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President's Notes: Challenge!

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CHALLENGE!

According to the Book of Ecclesiastes, "There is nothing new under the sun." In light of this, consider this excerpt from a poem written by the Frenchman Estache Deschamps in the 14th century:

Why is our life so cruel and dark
That men no longer speak to friends?
Why does evil so clearly mark
The monstrous government of men?
Compare what is with what is past
And see how fraud and sorrow stand.
While law and justice fade so fast,
That I know no longer where I am.

Deschamps could well have written those words today. Now, as in the past, the world of action is far removed from the world of words. Responsibility, authority, and accountability are still the benchmarks of our leaders. Our nation and the free world face a crisis in the struggle for the basic rights of man.

It is very easy in our present environment to overemphasize material things, particularly technical progress. We sometimes forget that it is people who make things go. The founding documents of this country—the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, which we might call the "birth certificates" of the United States—affirm a conscious dedication to principles of the individual. They apply mostly to people. Indeed, the first truth Jefferson proclaimed in writing the Declaration of Independence he claimed was self-evident, namely, "All men are created equal."

Almost all Americans inherit from their early school teaching a simplified, black and white though somewhat hazy picture of the American Revolutionary Period and the founding of this Nation. In the sweetness and light atmosphere conjured up, with the exception of a few dissenting Tories and the obvious opposition of the British, the founders of our Republic are generally believed to be united in harmonious agreement



as to the righteousness of their cause and a firm trust in the justice of their goals. Such was definitely not the case. All Americans will profit in knowing the credibility of opposing political philosophies which pointed out weaknesses, dangers, and fears of this scheme of government of the people, by the people, and for the people. That the proper concept of liberal democracy triumphed, is generally unquestioned. That all this came into being unchallenged by extremely sharp and credible debate, should be recalled.

Fisher Ames, one of the toughest and most vocal members of the opposition in the days of Jefferson, made some piercing comments.

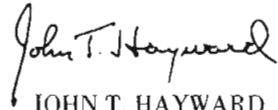
A government by the passions of the multitude, or, no less correctly, according to the vices and ambition of their leaders, is a democracy . . . It is the almost universal mistake of our countrymen that democracy would be mild and safe in America. They charge the hard excesses of France not so much to human nature which will never act better when the restraints of government, morals, and religion are thrown off, but to the characteristic cruelty and wickedness of Frenchmen.

It is indeed a far cry from those days to the complex world we face today. It

is not, however, such a far cry in what is required of us as individuals—in the way we perform our tasks and discharge our duties to this our country.

Modern Europe rose phoenix-like from the problems of the 14th century. America survived the “evils” of American liberty. I am certain that a far better world will rise from the effort we put

into the performance of our tasks today, though it be not in our time. It will undoubtedly be in a world of action, not a world of words. Debate and dissent should always be a part of our way of life. However, once we have taken our stand as a nation we must go forward with firm purpose to discharge our responsibilities.



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