

Remarks by
Thos. C. Ferguson
To Teaching Staff.
Burnett Independent School District
August 30, 1961

“STARS IN YOUR EYES”

You have heard the expression “Starry Eyed Patriot”? I feel what we Americans need is to get a rebirth of “Stars in Our Eyes.” We need to recall America’s virtues, her strengths, her achievements, and her service to mankind.

I feel deeply concerned at heart because so many of our people seem to be able to find nothing good to say about America and nothing bad to say about socialism and her misbegotten spawns, communism and facisism.

I feel deeply concerned that there are those who condemn the teaching of patriotism in the public school system. I am dismayed that some have even criticized your program of Americanism in this school.

It is small wonder that some 22 young men from this country betrayed their country and their heritage to the Communist Chinese and Communist North Koreans at the time of he exchange of prisoners upon the signing of the cease-fire in Korea. Why should they know differently when they had not been taught that the only real liberty this world has ever known resulted from the American revolution and the creation of a new government devoted to the principles of freedom and liberty based upon justice. How should they know that dialectical materialism in essence denies everything for which America has striven -- that it denies God, denies the rights of the individual, denies individual opportunity, and denies any moral value in truth or justice.

If we do not regain the Stars in Our Eyes, and be gin to teach and uphold the true beauties of the American dream and the history of the steps taken towards its realization, we must not be abashed when young people see no particular good in defending our way of life.

Let us review a little history and experience from the past.

Many years ago, as man began to learn the principles of trade and navigation, the economy began to expand in relation to man’s ability to trade with other men. This was followed by the establishment of the market place. It might be a storeroom; it might simply be a cleared area where goods or animals or something could be contained until it was exchanged for something else either directly or through the means of exchange media. Such intercourse between tribes,. and clans and nations required a degree of liberty. The market place was a place of enterprise which gradually became free, and was the freest and most liberal of ancient man’s activities.

The free market was bottomed upon the need of man to exchange that which he could make or produce in excess of his own need for some other good that someone else had made or produced. Always exchanges in kind were not practical, so a medium called money was devised to represent

the goods that each had and thereby facilitate its exchange. Soon it became necessary that there be reservoirs of money so that one merchant might assign to a trader far away a portion to represent payment which could not be made in specie. National boundary lines had to be transcended. Restraints that might otherwise bind men had to be lifted, and since princes depended upon this trade they were quick to grant a larger measure of freedom to those involved in this process than to others.

As years passed, this expanding economy and the freedom of the market place was also influenced by another factor which refined its practices into fixed principles. This was the influence of the Judeo-Christian heritage that flowed across the world, beginning at Jerusalem, by way of Greece, the Roman Empire, the Visigoths, the Holy Roman Empire, and the tremendous influence of the reformation. The Judeo-Christian concept of the individual dignity and supreme worth of the person as an individual, magnified by the ideal of the reformation of the priesthood of every believer, with the principle of the freedom of every man to deal with that which was his own according to his own best judgment, came to fruition in America. This came about when peoples of any racial origins, influenced by many religious beliefs, seeking freedom from oppression, worked out in time their belief in the inherent right of every person to life, liberty, use and control of property, and the right to respond to his opportunities according to the best of his understanding and the extent of his industry.

“The word freedom has come from the lips of men in every language. The ideal of freedom has been extolled in the world’s great oratory, and celebrated in poetry, drama, and song. Men have prayed for freedom, fought for it, died for it, lived to enjoy the fruits of freedom, and to pass on to their children the heritage of government organized to preserve freedom.”¹

I noticed in the Austin Statesman for August 29, 1961, an above-the-masthead feature story concerning a letter from a youth in Berlin to a young lady in Austin. While they had been “pen-pals” for some time this particular letter was particularly prompted by Vice-President Johnson’s recent visit to Berlin. He has a paragraph in which he asks a question which is poignantly soul searching. He wrote:

“Freedom and liberty is more important than to eat and drink. You can exist without freedom and liberty but can you live without it?”

We need to learn the lesson this youth already grasps as well. This great principle which found its greatest expression in the thought, lives and action of the early Americans, and which is a part of our American heritage, emphasizes the responsibility of the individual. As it recognizes and emphasizes individual responsibility, it also recognizes the parallel concept that the individual must be free to fulfill his responsibilities in his own way and according to his own convictions of right and wrong. The individual had to be able to freely make his or her own choices, good or bad, and to be responsible for them.

A further result in bringing together on this continent these streams of thought and practice from the past and their merging into a new way of life was a complete freedom of enterprise. The individual might choose his own occupation, business or profession. He might plan for such

¹ Willard E. Givens and Belmont M. Farley, The Road to Freedom, Washington D.D., 1960

achievements as he wished or strive for. He might choose the location where he practiced his profession or pursued his calling. It was as necessary as physical food is to physical life that this way of life govern itself according to the consensus of opinion of those involved. That is, that the system of government must serve the individual and maintain freedom and opportunity as well as to provide for the welfare of the group. At no time, however, could the rights and liberties of the individual be completely subjected to the will of the group except to the extent necessary to permit the group to live together and work together in peace and harmony.

The American way of life is not limited to the principle of free enterprise. America is not primarily a capitalistic state. It is not just a democracy. America is a republic; it is a way of life resulting from a conviction of the dignity and worth of the individual, dictated by religious faith and understanding, interpreted by the give and take of freedom of thought and action, which together has devised a system of government based upon these principles and designed it as a servant-government not a master—government. It brings to the plane of normal, every-day living the normal desire to achieve personal triumphs over the limitations that surround us, controlled by high ideals of religious morality and ethics, illuminated by benevolent personal relations, and encouraging each person to strive by righteous means to lift himself or herself to a higher plane than that from which they came.

That these ideals and beliefs were successful is the most outstanding testimony of history. If you drove down a road for 6,000 miles and were surrounded only by barren waste, and then suddenly came upon a beautifully fruitful land, with every beauty and every good thing multiplied many times, you would say something significant and eventful had occurred here. We do not need to be boastful to recognize that history is barren of great human advances for 6,000 years of history, and that for a little over 180 years the great advances for human betterment stand out like the oasis in the desert, and the people of the whole world who knew not liberty a few years back, now clamor for recognition, and that therefore there has been a significant change by which the greatest potential of man has been loosed. As opposed to the advances we now face the flood tide of that malevolent backwash of human ideas which denies the right to freedom of the individual (the divine right of kings disguised in another garb); and deifies the State (and they made fun of Hirohito) thereby seeking to overcome and stifle that flood tide of human development which began on this continent with the American revolution.

It is not a struggle of capitalism against communism. The Communist, and all other socialists, strongly believe in capitalism, but they want the State to be the capitalist rather than trusting economic gains in the hands of those who produce them.

It is rather a struggle between the idea that all problems can be solved by the management of physical property and the idea that man is himself of divine origin, and as such can not find the highest plateau of his achievement in the realm of the material, but in the realm of the spiritual. A struggle between the teaching that what we enjoy here on earth is all we will ever enjoy, for death will end all life, and the belief that there is a God who is creator, father and savior, from whom we received life and opportunity; one who will guide us by his live; and one who will join us to himself that we may be as eternal as himself.

Ye that have faith to look with fearless eyes beyond the tragedy of a world at strife, And trust that out of night and death shall rise The Dawn of ampler life; Rejoice, whatever anguish rend your heart, That God has given you for a priceless dower, To live in these great times and hay ~ your part In Freedom's crowning hour; . . .

For illustration of the remainder of what I would like to say in this connection, please go with me in imagination back down the corridors of time and pick up the threads of life of the American way as it developed that we might better understand that which we must keep alive today.

Suppose we walk a moment along the path of the rag-tag army of the American states, following after the leadership of a stern, solemn man, filled completely with wholesome, wholehearted integrity, as they fought from the place here they had experienced the snows of Valley Forge towards York-town. As Washington led his army southward, we come to a place where a skirmish occurred and find an American soldier sadly wounded, whose life is ebbing away, but who in flashes of coherent thought is saying to himself, "Why? -- Why am I here?" -- Why am I about to die?" Then a moment of incoherence and as it passes and a little strength returns for just a second, he remembers his father and mother at their quiet, well-ordered home in the New England area, carved out of the granite-like hardness of the frontier by the hands of those who believed in God and His purpose for man, and the freedom of a man to achieve. As the scenes etched in memory of the gentle green of the pastures where the cattle graze, and the brown earth of the fields where father drives the team to the plow, by the white house where mother works and withal lingers to think of her son so far away, passes before the eyes of his memory, and he thinks of the beautiful white church down the road where he was wont to go with his family and hear God's word preached, and to mingle with others in fellowship and faith, he finds his answer in his hope that this gentle way of life, which demands in its gentleness great strength and will to support it, but providing so great a liberty, shall not pass away but may be kept alive for all of those who may come after him.

Or go with me to the battle for Washington during the war of 1812, and we see another American soldier gravely wounded and about to make that last great sacrifice that man can make. He, too, wonders why it must be that he should make this gift of his life. As his eyes catch the last glimpse of life he sees in the distance the great capitol building in the process of construction and there comes to him that sense of justice that is represented by this youthful government, completely new in design, devoted, as are her leaders, to preserving the rights of the individual. He knows then, that while his gift cannot be explained, if it but preserves the American sense of justice and the leveling of right between man and man, and man and the government, It would be a gift none would refuse.

You can also walk with me across the field at Cemetery Ridge, and see here two brothers, one clad in blue and one in gray, met their death with hands clasp. Could they understand why there was turmoil and war between kindred people, who so treasured their free heritage? Perhaps not, but we know that they gave their lives that what had been so nobly begun would not be abandoned or forgotten.

An American dying on San Juan Hill might surely say, why here? Why at all? But freedom cannot live if it approves, supports or permits slavery, and America was committed to freedom for all.

A fighting man at St. Mihiel, at Ypres, or somewhere else along the awful trenches of death in 1918 might well wonder as he gave that which no man may reclaim once given, why he should die on a foreign field of war, and find his answer in the firm belief that he was a soldier of freedom's army, and that wherever the stars and stripes might float upon the breeze, there was man's greatest testimonial to liberty.

At Pearl Harbor, Guadalcanal, Luzon, Okinawa, or Iwo Jima, men must have wondered if death was a fitting price to pay for the continuation of the American way of life.

At Salerno or on Omaha Beach could men who gave their all find consolation as they died in the belief that the American way of life was worthy of this?

On Heartbreak Ridge a dying soldier prays for loved ones at home, and that somehow by his sacrifice their safety and security and liberty has been made safe.

If we compromise a single principle upon which freedom is based we are false to every man who has died that we might have that blessing. If we think that freedom of religion means freedom from religion we have mistaken that which called forth the courage and the will for men to make the greatest gift they could give that we might worship according to our conscientious conviction. If we forget the sanctity and security of the home we betray that which is made sacred by sacrifice of life and limb.

When we fail to vote we say to these who so valiantly gave their lives that we might have that privilege that their sacrifice was useless.

“The blood of free men stain my ballot sheet. Whatever others may do, I shall not carelessly make my mark. I vote not because I may but because I must. Those that died for this my voice in government, had a right to expect that I would prepare with every faculty to use it wisely, honestly and courageously. They did not die that fools, blind partisans or the reckless might make a game of free elections . . . I must be free of all influences save that of conscience and justice . . . I vote as if my ballot alone decided the contest. I may lose my preference, but I will not throw away my sacred vote. For within the booth I hold in my humble hand the living proxy of all my country's honored dead.”

When we surrender rights to strive for and achieve by work, skill, thrift and intelligence a place of greater usefulness, and exchange that for easy security, we condemn every one of those who died to a restless grave because their gift is rejected.

If we surrender education to political uses rather than making use of it to perpetuate free government and to provide the cultivated mind that is the guardian genius of democracy, we fail countless men who fell as heroes at countless unremembered places around the world.

If we permit inequality before the law, a captive press, or take our freedoms for granted we break faith with those who to us from failing hands threw the torch that we might hold it high..

The free state, the free Church and the free School are the triple armor of American principles and freedom, gained for us by hundreds of “Heartbreak Ridges” that none can now recall.

We must ever be all American, support the American way of life, and guide our youth into an appreciation of the heritage which is theirs, and if we fail, we fail a million men who died that we might have this chance.

You as teachers of young people and children have this bright opportunity to give them the ideals which will put Stars in their Eyes. Let them know our ~dreams for free- dom and for life that they may achieve them for us. Let them gain a glimpse through your eyes of the greatness of America that they will not surrender it. Let them walk with you in paths of human brotherhood that they will never doubt that together we can gain the world for the meek and the humble -- the just and the true. Paint for them the true beauties of liberty that they shall never fail her.

I congratulate this school, its superintendent, and its teaching staff for the excellent program of patriotic in- struction that you have had in the past. I have looked at your window exhibits and marveled at the understanding of the true greatness of America I saw there. I have talked with your students in the Scouting program and found that they had truly caught a glimpse of the mountain- top of human freedom that is inherent in the basic concept of the rights of the individual, respected because he is a child of God, insured through justice, illuminated by understanding, and achieved by human struggle against evil.

If we would preserve the greatness of this land we must inculcate in our youth the unyielding belief that the United States of America is a government of the people, by the people and for the people; one whose just powers are derived from the consent of the governed, and recorded in declarations and constitutions which declare the fundamental law of the land; a government that is a democracy, within a Republic, but is more than that, and is a sovereign Nation composed of many sovereign States, a perfect Union balancing the powers of each for the welfare and liberty of the people, and the ultimate protection of the Nation. One Nation, under God, inseparable, established upon long cherished principles of freedom, equality, justice and humanity for which American patriots sacrificed their lives and fortunes and to the sup- port of which they pledged their sacred honor. That we believe and lead others to believe that it is our duty to our country to love it; to exemplify in our daily lives its virtues, and to oppose wrong wherever it appears; to support our National and State Constitutions, and to obey our country’s laws, bringing ourselves under strict self—disciplines to seek to achieve that which is right, and only that which is right, within each individual life; to respect and cause others to respect our country’s flag as a symbol of its highest aspirations, and of its glorious history, and to in all events defend it against all enemies without and within.

This commitment if lived up to will strengthen our Nation. If observed across our land will guarantee its continuation and existence.

If we fail

We must not fail.

Let us have Stars in Our Eyes.

-
1. Willard E. Givens and Belmont M. Farley, *The Road to Freedom*, Washington, D. C., 1960.
 2. Owen Seaman, quoted in *The Road to Freedom*, supra.
 3. 'Ralph Busnell Potts, *Responsibility of the Citizen as a Voter*, American Bar Essay, 1945.
 4. Enlarged and paraphrased from William Tyler Page, *The American's Creed*.