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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT BOY SCOUT JAMBOREE
VALLEY FORGE, PENNSYLVANIA

[AS ACTUALLY DELIVERED]

Mr. Watson, Scout Leaders, Members of the Boy Scouts of America: The America that you will build and live to see will be far different from the America of today.

In fifty years, there will be 400 million Americans instead of 190 million Americans. Man will have reached into outer space and probed the inner secrets of human life. And some of you will take those journeys. New inventions will have changed the way in which you live, just as the automobile and the airplane and the television have brought changes to my life. Fast planes and satellites will make neighbors of distant lands.

You will see wonders and participate in achievements of which we older Americans can only dream.

This is an exciting challenge. I envy you the great adventures which await you.

But it was an American President, Woodrow Wilson, who said, "A nation which does not remember what it was yesterday does not know what it is today nor what it is trying to do."

If you are to do great things, you must remember also what America has been.

For this country of ours is not just a collection of factories and banks. It is not simply 190 million people, or crowded cities, or broad highways.

This country of ours is a community built on an idea. Its history is the history of an idea. And its future will be bright only so long as you are faithful to that idea.

It all began right here where we are standing tonight. In 1777, in Valley Forge, a few thousand men suffered and starved through the freezing cold of the harsh winter. They did not have, as you have, regular meals, a decent place to sleep, protection from harm.

But they did have an idea, an idea and a dream. That idea gave them the strength to survive the winter, and when their ordeal was over, George Washington led them forth to liberate and to create the United States of America.

Throughout our history, most Americans have shared the common purpose which gave strength to the soldiers at Valley Forge. Most Americans share those purposes tonight.

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The American idea is, first of all, the belief in freedom and the rights of man. Government was to be chosen and directed by the people. And every individual citizen was to have the right to speak his views, to worship as he wanted, and to be safe from the arbitrary acts of government. Even if a single man stood alone against the entire nation, that single man was to be protected in his beliefs and in his right to voice those beliefs.

This dedication to freedom was founded on the great moral truth that all men were created equal. This was a recognition that all men were equal in the eyes of God. Being equal, the poorest and the most oppressed among us had the same right as all others to share in government, to enjoy liberty, to pursue happiness as far as his abilities would take him.

It will be up to you to carry this idea forward. For it is not yet a reality for all in this land.

If government was to be chosen by the people, it must exist to serve the needs of the people. This, too, is part of the American idea.

As a result, in America we have a government which exists to protect the freedom and enlarge the opportunities of every citizen. That government is not to be feared or to be attacked. It is to be helped as long as it serves the country well, and it is to be changed when it neglects its duty.

I know that to many of you the government in Washington must often seem far away and must often seem difficult to understand.

But your government is made up of people, people like those you know in your own hometowns, people who are chosen by your parents and your neighbors and sent to Washington to serve your towns and your states.

Government is an Irish boy from Boston who grew up to become President of the United States.

Government is the son of a German immigrant from Pekin, Illinois who became a leader of the American Senate.

Government is a rancher from Montana, a banker from New York, an automobile maker from Detroit.

Yes, government is the son of a tenant farmer from Texas who is speaking to you tonight.

And I am sure that here tonight within the sound of my voice are others who will grow up to work for this country in the councils of government.

The American idea is also the belief in expanding opportunity and in progress. This was not to be a country where a few were rich and most were deprived. It was to be a country where every citizen had the chance, through his own work and skill, to provide for his family and to enrich his life. And that is the kind of country that we have built.

In the early days a man needed only an axe and a gun to build a new life in the open spaces of the West. Today it takes knowledge and skill. Today they must have that chance in order to find a job in order to take a rewarding place in the life of our country.

But because we have been faithful to this idea, more men have greater opportunity in America than in any other country in the history of the civilization.

These ideas are as old as your country, but they are not old-fashioned ideas. They are as alive and as vital as America itself.

I have no doubt that if you remain true to them, you will remember these days of scouting as only the beginning of a lifetime of useful service to America.

The qualities you will require for this task are those contained in your Boy Scout Oath. Its pledge has meaning not only for you but has great meaning for all of our citizens.

What that pledge really means is the theme of this Jamboree. It means "This Is My Country," and "I must prepare myself to serve it well."

Be faithful to it. Your life and the life of your country will be the richer for it.

It is wonderful to come here and be with you this evening, and to look into your smiling, optimistic faces. It will give me strength that I need in the lonely hours that I spend in attempting to lead this great Nation.

It is wonderful that you could be here in this peaceful atmosphere of one of the great States in our Union and at such an historic site.

You have much to be thankful for. Yes, we have much to present and much to protect.

I am grateful that your great leader, Mr. Tom Watson, Jr., asked me to come here to be with you tonight, and I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for receiving me so warmly.

God bless you all.

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