

To Chamber of Commerce Annual Meeting,  
Johnson City, Texas, February 12, 1964

Among Communists they have a practice they call "self-criticism." This idea would not be bad at all if in fact it was a self-appraisal for the purpose of improvement. Generally, we are led to believe from reported incidents, it is not self-criticism at all but "parroting" something from the "party line".

In America we do things differently. We arrange a dinner or banquet, and pay more for tickets than the food would cost at home, and then have someone, who probably doesn't know what he's talking about, to stand up and criticize us.

I don't believe that is what we want to do here tonight.

According to a national magazine many of us live on rabbits and pork sausage. I can tell those Eastern folks it isn't bad eating. In any event I know the food here tonight is a treat and is more than worth the price. The speech you hear may not be worth so much, but at least we are going to look for that which is constructive and not merely destructive criticism. We will look for encouragement for all that is good in our community, that it may grow to be even better. This community tonight is one of the most unique in the world. It is the hometown of the President of the United States. No other has that honor that privilege, that distinction, that opportunity or that responsibility.

Dateline: "JOHNSON CITY, TEXAS," is becoming world famous. Among free peoples it is now something of a status symbol. LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON, the man within whose reflected glory we are highlighted, is one of whom we would be proud regardless of what position he held, for he would fill it well. As President of the United States we are extremely proud of him, and somewhat awed with the position he holds. We do not forget, as he does not forget, that in this land he had his beginnings. From a proud father, devoted and devout mother, and within the environments of this community, he acquired a sense abiding of abiding values, and lessons of honor, courage and humility which grace him today as manly virtues.

As he is a part of you, so you are a part of him. In this sense let us resolve to preserve and maintain here the environment, the human values, the convictions which were truly the nurturing soil within which grew this tree so tall and strong. Because of the unique place we now fill, we are faced with unique opportunities and responsibilities.

The spotlight is upon us here, not because of ourselves, but because through this one man we are projected into the whole world. This does not mean that we may just bask in it, rather~ it challenges us to greater effort to make our community representative of the highest and best.

The unfeigned simplicity of the hill country requires of each of us who live here strong character to resist mere boorishness. It demands that we face realities with a will and make our ideals practical. It requires that we live honorably for we deal with our fellowman face to face. What may seem to some a rough and arid land, a backward people, upon examination becomes a fetish beautiful land, touched with the tender color of a great Creator and within which there is the ~ hearts of true men and women. The out-reach of nature about us reminds us daily of the fact we are of God and In His land. The harsh is softened into exceeding beauty, faith is strong within us and the uplifted hills reminds us whence cometh our strength.

This is worth having - this is worth sharing. This means we must seize onto the opportunities we have and grow to meet the responsibilities.

Our community is not as good as the best of us, and thank goodness it is not as faulty as the worst of us. Rather it is a composite of those who live here and make this home. It is us, as we are, both good and bad. As an individual may choose paths which lead upward to better things, so may communities. As we may improve ourselves as individuals, so we may improve our community.

This improvement comes about by encouraging always the best. As the individual must grow as a whole person, likewise a community must grow in the same manner. An individual who knows nothing but how to make money is lopsided. One who knows nothing except preachments would be, too. We grow physically, mentally, spiritually, as stewards of things and as being capable of exceeding the higheths to which our fellows may have attained.

A community that is preoccupied with only economic welfare factors will be to that extent lopsided. A community which seeks to grow in size, in spirit, in heart, in mind, in wealth, as a whole, that all her people may benefit, truly becomes larger in every way.

Realizing that we do not have the time tonight to draw a blue print of how we might grow by seizing our opportunities to meet our responsibilities, I would nevertheless suggest some guidelines which would lead to true growth. It seems to me that one of the things fundamental to the betterment of an individual in mind, heart, soul, and body, and speech, and action, and in all his living. I think a community must do the same. Someone said cleanliness is next to Godliness. He had rare insight. No person can build a better life, nor can a community find food for growth,

upon that which degenerates the mind, sours the soul, hardens the heart, or begrimes the body or surroundings. Rather we grow when we bottom our lives upon cleanliness of thought, action, speech and life. So will a community.

Spiritual faith is as essential to a community as to the individual. It is the cornerstone upon which to build. Without it, the wall will be weak and fall. With it all is made truer, stronger, purer, better.

Education for all is another necessity. For our youth, yes. But also for adults. This community is blessed with as fine a school as any community in the nation. It can be if all of us would contribute the most we could to it. If nothing else, our encouragement to teachers and pupils alike would be helpful. Beyond this, we should have adequate library and similar facilities; demonstrative lessons; and a continuing effort to improve our knowledge, our mind, and our appreciation of things worthwhile.

Thrift and industry are the foundation for security. No one can give us that, we must earn it and make it secure for ourselves. Sometimes a person cannot do this adequately for himself, while his neighbor may be able to do much more than he needs. In those cases we must be willing to share that the community may be strengthened.

Energetic application of all our talents and abilities to solving daily problems is needful. We should give our best to everything in our own lives and in the life of the community which will enrich, ennoble, endure.

Neighborly love and understanding, typical of our frontier heritage, brings together the community into one wholesome band of friends and people with concern and love for one another. All this not because duty demands it, as it does, but because of love in the heart. This is the cement which properly spread will weld together the whole of our people as though it were into one family.

It has often been said that a community begins to grow when the people who live there stop saying "they" and start saying "we". This results from using the cement of brotherly love and affection, friendship we sometimes term it, to mould the many into one.

I have experienced a community working together with one mind and purpose, to achieve an objective. It is truly a moving experience and one which impresses a person far more than you think it would. I believe that we can achieve anything that is right and good for our community if we try and work together with all our talents and ability to achieve it. We fail, not because we cannot, but because we do not try - together - to do it.

Those who think of themselves as sophisticated are apt to term these thoughts I have stated tonight - which certainly are not original but have been said in many ways at many times - are purely idealistic. Admitted. But no more profound truth has been said, than when the poet wrote:

"Ideals are like the stars - - you will not succeed in touching them with your hands, but like the seafaring man on the desert of waters, you choose them as your guides -- and, following them, you will reach your destiny."

I am convinced that if we would build a greater Johnson City, the best guidelines we can have is to follow the highest ideals we can attain.

Our destiny is to be worthy of the unique place we fill in the world today. We can attain it only by following the dictates of that which is good and therefore idealistic. We can make these ideals practical by carefully surveying our needs, our resources, and our strength and planning by these guidelines to make the best use of what we have to achieve that destiny.