

ADDRESS OF THE HONORABLE JOHN E. FOGARTY, M. C. 2ND DISTRICT,  
RHODE ISLAND AT THE UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND CONVOCATION ON  
JANUARY 12, 1961.

Doctor Horn, distinguished guests, members of the faculty, and students of the University of Rhode Island:

As one who has watched the growth and development of this institution of learning over many years, I am deeply gratified and honored to have been invited to address this University Convocation. It is an important occasion in a period of significant progress towards ever greater excellence in the University's contribution to higher education in Rhode Island and in the nation. The conferring of advanced degrees at the doctoral level, which marked the Commencement exercises of last June, points to the full maturity of the University's graduate programs and gives promise of an even greater future.

In my capacity as Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Appropriations for Health, Education, and Welfare, I am happy to say that it has been my privilege to have a share in promoting the past accomplishments of our State University, and I can assure you that I will continue in my efforts to do so.

The great Benjamin Disraeli, speaking before the British House of Commons during the reign of Queen Victoria once described a university as "a place of light, of liberty, and of learning." The light of higher education gives a person a clear view of his own opinions and the ability to see and judge things as they are. From that light comes a greater liberty, for it is the power of intelligent judgment which is the source of all true freedom. Students and teachers joined together in a university for mutual stimulation and the common pursuit of knowledge are in a position to develop their full potentialities for successful and constructive living.

It is the goal of our government to see to it that the opportunity of such personal development which higher education can give will be open to all who have the ability and the desire to take advantage of it. Education in our free America is not the special privilege of any one group. On the contrary, the principles of democracy and the challenge which confronts us from Communism today call for a widening and deepening of the opportunities of higher education for all our people without regard to race, creed, or economic condition.

As this is true of American higher education, so must it also be true of the opportunities for public service which elective office presents. No test of race, religion, ancestry or personal wealth should ever be permitted to influence the choice of political parties or the electorate in the selection of candidates. The only tests should be those of proven ability, personal integrity, and the evidence of a desire to serve the common good of all.

That is the ideal. An honest and realistic appraisal of the history of politics in our State and nation, however, forces us to the conclusion that while we have made some progress towards the fulfillment of that ideal, we still have a long way to go in reaching it. The scope of civil rights legislation, it is true, has been greatly expanded in the last 15 years. Going beyond fair employment



practices legislation, it has been extended to the armed forces, schools, public housing, and such places of public accommodation as hotels and theatres in many areas. As recent events in Louisiana have clearly shown, the battle for equal justice under law is by no means won. Those who, like myself, have taken up the fight for civil rights in Congress are well aware that a great deal of hard work still lies before us. Yet, I am confident that in the end, all that can be accomplished to advance the cause of civil rights by Federal legislation will be done.

But legislation alone cannot eliminate the evil of group prejudices from American public life. Such prejudices are based on emotion, not on reason. They reach down deeply into the hearts and minds of men and flow from attitudes which no laws by themselves can alter. To get at the root of the problem, we must first have some reasonable understanding of its historical origins.

What has, for example, produced the emphasis on ancestry which seems to govern the selection of candidates by our political parties here in Rhode Island? Some have named it "League of Nations" politics, for instead of treating all of our people as equally good Americans, <sup>the careful balancing of a ticket on the basis of</sup> origins gives the impression that we are <sup>ancestra</sup> not one nation but a collection of nations. It is a contradiction of the great ideal of those founding fathers of our country who, like Thomas Jefferson, hoped to see America become a society where individuals of all nations might truly be melted into a new race.

As we look back into our history, we can see how "League of Nations" politics came to be a feature of American life.

The story of the making of the United States into the world's greatest free power, is of course, a story that involves succeeding waves of immigration. Here in Rhode Island, as elsewhere along the Atlantic coast, the first settlers were mostly from the British Isles, and especially from England. Yet even in the first two hundred years of our State's history there were, as you know, a number who came from other parts of Europe. Many German and Irish names were on the rolls of the Rhode Island Regiment during the American Revolution, and the contribution to our growth and progress made by the Jewish families of Spanish-Portuguese origin who settled in Newport is well known. Certainly no State has had closer associations with the important part which France and her armies played in the winning of American independence.

As America prospered, especially in the years between 1837 and 1857, economic distress and political oppression combined to cause tens of thousands of immigrants to come here from Ireland and Germany. The tragic story of famine and tyranny that drove these people from their homes is familiar. But what is sometimes not mentioned is the fact that thousands of them were offered every inducement to come here. Manufacturers in search of cheap labor, railroad builders looking for workers to build the expanding lines, new steamship companies looking for passengers--all these combined to drum up immigrant traffic. Many of the ships in which they came were little better than floating coffins, as they were often called. Many died during the trip across the Atlantic, and many were cheated and abused upon their arrival here. Yet wages of fifty-cents a day and the promise of a free life looked good to those who were strong enough to survive.



The new immigrants, wherever they came from, were almost always looked down upon. Furthermore, the low wages they were more than willing to accept made them feared and disliked by those of the older American groups who had previously done the heavy work of building the new nation's industry and transportation facilities. If the immigrants were not group-conscious when they arrived, they were soon made so.

Until late in the second half of the nineteenth century the immigrants came almost entirely from the countries of north-western Europe, from Great Britain, Scandinavia, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, Belgium and France. In Rhode Island the Irish were most numerous. At first they worked building the Blackstone Canal and the new railroads, but by 1850 they had taken their places in the textile mills and other industries of the State. They were soon joined, however, by the French Canadians, the first non-English speaking group to come to Rhode Island in large numbers.

The twenty years from 1890 to 1910 were the heaviest years of immigration for this country. The foreign born made up 60 per cent of the workers in the packing-house industry; 57 per cent of those in iron and steel, 61 per cent of our miners, and nearly 70 per cent of those in textile mills.

These people came after the free lands were no longer open. Many came from eastern Europe, while in Rhode Island the years between 1890 and 1920 were marked by a rising tide of immigration from Italy. Labor unions were weak; housing conditions were very poor; and wages for the immigrants were just above the subsistence level.

In Rhode Island, as elsewhere in industrial America, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, there was segregation in housing and almost no real social contact between groups. Laborers and managers lived in worlds in which the separation between them was as complete as that which once existed between lords and serfs in the Middle Ages. It is not surprising that group differences based upon language, religion, or the strong bonds of ancestry grew and flourished.

To every immigrant, America has been, from the earliest times, a frontier, a chance to begin all over from the beginning. As the historian Frederick Jackson Turner has said, every new frontier settlement took Americans further away from dependence upon European conditions and made them more and more into members of a single, new society.

It is easy enough to see how this was true for those who first penetrated the wilderness and crossed the Western plains. But it has been equally true in modern times for those who have managed to rise up out of older segregated housing areas into newer and better neighborhoods. Subways, streetcars, buses, and the automobile took the place of the covered wagons and opened up the suburbs. Immigrant fathers and mothers through drudgery and careful savings played a no less heroic role in moving their families to a better life than did the pioneers who mastered the savage frontier.



If the immigrants of the last century were often given a false idea of what America had to offer them, it is still true that by hard work and a constant effort to better themselves, each group that has come here has not only contributed to our country's present greatness but also proved that America is indeed a land of promise.

Land hunger was the great drive behind the conquest of the West. The desire for dignity, recognition, and a share in the abundant material blessings of science and industry has been the driving power behind the rise of all the groups of immigrants who helped to build our modern economy. Out on the old frontier the obstacles were those of nature. There were deserts and high mountains to be crossed, great rivers to be bridged. In the industrial cities, the obstacles were man-made. Rents and restrictions blocked the way, and the terrible threat of unemployment hung over the family's economic security.

In the great adventure of building the kind of national social unity which a free, industrial society requires, we have inevitably developed group conflicts and competitions. Our democratic political system, no less than our industrial development, has provided an opportunity for each segment of the growing nation to fulfill its ambitions for improvement. From each immigrant group that has contributed to the industrial and economic growth of our own State there have come men who can truly be called outstanding public servants. The same thing can also be said of Rhode Island education from the primary school to the university level.

In the years after the Civil War, in which foreign born citizens and their children contributed so much to the victory of the Union, the political life of Rhode Island remained in the hands of the descendants of the earlier settlers, who thought of themselves as the true "Yankees." The first real break in this situation took place in 1928, when the out-moded property qualification on voting was repealed. Since that time, Rhode Island has been a leader in the nation in according to most of the groups which make up our cosmopolitan State a chance to participate fully in its political life.

As we look about at the modern scene, we can indeed be grateful that our people are not divided, to the same extent as they once were, by sharp economic differences. The majority of our citizens have found their places of real acceptance in the business and professional world as well as in industry. We still have a long way to go, but I believe that most Rhode Islanders look upon this State and nation as places where the dream of betterment for all can be realized. The Communist notion of class warfare does not have any validity for modern America. It is something which we utterly repudiate and reject. The competition in American economic and political life comes not from poverty but from the opportunity for progress for all.

Such competition is a healthy thing, and the effort of minority groups to gain their rightful place in the public affairs of the State and nation has, in many ways, contributed to their coming of age as Americans. Compelled by the historical circumstances which I have outlined, each group in its turn has risen to take advantage of its opportunities.



Now, however, I believe that we have reached a stage of political development in which we need to grow out of, and away from, the so-called "League of Nations" attitude. It has been said of Abraham Lincoln that the important thing about him was not that he was born in a log cabin, but that he came out of it and made his way to the White House. Lincoln had the true American attitude when he said, "I don't care so much about who my grandfather was; I am much more concerned with what his grandson will be."

From a practical point of view, it is clear that we in Rhode Island cannot hope to see the end of "League of Nations" politics overnight. For some time to come, there will be minority groups who will feel that they have not yet obtained the full recognition of their numbers and will continue to press for it by group action. But the gap between the various groups is steadily becoming more narrow, as we merge more and more into the common life of American progress. In another generation the old group distinctions will be virtually meaningless, and I am of the opinion that it is the responsibility of our political leaders to hasten that process.

We have an obligation to look beyond the borders of our local concerns in order to grasp the role of our great country in the world today. We are engaged in a life and death struggle with an enemy whose avowed purpose is our destruction as a free people. The power and the democratic example of the United States to the emerging new nations are the main bulwark against the march of Communism. Countries like India, with its variety of conflicting races and ethnic groups must learn from us the lesson of how the distinctions of language and ancestry can be overcome by a real democracy.

Now is the time for us to recall the words of President Franklin Roosevelt, who said: Every American takes pride in our tradition of hospitality to men of all races and creeds. We must remember that any oppression, any injustice, any hatred between groups is a wedge designed to attack our civilization."

National unity is one of the main foundations of national defense. The work of educators at great universities such as this, the labors of scientists, the plans of leaders in our armed forces--all these must rest upon the support of a unified people. In every war which America has fought we have put aside our group differences in the common cause. No American is asked to be classified according to his ancestry when he is called upon to take up arms in his country's defense. The men who fought and died in the great wars of this nation from the days of the Revolution to the conflict in Korea did so, simply as Americans, without any hyphens attached. They defended their country, not as Irish-Americans, German-Americans, Italo-Americans, Franco-Americans, Portuguese-Americans, or any other group designation that might be added to the list. In the time of trial, they were All-Americans, and nothing more or less.

For at least the next decade, and probably longer, we will be facing the challenging tactics of Communism. The battle is being fought on many fronts, for the enemy makes education, economics, science, and propaganda into weapons. Right on our own doorstep in Latin America, the Communists are at



work trying to picture the United States as a country which exploits and abuses minority groups. Their aim is, of course, not only to divide the American nations of this continent from one another, but, wherever possible, to foster group hatreds within the United States itself.

We may thank God that a shooting war has not engulfed the world. But we must not deceive ourselves into thinking that we are not engaged in a struggle of world-wide proportions which calls for exactly the same degree of national unity which we have displayed in the wars of the past.

For that compelling reason and for the common good of our whole society, it is essential for us to hasten the process by which all the many different cultural groups in this country will reach full civic maturity as Americans. To that end, I believe, we should start to move away from "League of Nations" politics in our national and local affairs. What may have been necessary in the days of the great immigrations to this country, has come to be an unnecessary and even harmful thing in modern times.

Here in Rhode Island all of us live very close together, judging by American standards. Suburban communities are developing at a steady rate, but in our land area, all Rhode Islanders will always be close neighbors. This means that we have to learn to live together as good neighbors should.

Colonial Rhode Island set an example to the world for its proclamation "that a most flourishing civil state may stand and best be maintained with full liberty in religious concernments." Modern Rhode Island has set an example to the nation in the way in which it has afforded educational, economic, and political opportunities to all of its citizens, regardless of their ancestry. Our records in this regard is by no means perfect, but we do have much of which we can be justly proud. Now we must move forward once again. We must prove that we have the political maturity to rise above group distinctions in the selection of candidates for public office.

It has been rightly said that any man who serves his country well, has no need of ancestors. Loyalty to the roots from which we spring is of course a virtue. Every group that has helped to form our State has reasons to respect and to venerate its traditions and its past. But we cannot live in the past, even though we do live on the benefits of what those who have gone before us have suffered and accomplished. Our ancestors were enterprising and bold men and women or they would never have come to these shores to build a new life for themselves and their posterity. Much that was good in the lands of their origin, they brought with them. Much that was bad, they wisely left behind. The hatreds and bitter national feelings which made Europe a bloody battleground for so many centuries have no true place among us. As Theodore Roosevelt said, we Americans count this country as home and we must not act as if we lived in a boarding house where the tenants quarrel with one another in a dozen different languages.

The University of Rhode Island, together with all the other outstanding educational institutions of our State, day by day provides a meeting place where teachers and students with a wide variety of backgrounds seek the truth of real



knowledge. I believe firmly that the fruits of such education, which may be seen on all sides in Rhode Island, will go far to produce new generations for whom the old group classifications will be things of the past. Educated as Americans, our young people will find no appeal in "League of Nations" politics. The future belongs to those who are in our schools today, and it is a part of the responsibility of our present leaders in public life to make certain that in the years to come our youth will not have to find their places in the life of our community on the basis of group distinctions. America today needs the best that each of us can offer, and Rhode Island needs the talents and skills of all of her citizens. In the truly perilous times ahead no portion of the strength, either of our State or our nation, can be wasted on group conflicts that belong to the past.

It must, therefore, be our common endeavor to make America's future open to all of her people, without distinctions of race, color, or creed. In that great adventure, all of us who hold public office must count on your help. I am confident that you, to whom the future belongs, will not fail to rise to this vital need of our State and Nation.