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Excerpts from a speech entitled "Education and Better Living"

To Be Delivered by Dr. Henry H. Hill

at the Western Kentucky State College in Bowling Green, Kentucky

Friday evening, August 5 [1960]

Only since World War II has the South had nine months of school provided in every state. Prior to World War II our Northern children usually had the benefit of twelve full years of ten months each compared to the North Carolina practice at that time of eleven years of schooling with an average term of eight months. It is obvious that children and high school youth will learn more in 120 months than they will in 88 months.

This fact illustrates the importance of having good schools over a generation rather than over a period of five or ten years.

During the recent Korean War one Southern state had more than 50% of the draftees turned down because of low mental achievement. In other words, over half of the young men who might serve in Korea could not do so, because they had not had enough schooling. It is a bit discouraging but nevertheless a fact that we have to accept, namely, that Utah at the same time had less than two per cent turned down for poor mental achievement. This most emphatically does not mean that Utah youth are more intelligent than Southern youth. What it does mean is that a state which over a generation has practically eliminated illiteracy and which regards ignorance as the worst sin, will achieve a record in fighting, as well as in serving the country that is superior to that of children elsewhere who have not had comparable opportunities.

It takes a whole generation to raise the educational level of the entire people substantially. The adults of today who are fifty years of age and older and who might have finished their schooling from 1925 to 1935 did not have the opportunity which boys and girls do today.

The South has made tremendous industrial progress since World War II. In percentage of gain, they have gone farther than their Northern neighbors. We are in the midst of what has been termed automatic wealth, which means, in substance, that we have the physical capacity and ^{mass}~~mass~~ production techniques which enable us to produce almost any quantity of any material product, whether it be automobiles, refrigerators, or whatnot. We need better education to accompany this great advance, or else we become too greatly interested in material things only.

All this recent progress has, I think, at least three implications for the South and for the nation as a whole.

In the first place, domestics and ditch diggers have just about disappeared. Over 98.5% of the energy necessary for doing the work of the nation is produced by gas and electricity and coal. Except for leisure time uses, the horse has practically disappeared. All of this means that education is even more important, because the uneducated are more and more of a burden and less able to earn their own living.

A second implication is that we have a greater need for the well educated. I have only to mention that this is an age of jets, electronics and space to indicate the importance of educating everyone who has superior ability and of increasing the opportunities and education of those with average or less than average ability.

This is all the more important, because our powerful Communist rival, Russia, has made a religion out of education. Should we reduce our effort to maintain good education, it would be an open invitation to the Soviet government to become worldwide leaders in education. We must identify and inspire the able especially.

In the third place, we have more leisure and are going to have even more. The fact that we choose to travel widely and to spend much of our leisure time in motels, in clubs, in boats, or before television sets does not mean that we are compelled to do these things. It does mean that this is our choice of how to spend our leisure. I have no condemnation of these pursuits, but I do want to stress the fact that increasing leisure brings a challenge to see that more time is spent in more important activities.

It brings sharply before all of us, ^e ministers, teachers, and leaders, the question of what we are living for in the United States of America. Leisure and longer life without a purpose and without some worthwhile values would seem to be futile indeed.

Better living has always been one aim of American life. As a small boy, I listened to the housewives of our community talk about how many jars of fruit they had "put up" for the winter. The wonderful orange which was in the toe of my long, black stocking at Christmas, and these jars of fruit represented an effort to have better living. I do not have to tell you that better living, always a laudable aim of American life, must include better education.

This could be America's finest decade. For the first time in history, we have, through science and industry, the ability to produce both manufactured goods and food and most of the better things of life materially. My challenge to you graduates, to your parents and friends, and to my own contemporaries, is to see to it that America does not become merely a great material paradise.

We need to develop that inner strength which comes from religion, or some other source, which enables us to accept the inevitable changes and challenges which come to us in an age of jets, electronics and space.

The age-old values of vision, duty and charity continue to apply.

In the not too distant future, we look forward to the time when the energies of the leaders of the South will be devoted to developing the potential capacity and character of every citizen to the end that all may be productive and self-supporting; valuable to themselves, to their families, to the South and to the nation. We visualize a renewed spirit of the Woodrow Wilson idealism and the glow of the Henry W. Grady dreams of another day. We hope for a time when Southern States may vie with each other to see which can fashion and support the best educational system, and when any reference to closing of schools will be of historic interest only.

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