

# COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

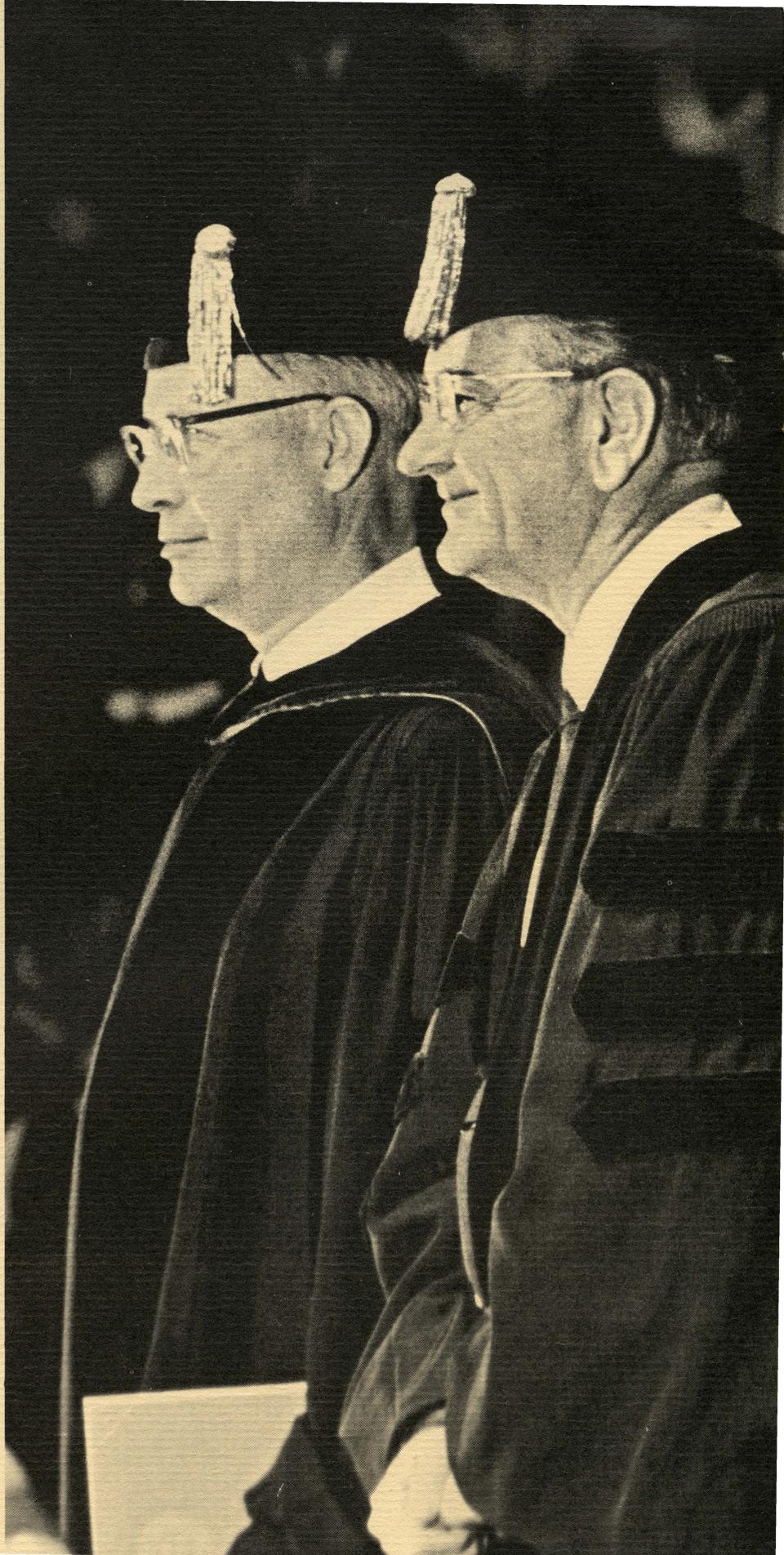
by

President Lyndon B. Johnson

TEXAS CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY  
FORT WORTH, TEXAS

May 29, 1968

*The highest moment in the history of Texas Christian University was the participation of President Lyndon B. Johnson as speaker and degree recipient at commencement on May 29, 1968. The first holder of the nation's highest office to visit the 95-year-old institution, he was introduced as "the steadiest of giants in the fiercest of times" by Chancellor J. M. Moudy.*



**W**E MEET AT A TIME when the American university is at the center of rapid change and heated controversy. Perhaps this is a good time to reflect on the nature of change in America, on affirmation and discontent among young people and on your opportunity to share in the ongoing discovery of our country.

It is an unchanging habit of commencement orators to talk about change.

The speakers who tell their audiences this year that times are changing, however, should not be accused of dealing in platitudes. For America — and the world — are altering themselves with dizzying speed. The citizen, the student and the public servant may find it difficult to fathom the nature and the meaning of all this change.

But all of us can feel it happening. All of us are stirred by it. All of us are sometimes elated and sometimes disturbed by it.

A stranger to America might well wonder how a people so active and so successful can be so troubled.

Why do we take so little comfort in the undeniable triumphs of the last few years? Why do we scarcely seem to notice how far we have come — and in how short a time — toward solving problems that have plagued our democracy for generations?

In the last three years, a stranger might point out, America has brought the franchise to almost a million citizens who had been systematically denied the right to vote.

In this administration alone, the nation's economy — and our common efforts to conquer want — have lifted more than eight million citizens up from poverty, created seven million new jobs, cut unemployment to the lowest level in 15 years and increased the real income of the average American, after taxes, by 20 per cent.

In a few years, the Congress has broken the deadlock of years and has pioneered new programs in health, in education, in consumer protection, in conservation, in civil rights.

Yet for all this accomplishment, the American people are anything but satisfied. We are, as countless orators and observers remind us, a restless nation.

Why? Part of the answer lies, I believe, in the very progress we have made. For a nation — as for an individual — success brings its own problems and raises its own vexing questions.

More than a century ago, a shrewd French visitor to our shores made this observation:

The sufferings that are endured patiently, as being inevitable, become intolerable at the moment it appears that there might be an escape. Reform, then, only serves to reveal more clearly what still remains oppressive, and now all the more unbearable. The suffering, it is true, has been reduced, but one's sensitivities have become more acute.



*To receive an honorary Doctor of Laws degree that TCU trustees voted in 1964 to confer upon him, he was invited to take part in the spring event for a number of reasons. "First and foremost, this man is our President and, as such, will always be respected and welcome on our campus," said Dr. Moudy in his welcome. Noted, too, were his Texas heritage and his membership in the Disciples of Christ Church, which founded TCU's parent institution. Other honorary degree recipients, University officials and distinguished guests were in the platform party, shown during one of several standing ovations given the speaker.*



*Under a policy designed to guarantee admission for family members of those in the record-setting class of 807 earned degrees, seniors, other students and faculty lined up at Daniel-Meyer Coliseum for reserved seat tickets.*



*The presidential motorcade arrived at the coliseum as faculty members moved inside in academic procession.*

CERTAINLY OUR SENSITIVITIES have become more acute. We are today more keenly aware of lingering poverty amid our growing wealth, of public squalor amid private luxury. Our people, especially our younger people, are more impatient than ever with "what still remains oppressive" — with racial injustice, urban decay, outworn institutions, bitterness and war between nations.

By almost every measure, we have moved closer, much closer to solving our problems. But, although some of the solutions are in sight, many of them remain frustratingly beyond our reach. With all our advances in computer technology, we are still unable to set a precise date for the arrival of equality, the advent of peace, the curing of old ills and the healing of old wounds.

As President Kennedy put it, we are destined — all of us — "to live out most, if not all, of our lives in uncertainty and challenge and peril."

How should we face that uncertainty? Will we master an uncertain age or let it overwhelm us?

Have we the strength, the tolerance, the vitality and the faith to weather the "burden and the heat of the day?"

Much depends on the answer your generation gives. And sometimes, that is not encouraging.

Today, as in every time in our history, there are those who doubt the power of our democracy to make early and significant progress.

There are extremists whose aim is to rule or to wreck. They speak only in slogans and are deaf to reasoned reply. They are chiefly united in the certainty with which they advance their views and in the vehemence with which they mock the views of others.

Theirs is not the spirit of liberty, which Learned Hand once defined as "the spirit which is not too sure that it is right."

Jefferson, the drafter of the Declaration of Independence, the philosopher of individual liberty and the defender of individual conscience, wrote a kinsman in 1808 that public men:

should from all student disputants keep aloof, as you would from the infected subjects of yellow fever or pestilence. Consider yourself, when with them, as among the patients of Bedlam, needing medical more than moral counsel. Be a listener only, keep within yourself the habit of silence, especially on politics. In the fevered state of our country, no good can ever result from any attempt to set one of these fiery zealots to rights, either in fact or principle. They are determined as to the facts they will believe and the opinions on which they will act. Get by them, therefore, as you would by an angry bull; it is not for the man of sense to dispute the road with such an animal.

I might point out that Jefferson wrote this during the last year of his presidency.

It would be interesting to compare his views with those privately expressed by several modern presidents in recent weeks.

But my purpose, this evening, is to talk about change, and those who glorify violence as a form of political action are really the best friends the *status quo* ever had. They provoke a powerful conservative reaction among millions of people. They inspire, among many people, a blind allegiance to things as they are — even when those things should be changed.

But, though they are great in volume, these young totalitarians of opinion are few in number among America's graduating classes this spring.

For 40 years, since I was graduated from a small college down in San Marcos, I have been observing the quality of each year's crop of university graduates. I tell you frankly, and without any attempt at flattery, that this generation of young college people is the best I have ever seen. Healthier, as you would expect. Quicker of mind and better trained.

But beyond those things — which could be, after all, only the results of affluence and evolution — there is a moral energy in this generation that exceeds any I have ever seen before.

**E**VEN THAT MAY STEM in part from historical circumstance. Most of those who are graduating from college now have had a degree of leisure in which to contemplate the society around them. Most have had a measure of confidence in their ability to secure a prosperous place in that society. And so they have been spared the pressure of meeting society's demands, of shaping themselves to be acceptable to a restricted job market.

However it has come about, they have had an opportunity to look at their country — at its institutions, its people, its promise and its performance.

You have had a chance to feel the force of change in modern life, even if you — like the rest of us — cannot entirely comprehend it. You have already experienced the impersonality of modern institutions that affords you a degree of privacy, while it sometimes deprives you of a sense that you count.

You know that your chances for long and prosperous lives have never been better. But you wonder whether you will continue to live side-by-side with desperate want, ugliness and racial animosity.

You know that your nation is the most powerful on earth. But you wonder how its power, and its idealism, may help to bring peace to a tormented world.

These are not new concerns. What is new is the desire of young graduates today to ask the right questions and the desire of our country to give the right answers.



*While tickets for commencement were not available for the public, friendly crowds gathered outside the TCU building and along Fort Worth streets to extend a warm welcome.*



*Mr. Johnson shook hands with Dr. Sandy Wall during brief introductions and later wore the associate dean's academic gown when it was discovered that the President's regalia had been left aboard his airplane.*



*Carried "live" on television, the commencement address and the evening's proceedings were filmed and taped by journalists from the nation's leading papers, as well as the national press corps, and stories went via Western Union instantaneously to editors throughout the world.*



*A reverent chief executive covers his heart during singing of national anthem at the closing of the ceremony. At left are Congressmen Olin Teague and Jim Wright.*

Here are some of the questions I hope you will ask and then take part in answering:

- How can the quality of education be improved — not only in ghetto classrooms, but throughout the country's educational system from pre-school to graduate school?
- What are the best means of helping our poor to lead more secure and productive lives?
- How can good medical care be provided at reasonable cost to every citizen?
- How can the transportation of people be made safer, swifter, less frustrating, more efficient?
- How can we take advantage of technological change and the economy of massive enterprises without submerging the individual?
- How can we best help the people of the underdeveloped world in their struggle against poverty?
- How can we help the world — and ourselves — find rational solutions to conflict and end the threat of a nuclear war?

These are formidable questions.

You may feel ill-equipped to deal with them. I assure you that I do. But they must be answered if conditions in our country and the world are to change in a manner that will serve man and not master him. And it is your generation that must answer them.

**Y**OU MUST BEGIN NOW—in industry, in government, in universities, in politics, in private life—to examine the alternatives, to seek the programs, the politicians and the public support for progressive change.

I believe that leaders in government can contribute to the education of this college generation. I should like to see outstanding leaders from the junior class all over America come to Washington each year for direct discussions with government leaders on the key issues of our times. I would like to see them spend, without losing credit, a month to six weeks in Washington each spring deepening their understanding of the problems and prospects we face.

I have called upon the White House Fellows — young citizens who have served a year at the highest levels of government — to develop a plan for accomplishing this and to submit their plan to me in the early fall.

It is a time to widen the opportunities for excellence and for service. I have tried to do this in a number of ways:

- through VISTA, Volunteers in Service to America, where young men and women help those who need it most;
- through the White House Fellows program;
- through the recognition of Presidential scholars;
- and, not least, through finding and using the best young talent available for government service.

Now, I believe we should extend the range of young people's participation in public life. I believe we should move forward now to grant the vote to 18-year-olds.

Several states have already done so. A majority of the people and many in Congress approve the idea. The great majority of young people in America have demonstrated their maturity, their desire to participate, their zeal for service.

I leave you, this evening, in faith:

- faith in you;
- faith in our country;
- faith in your capacity to change our country for the better.

My faith is built on what young people have achieved in these last few years; on their bravery and steadfastness in battle; on their idealism and perseverance in the cause of social justice.

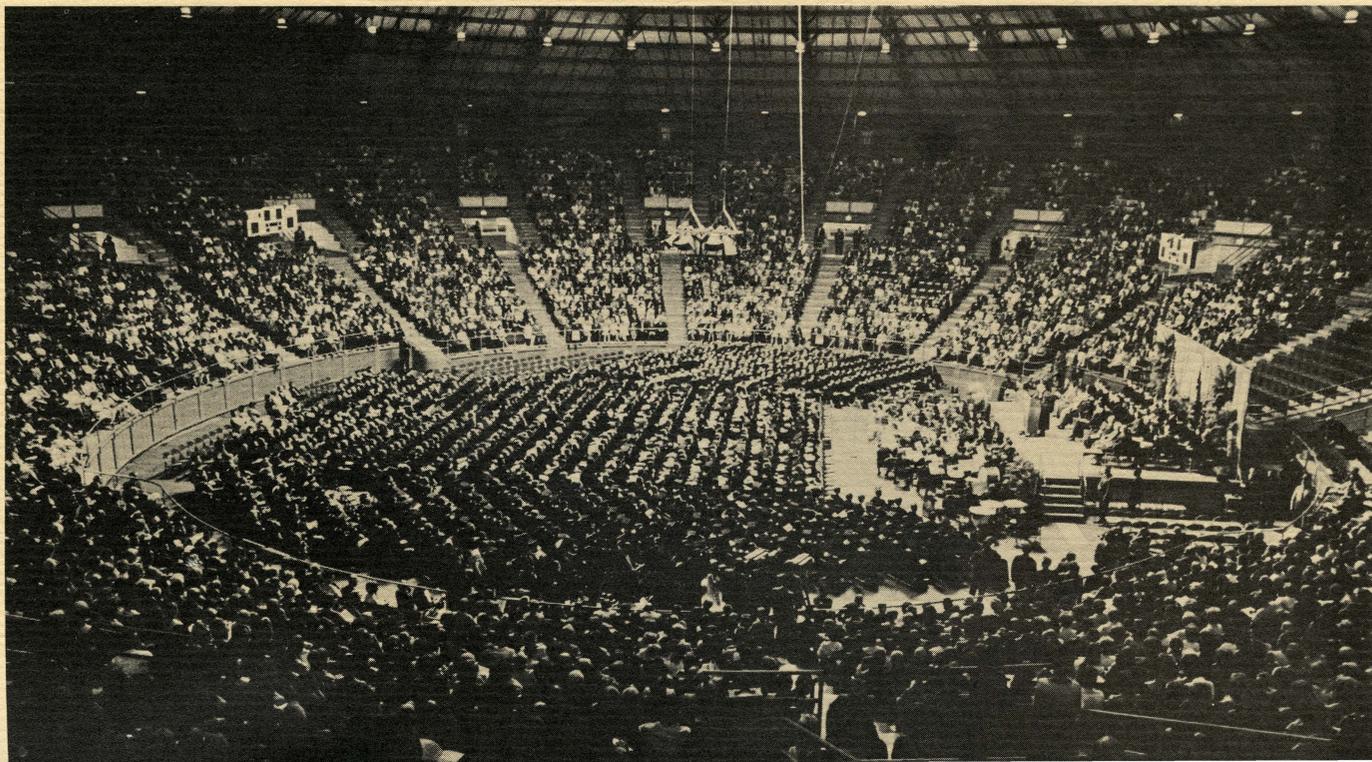
It is built, as well, on the country itself: on its ability to move out of apathy and bigotry, toward dignity for all of its people; on its steady assumption of responsibility in the world.

I know the future will be often perilous and frustrating, like the past. But what we have accomplished in these years — and what you are tonight — tells me that we have only begun to achieve the greatness that is our destiny.

Good night, and God bless you.



*President Johnson, addressing his remarks primarily to the graduates, urged youthful participation in the shaping of the destiny of America and called for constructive rather than destructive change. The 7,116-seat coliseum was filled for the occasion by proud relatives and close friends of the gowned graduates.*





*The president was hooded by Vice Chancellor W. Earl Waldrop and Dean Thomas Palmer as Chancellor Moudy read the citation that described him as a "loyal son of a proud Texas, devoted pupil and able teacher to far-seeing American leaders, a man whose dedication and vision of service to his nation has never ceased to grow, destined unflinchingly to become President of these United States in their most uncertain hour, a President whom historians of the world will pronounce the steadiest of giants in the fiercest of times."*

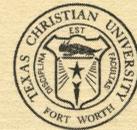
## Texas Christian University

has conferred upon  
**Lyndon Baines Johnson**  
 the degree of  
**Doctor of Laws**

and all the rights and privileges thereunto appertaining.  
 In Witness Whereof, this diploma duly signed has been issued and the seal of the University affixed.

Issued by the Board of Trustees upon recommendation of the faculty  
 at Fort Worth, Texas this twenty-ninth day of May A.D. 1968.

*Lamin A. Bowell*  
 Chairman of the Board



*J. M. Moudy*  
 Chancellor

