know how to be. Actually, none of us just sat down and said, "I'm going to get involved." It happens gradually, inspired by husband and family, sometimes triggered by crisis, always influenced by circumstance and opportunity.

For example, let me tell you about one woman who has made a mark on her community and on the lives of many people around her. I went to college with her at the University of Texas. She was -- and is -- a beautiful girl, gay, filled with character and grace. Then, after she married, she was hit by one of life's hardest blows: her second child was born with cerebral palsy.

After two or three years of fighting this fact, and carrying her child to many, many doctors, she accepted it. She discovered that there were different degrees of this illness, and that in many cases, the victims could be helped. So she went to work.

Largely through her untiring persuasion, she brought together local organizations and city fathers. We now have a clinic in Austin where hundreds of children come from hundreds of miles around for treatment and training. Behind every achievement or success is one dauntless person who keeps gathering together the strength that makes the web of success.

Tonight we met a high school home economics teacher with four children who, I understand, has a daughter born with a physical handicap and a sister-in-law who suffered loss of an arm recently.

Far from restricting her activities because of these family problems, this home economist has gone beyond the call of duty to organize a place of worship for her religious denomination in the community, to initiate and lead a 4-H group, to introduce the National Honor Society in her high school and to serve as the faculty adviser for the student council and the yearbook. And, she is volunteering as bookkeeper for her husband who has just opened his own business! These are just two examples among thousands.

All of us are acquainted with many women working at citizenship. You -- yourselves are doing it each day of your lives -- bringing home economics know-how to girls and women who have or will have a home of their own.

That has been your role since your Association was founded 55 years ago. I like what your founder, Ellen Richards, the first woman to graduate from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said. It is as applicable today as it was in 1909; to apply principles of science to the home so we may have -- and these are her words -- "Freedom of the home from the dominance of things."

What better formula with which to develop the full potential of the home as a springboard to citizenship!

For, as someone once said, "When you teach a man, you teach an individual; when you teach a woman, you teach a family." And in this age, I would add to that -- "You also teach a nation and a world."

For me, your work has a very personal meaning. In Texas, our county home demonstration agents have helped homemakers to live better, to make wiser choices, to tackle problems more intelligently within the family and the community. At the ranch, we have always been delighted to see her coming. We know that when she leaves, we shall have learned much in a few hours.

Over the past 15 years, as Americans moved to town, the home economist has followed them.

I do not need to tell you that the cities reach out for you -- to help people in the public housing units and the crowded slum areas who do not know how to cope with the new and unaccustomed conditions of city life.

Indeed, as I consider your profession, there are so many ways in which the nation needs your help in the unfinished business of America.

You have long been alert to the fact that poverty roots are deepest in the family structure. Now I am delighted you are stepping up your activities for the low-income family.

An education program geared to the family without modern equipment, the family that can read, perhaps not well or, not in English, may offer these people the lifeline they need.

Your president, Florence Lowe, tells me of the El Paso Project in which a bi-lingual set of instructions about Food for Fitness was mailed out to Mexican-American families. It brought tremendous results.

One reason was that the mail got top attention because these families received so little mail.

The all-out war on poverty needs home economists in the front brigade. And, I commend all you are doing to be a full participant in this force.

New thinking and teaching is needed if we are to communicate fully to the low-income family. We must reexamine the college curriculum which produces the home economists. As in other professions, this curriculum may be geared too much to the values of the middle-income family.

Our state departments of welfare are realizing, more and more, how important it is to have the home economist to reinforce the case worker. Family problems often stem from a lack of knowledge of wise buying habits. Seventeen states now have full-time home economists on their staffs.

One of the most exciting new horizons for the home economist is helping solve the problems that daily face ten million homemakers in this country who are permanently or temporarily disabled.

The blind woman with the baby needs advice on how to care for it in her own home.

The woman with only one arm needs a little extra attention to learn how to manage her home and bathe the baby.

A mother paralyzed by polio was asked several months ago what she wished she had known when she returned home from the hospital.

"I wish someone had told me to buy a different type of carpet, one that would be right for my wheel chair," she said.

Help from an expert can make life more comfortable and productive.

I trust your professional efforts on behalf of women and families in the developing countries will receive a big push in the coming years. The fact that over 300 home economists are in the Peace Corps -- some of them women who came out of retirement to volunteer for service in Sierra Leone and Peru -- is an indication of your concern for your fellow man around the world.

One of the great joys of your work is that you can see the results. My husband has often told me that the years which gave him the most intense personal satisfaction were those in which he served under President Roosevelt as a state director of the National Youth Administration. Boys were taken from boxcars and given back their self-respect along with part-time jobs which enabled them to stay in school. To watch this happening, to have a part in its happening, was an experience we shall never forget.

For me, it was the beginning of seeing how politics can bring tangible results. I always hope that the very best of our people will go into politics, and I am sure that some of our best are women. It was for this reason that the President began his effort last winter to bring more women into government.

You home economists are examples of women who manage several lives successfully. Most of you have both a home and a professional career. Many of you, like several of the award winners tonight, also have children. You have much to share.

So, I say: "Don't hold back. Don't be shy. Step forward in every way you can to plan boldly, to speak clearly, to offer the leadership which the world needs."

For me, and probably for most women, the attempt to become an involved, practicing citizen has been a matter of evolution rather than choice. Actually, if given a choice between lying in a hammock under an apple tree with a book of poetry and watching the blossoms float down or standing on a platform before thousands of people, I don't have to tell you what I would have chosen 25 years ago. But 25 years and the invention of the nuclear bomb have left us no choice. The hammocks and apple trees are happy memories except for a few short, cherished moments.

Edmund Burke said, almost 200 years ago, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." I hope he would forgive me if I modernize and amend his statement to say, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men and good women to do nothing."

I am sure that will not be.

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