

10-28-1971

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“Is America Possible? Lecture 1”

Tom Wicker

Portland State University

October 28, 1971

PSU Library Special Collections and University Archives

Oregon Public Speakers Collection

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Transcribed by Sai Sri Harsha, May 14, 2024

Audited by Carolee Harrison, June 2024

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HOST: This is the opening session of an All-University Conference on the theme “Is America Possible?” Tomorrow morning here at 10:00, Dr. Harvey Wheeler will be speaking, and tomorrow afternoon at 1:30 Dr. René Dubos will be speaking, and tomorrow afternoon at 3:30 a panel of our three speakers will sum up the conference, in which both they will speak to each other, and they will speak to you.

We have called this conference with the question “Is America Possible?” and this question is meant literally. We might have said, “Is it possible to be an American in the 70’s?” but that would have not wholly described the question that we want to put to ourselves and to this community. It is now 12 months before a national election, and it is now several months before the boredom sets in that attends upon a national election. We note that some of the best of our young men are not with us; they are hidden in urban anonymity, in Canada, or in jail. And some of the rest of us are that are not in urban anonymity or in Canada or in jail are torn with unthinkable answers to the question about the possibility of America, about the possibility of survival as a American. Exile, treason, civil disobedience, violence. We are not persuaded by the cliché dualisms that conventional culture imposes upon us, the dualism between the old and the young, male and female, Black and white, liberal and conservative, working within the system, working outside the system; and indeed, to ask the question “Is America possible?” is to raise the question about the possibility of a definition of America. What's happening in

America is that the old mythic definitions of America are dying; we are no longer the new nation, the new world. We are no longer innocent; we are no longer virtuous; we have become, in some sense in the last decade, just an ordinary nation like any other nation, no longer supported by the mythic supports that have given us a sense of being something superior. [clears throat] This is why this conference is addressing the question "Is America possible?" We do not propose to raise this question in some rhetorical or flashy sense; in some sense, it is a deeply serious question to which the answer may be "No."

Our speaker tonight is Mr. Tom Wicker, associate editor of the *New York Times*, columnist, Washington bureau. Mr. Wicker's recent career has in a curious sense been defined by place names, and when one thinks of Mr. Wicker's contribution to our life, one thinks of cities: Dallas, Chicago, Attica, or more exactly San Quentin Attica, because it was what he said about San Quentin that was his ticket of admission to Attica. There are a number of pieces of his writings over the last years that have meant something special to many of us. His important Chicago article in the summer of 1969 entitled "The Day All America Was Radicalized," in which he reflected on his experience of the Chicago convention the year before—if this was not the day in which all America was radicalized, it may well have been the day on which Mr. Wicker and some of the rest of us were. There was an Easter meditation two years ago on hope and despair that showed something of the quality of his prose. There was an attempt quite recently to ask what it meant to call George Jackson our brother; that was indeed the reason why he ended up at Attica several weeks ago. He is a writer, a novelist—six novels, working on the seventh—a journalist of great distinction; he honors us by his presence. Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Tom Wicker.

[applause]

TOM WICKER: Thank you very much. I appreciate that. I am not sure who's honored on a weekday night here, my presence or by the presence of so many people. I thank you for coming out to hear what I may have to say. I want to answer the question right away posed by this conference: "Is America possible?" I want to answer the question resoundingly and wholeheartedly and say yes, of course, America is possible. It always has been possible; it will be possible, will remain possible. But there's nothing automatic about it. It isn't going to happen because we are favored by the gods or because we have an interesting geographical position or because the winds blow westerly or easterly or whichever way they blow. Nothing of that kind is involved here. The question of "is America possible" is a question for Americans to answer at any given time, and I'd like—because my particular work over the years has caused me to concentrate some extent on political life—I think that my answer has more to do perhaps with

politics with any other particular phase of our national life, but looking at it from that particular view—from the political view—I answer wholeheartedly, “Yes, America is possible.”

It doesn't have, I hasten to add, a great deal to do with the 1972 election, which is now ominously upon us. As we look at those who are contending, who are contending for the right to lead us, to lead the nation after the 1972 election, I think it's possible at this stage to give a sort of a thumbnail evaluation of those men and suggest what we know about them at this point. President Nixon surely will seek re-election, we think, although I'm quoted in President Johnson's new book quite accurately. I am quoted as having said in late 1967 that there was no more chance that Lyndon Johnson would withdraw from the presidential election than that J. Edgar Hoover would resign [laughter] which... President Johnson, former President Johnson quotes that remark of mine with some relish, and I must say I don't blame him, although I still think I was right. [laughter] As I look ahead to the candidates for 1972, it seems to me that we know pretty much what we can expect of a Nixon administration if we should have another Nixon administration, whether it would be a Nixon-Agnew administration or a Nixon-Connally administration. Wouldn't be much difference. We could expect, I think, divisiveness cloaked in the rhetoric of unity, and we could expect a willfully ideological approach to some of the most grievous ills of the nation, for instance, to the question of crime and law and order.

If we are to suppose that the man I take as the leading Democratic alternative, Senator Muskie, should be elected president, we know a good deal last about what that might bring. I think at this point that Senator Muskie appears to be a much stronger leader than perhaps many of us had supposed some years back, but there's still no record either in the Senate or elsewhere to show that a man from Maine, from that pastoral part of the country, has a really deep, or what is more important, instinctive grasp of the national situation, particularly as it expresses itself in the great city-states into which our population is migrating. The next most likely Democratic alternative, it would seem to me—every man for himself in this matter of prediction—but it would seem to me would be former vice-president Humphrey, and as I think it would be very difficult to view Mr. Humphrey with all his somewhat elusive virtues, it would be very difficult to view him as anything more than a than a fallback candidate after others had exhausted themselves, and while I do think that Senator Humphrey would offer the country a good deal in some ways, nonetheless, there's no reason to suppose that he would be the man to lead us out of a period of wilderness after our long exposure to him.

Senators McGovern and Harris, the question about them seems to me less their programs—in many ways admirable—but whether or not either could govern adequately with the support that would almost surely be limited entirely to the left of the political spectrum. It would be very difficult to envision either of those men with a broad scale of national political support.

The same would be true, I think, of Senator Jackson of your neighbor state of Washington, only in the other direction—that it would be very difficult to envision a broad scale national support for him on the left, it would be mostly up a moderate to rightist support. It seems to me that Senator Jackson is in a very good position perhaps to compete for the Democratic nomination, but not really to compete with a moderate centrist incumbent president.

Mayor Lindsay of New York is often spoken of as a presidential candidate. I think you have to mention a pro and a con almost in the same breath there, that there isn't really any great record of achievement in New York that would recommend—quite the opposite—that would recommend Mayor Lindsay as a president. On the other hand, he does seem to be one of those rare political leaders who has been able, while having a considerable support among his own natural constituency, he has also been able to gain a considerable support among the Black population of the country, which is no mean trick to achieve. As far as Senator Edward Kennedy, who is sometimes spoken of as a likely possibility of the Democratic nomination next year, in my own judgment, that would be—not because of any personal qualities of his or anything of the sort—if he would be nominated by the Democrats, the resulting campaign would be the most divisive and possibly tragic political campaign in contemporary times, because almost all of the substantive issues would immediately disappear and the question of the campaign would, in my judgment, focus immediately on the mishap at the Chappaquiddick; and at a time when the nation needs to be considering seriously the problems before it, we would be presented with *that* kind of a campaign, which in my judgment given the history of the last few years, Senator Kennedy might not even survive. The kind of thing that we certainly don't need, that could hardly enlighten our political prospects.

That leaves the two men who are in many ways the most interesting, in my view, in the whole political spectrum: Governor Wallace of Alabama and Senator McCarthy. They are the most interesting because these are men who in their separate ways—who have almost no other affinity—but these are men who in their separate ways have rejected the political norms and the usual routes to political power, the sort of customary, accepted political situation in America. In Governor Wallace's praise, they both seem to have come to the conclusion that there's not a dime's worth of difference between the two major parties, and that somehow only outside they accepted convention and general election procedure of the two major parties, only outside that kind of a procedure is there some possibility to shake, to reform, to move the national body politic. And we can well imagine that that Governor Wallace will be a candidate, although we don't know whether he will limit his efforts to the South; we don't know quite what the effect of that will be, and former senator McCarthy in many ways, to borrow Churchill's phrase, is a “riddle wrapped in an enigma.” We hardly know what he may be intending to do. You're very familiar with him here, in Wisconsin.

But the larger question, rather than—as we study and think ahead of the prospects for 1972—the real question seems to me is not which of these men—and as you go through the list it's almost to say that there are differences of degree, there are differences of importance; I don't mean to downgrade them—but there are really differences of degree only between these men. The important question is really not so much whether it's Muskie or Humphrey that opposes Nixon or Fred Harris or Jackson. It really isn't so much that question, or even whether Nixon defeats whatever candidate the Democrats might ultimately put up. The question is, are any of these men—any of these men or any others that you might want to suggest is a potential nominee for '72—are any of these men likely to be able to provide what it is that in a political sense our society in our country needs to put itself together to begin to move ahead; in President Kennedy's phrase, “to get ourselves moving again”—not necessarily in the way he meant that—to regain our national confidence, which has been badly shaken I think by the events of the '60s, to again see ourselves whole, to see our virtues as well as our weaknesses, to put our weaknesses in some kind of perspective as against our virtues, to begin to profit in a mature sense from our understanding of both strengths and weaknesses. Is there any one of these men we may be talking about who seems likely to be able to give us that kind of leadership?

In my judgement, this is the major lack that we're facing. We're lacking *that* kind of political leadership. Because when I answered the question at the outset, and I answered the question “Is America possible?” and I said that speaking in a political context, yes, of course America's possible, I think that there is a profound necessity that we feel and that I do not think is as yet being answered, and that is that we need—in my judgement, again within the political spectrum—we need what I would call radical leadership. Radical leadership within the traditional modes of American political process and function. I'm not talking about radical changes in our form of government or anything of that sort, I'm talking about leadership within the traditional modes of governing, leadership that will be able to adopt radical views of problems.

Now, what precisely does that mean? To use a rhetorical question as Mr. Nixon does: What does it mean when I say radical leadership, what do I mean? Well, I'll tell you. [laughter] Let me be very clear about radical leadership. [laughter] What would radical leadership do? I think the fundamental definition of radical leadership in American political life today is that it would face up squarely to the real problems that the American people have, the real problems that they feel in their everyday lives, the real problems that affect people, in their livelihoods, in the places where they live, in the education of their children, in the way they try to get to work, and all of those things that make up our daily lives. It seems to me that American political leadership has been greatly deficient in recent years, and it hasn't faced up to those things; it's

faced up to a lot of other questions, perhaps, and it's faced up to a lot of things that political leaders like to tell us are our political problems, but it hasn't really faced up to the question essentially of collecting the garbage and sending the kids to school and getting Daddy to work on time. These are the problems that the American people feel very strongly and I think that they are political questions in their essence, and they are questions about which radical political leadership could do something. Radical political leadership in my definition is a leadership that will face up to those questions and try to deal with those questions.

How would you deal with those questions? Again, to ask the rhetorical question. I'm not sure, and here we begin to delve into the realm of the speculative, because I think... I'm personally a mystic and I believe in mysticism, and I believe that great political leadership, if there is such a thing, is fundamentally a mystic quality. I don't know of anyone who has been able satisfactorily to analyze that relationship that existed at one point between Abraham Lincoln and the American people that day, or later, the relationship that existed between Franklin Roosevelt and the American people, the quality of the profound hatred on one side and the quality of the profound love on another side. But the net effect was great leadership at a time when leadership was needed. So I don't know precisely what it is; it's very difficult to write definitions and prescriptions for what a president ought to do coming into office, but I would try to suggest tonight some things that seem to me logical that he might do, that I think are standing in the way of effective dealing with real problems in real life.

In the first place, I think that a president exercising the kind the radical leadership that I've described or that I've defined here would try to lead the nation and would try to persuade the nation, and be in a sense a teacher for the nation, in a long process. It would be a long and difficult process; there's no easy way to do it—the re-examination of institutions that govern our lives in many ways. Now, re-examination of institutions in a way has been forced on our universities in this country by student activism. In my judgement, a re-examination of corporate and business institutions is being, and will be more so in the coming years, forced on the big corporate institutions of our country by the consumer movement, which is just now beginning to gather steam; also by the ecological movement, which is bound in the long run to have profound effect on major business institutions. From that kind of thing political institutions cannot be exempt, and in my judgement will not be exempt.

Unlike what's happening in the universities, and churches to some extent, what's happening in the corporations, it seems to me that the re-examination of political institutions almost has to be carried forward by people who are involved in politics: by political leaders who know something about how those institutions work and how they don't work. I'm speaking of such institutions, for instance, as the presidency of the United States. We are already beginning to

see in the Senate a movement to re-examine the powers and the extent of the powers of the presidency in conducting foreign policy, which we now know to be imperial. This is something that we haven't been accustomed to in American life; we haven't thought of it. The whole thrust of political science in my adult lifetime, since Franklin Roosevelt I believe, has been how to stack *more* power into the office of the presidency, so that that office could cope with what was believed to be a recalcitrant Congress and ineffective state governments and so forth. Until now, in many ways, we built up a monster of power in the White House, particularly in its foreign policy activities. That's beginning to be re-examined on the foreign policy side.

We need to examine it a great deal more so on the domestic side. We need to re-examine the whole question of state and federal, and state and city, relationships in this country. We have 50 states in the United States, most of which are historical accidents bounded by rivers; they don't necessarily make political sense as you begin to look at it in the late 20th century, and as you begin to think of it as a governing instrument for the 21st century. I am not suggesting—and wouldn't suggest the abolition of Vermont because there are those who love Vermont, including me—but the fact of the matter is that Vermont simply doesn't have very many resources by comparison to the state of California, and yet it's expected to provide something like the same level of services that the state of California does. The state of California—I venture a loose remark here, because I can't prove it—but I was once told that if the state of California seceded from the United States—and there are those who would advocate that; of course I don't—but if it seceded from the United States, it would be the fifth-largest nation in the world. Well, you can hardly expect that Vermont and California, then, can operate on the same level. What I'm suggesting is—not to be at all frivolous about it—but that the 50-state framework is not necessarily something that was graven on stone tablets and handed down by the ancient prophets and may never be changed. If we begin to look into the question of regional arrangements of one kind or another, if we begin to think about arrangements of that kind of that might cross state lines or that might work on a cooperative basis, there is a great deal it could be done beyond the present federal-state relationship. There is no particular reason, other than for the inertia of history, that New York state should be as bound as it is politically to the to the will of people who live in upstate New York. There are lots of things that could and ought be done here, short probably of New York City declaring itself the 51st state.

President Nixon, it seems to me, has made a good start in the whole field of revenue sharing, although revenue sharing itself is merely, it seems to me, the first toe in the door of what ought to be done in the whole re-examination of what we do with our resources in this country, which governing institutions spend them. After all, the resources that are allocated to governing institutions have a lot to do with the way institutions are able to function in relationship to our daily lives. Now, we know what federal governments are best at. Federal governments are best

at fighting wars and providing armies, and to the extent that we allow most of our tax resources to be accumulated by the federal government, it means that we're going to put most of them into armies and wars. Whereas most of our people live in cities and are not particularly interested in wars. And the cities, by the same token, have the least ability to collect funds and spend funds. We've got a mismatch here between where the people are and where the problems are, and where the resources are collected and the priorities by which those resources are spent. Until political leadership itself begins to lead us in a re-examination of these questions, rather than leading us rather in a different way towards a tacit assumption that whatever political leadership out of Washington says must be served; until we begin to get a more intelligent and questioning leadership on that, then I don't think that we're going to be able to bring our resources into line politically with our needs.

There are other areas in which a re-examination of institutions is vitally important, it seems to me, rather than simply letting institutions go along as they have been. The one that I would mention first and foremost is—I'm not familiar enough with Oregon to know how much this cuts into your own personal lives—but in New York City and Washington and the East Coast it is vitally important. There must be a re-examination of the of the almost limitless power of the labor unions, particularly the public service labor unions, which are more and more beginning to have enormous dominance over the lives of the people in our major cities. And as we... one of the other areas that would, I suppose, be more nearly in the vicinity of re-evaluating our government institutions, is certainly the great federal bureaucracy.

So, the re-examination of institutions that have grown up. For instance, in the early 19th century, there was a great movement to isolate politically operated institutions from what was then the endemic corruption of American political life. You had a number of institutions that were really insulated from that kind of thing, like the New York City Port Authority and a number of other authorities, and the idea was to remove them from the power of corrupt politicians. That was done very effectively; it was done so effectively that they've been removed from the power of anybody, and there's almost nothing that anybody can do to influence such institutions as that. Conditions have changed now, and the problem is not anymore to protect the toll revenues in New York from political corruption; the problem is to use the toll revenues in a sensible way, for problems that exist today, rather than for problems that existed a half century ago.

A second area that it seems to me would be useful for a radical leadership to explore, for radical presidential leadership to explore, would be to try to talk to the American people in mature terms of our role in the world. What is our role in the world today? For instance, as the Vietnam war comes to its inevitable close—it must end some day, as everything must—to try...

not merely to adopt mindless slogans, like “no more Vietnams,” but to try to say, what is it that we have learned, if anything in this terrible decade of waste and slaughter, and national foolishness and national shame? What is it that we've learned here? What does it tell us about the future? Have we learned the extent to which we can extend our power in the world? Have we learned the kind of power we have? Have we learned what the limitations of firepower are? Have we learned the difference between political struggle and guerrilla warfare and military struggle? Have we really learned any lessons, or are we merely tired of what's going on and trying to get out of it, and then reacting and saying “no more Vietnams”? Are we going to learn something from this dreadful episode, or are we simply going to end it and then perhaps go on to some other one later on, or perhaps worse, not fulfill our responsibilities at some point for fear that we will get into another Vietnam? It seems to me that these are questions that an enlightened, which is to say a radical leadership, at this point might explore with the American people.

The whole question of our relationship to the Third World is a very interesting question on which great light has been shed just this week by the reaction in Congress to the vote on China. It's astonishing that grown, and one would have thought mature, men—for instance Senator Scott, the Republican leader whom I rather admire; Senator Mansfield whom we all admire, probably—are talking literally in terms of reducing our contribution not just not to the UN, but to the UN specialized agencies: the children's fund, the World Health Organization... basically for the reason that they wouldn't do what we ordered them to do or wanted them to do on the question of China. It isn't particularly surprising that Senator Goldwater would wish that we should withdraw from the UN and expel it from our shores as if somehow it contaminated us, because he was for that 7 years ago. He's an honest man; he's for that then, he's for that now, no matter what they do in China. [laughter] But it is very surprising, it seems to me, that supposedly sensible leaders would suggest that because we lost the China vote, we ought to reduce our contribution to the UN, we ought to reduce our foreign aid. We ought not to have any truck with those people who voted against us. Senator Allott of Colorado even suggested we ought to reduce our troop commitments to NATO—incidentally, I'm for that on other grounds—but he says we ought to do it because the European nations voted against us on China.

This raises a real question: what do the American people think? And Senator Allott, one would think, would be a fairly representative member of the American public. What do we think NATO is? Is NATO useful and a necessary alliance for the defense of the Western nations, or is it an American system by which we punish or reward our friends for doing or not doing whatever it is that we want them to do? That's the question that's raised by that kind of talk. And I go to this only to say that it seems to me that a really enlightened political leadership in this country

would try to discuss these matters with the American people in mature terms, rather than in these terms of “they won't do what we said, hence we must get back at them.”

It is in this area in particular, the area of America's role in the world that we've got to come to terms, we've got to find some way to cope with the ongoing, the ingrained, the powerful bureaucracy that in many ways rules American foreign policy and American defense policy. It's been documented by Senate subcommittees that all of the important ambassadorial posts and diplomatic posts in Laos and Thailand throughout the decade of the '60s, all the top two or three posts in each of those countries military and diplomatic, have been handed around as if they're on a treadmill by the same people. The ambassador to Thailand, having served his function there, becomes the ambassador to Laos and vice versa, and the consulates change and so forth. But all the same people, approximately 10 to 12 people, and they've been making policy on southeast Asia throughout the whole decade, and no matter whether it's the Kennedy administration or the Johnson administration or the Nixon Administration. You change presidents and nothing happens. We're not going to begin to get at the roots of our involvement in things like the clandestine and undeclared war in Laos; we're not really going to be able to get at that until the election of a president makes some difference on these questions. Goldwater was everlastingly right about that, and those of us who criticized him at the time were wrong. When we elect the president, he ought to make some difference; and we've learned, if we've learned nothing else in the last two elections, that it doesn't necessarily make any difference at all. That's one of the questions it seems we've got to face up to, particularly on the matter of our role in the world.

The third area—and I'm not listing these in any particular order of priority—the third area in which the kind of leadership I'm talking about would necessarily address itself strongly with the American people would be on something that I call the quality of life in America, which I believe I would not find many dissenters on the proposition that it is deteriorating, particularly those, obviously, who live in the urban environment. I'm not speaking merely of the environment—and when I say merely, I don't mean to downgrade it; it's important, because it's of vast importance—but I mean I'm not limiting myself to a discussion of the environment. There are others who know a great deal more about that than I do, but certainly we need a leadership on this that pays more than lip service to preserving the environment. For instance, when a president issues an executive order having to do with the air and water pollution of federal agencies, we have a right to expect that that presidential order will stiffen the requirements against the pollution, rather than weakening them, particularly if it's billed as stiffening the requirements. And yet that hasn't been the case, at least in the current administration.

When I talk about the quality of life, I go beyond the question of environment; I go to the question of population control, even to the question of population shifts. I raise the question for instance—and I don't know the answer, but I raise it—whether it's really as dreadful a thing as some of the business leaders and some of the political leaders of New York City think, is it really as dreadful a thing as they think that many of the corporations are moving out of that city because they find conditions there difficult for the continuation of their business? I don't think it's a dreadful thing if on the single condition that they move in such a way is to make it possible for their employees to move with them. If they did that, the dispersal of industry outside of a few specific locations, the dispersal of our industries into other communities that don't have any, all this might be a very good thing. That might be, for instance—and there's legislation, rather sensible legislation I think, written by Senator Ribicoff, that would facilitate this—that might also be a way, and a good way, by which we could break the deadly embrace of white suburbs around the Black center cities. I grant you that there's more to it than the mere question of where people can get jobs, but nonetheless if are corporations moving into the white suburbs—basically the white suburbs—if they insisted in doing that and bringing their benefits to that territory that they also going to bring their employees with them and were going to be faithful to their employees to this extent, then that might have a very good effect upon the whole question of the segregated suburbs.

The quality of life in America certainly includes the questions of poverty and hunger, which have been so much to the fore lately, and about which, in many ways, so little is being done. But if we're going to talk about the question of poverty and hunger in America, an enlightened political leadership has got to get beyond the question of tactical welfare reform. It's got to get beyond the question of whether the poor should pay 50 cents for their food stamps or nothing at all; it's got to get beyond limited questions like whether or not providing free potatoes painted red to the poor is what one ought to do, or whether you could perhaps benefit them in such a way that they might—horror of horrors—go out and buy a bottle of cheap wine. You've got to get beyond those questions. It seems to me if we're really going to deal with the questions of poverty and hunger in the richest nation in the world, and come to grips with a question that American liberalism has never really tackled, and never tackled in any meaningful way, the question of the redistribution of income in America. Because not only are the vast bulk of our resources controlled by very small percentage of the population, but the gap is getting wider, and every year more of our resources are controlled by fewer of our people, and the gap between the very rich and the very poor has getting wider all the time. This is a question that no American political leader, including the New Deal leaders, have ever really been willing to tackle.

Thirty-odd years ago, Huey Long of Louisiana was talking about an inheritance law to do something about the accumulation of vast amounts of wealth through the generations in the same hands. Yet nothing has ever been done about that, and Huey Long at the same time was talking about free college education, federal loans for college education. That too, in 1935, in many ways was regarded as having been radical. Yet it would be regarded almost as commonplace today.

So when we talk about the quality of life in America, we're talking about many things. Poverty and hunger. We're certainly talking about education; we're talking about health; we're talking about housing; we're talking about the transportation system. We have a transportation system in America which is worthy of one of the central African republics, [laughter] but it really doesn't suffice very well to get people from place to place. It's much easier to get from New York to San Francisco. You can do that in considerable luxury and at incredible speeds; it's much easier to do that than it is to get between some of the cities, some of the smaller towns, to get out of Montana, for instance, into Arizona or somewhere like that. We have simply don't have anything other than a long-haul transportation system that is worthy of the name.

Finally, on that question of the quality of life in America: this is not by definition a political question, but I think it's something that political leadership could have something to do with. I think in an advanced technological society and one in which technology is going to become more and more important as time goes on, more and more pervasive, we're going to have to begin to face up more near to the question of whether or not people have anything useful to do in terms of work. Because we have a work ethic in the country, and many of our laws, welfare laws for instance, are based fundamentally on a work ethic, the idea that everybody should work and that work is rewarding, and that those who work hardest will get farthest ahead in material terms. Yet that isn't necessarily true anymore, and it isn't necessary true, it won't necessarily be true as time comes along that it will be required—that the national good will require—every one of us to work hard 8 hours a day, 5 days a week all the time. It may be that there isn't anything useful for us to do in terms of work. The time may come when there isn't anything useful to do. When that time comes, if it's not already here, what do we substitute for the work ethic on the part of people who don't have anything useful to do, and what do we substitute for our appreciation and outstanding of the work ethic on the part of those obviously who may at that point have something to do? If the work ethic remains the national faith, then before long there are going to be a great many people who simply are neither going to be able to meet that national faith, or else there are going to be a lot of other people—there will be both—who think that a great bulk of the population is not doing so. So the question of something useful to do in life is one that I think is going to become of more and more concern, and it should be to an enlightened political leadership.

Another great area that cries out for radical political leadership, a strong, mature political leadership, is in the whole... is in that growing area of collision that I would describe as order versus liberty. It seems to me that many manifestations of this tremendous struggle that's going on in American life today, between those who quite sincerely and quite honorably and profoundly believe that the fundamental duty of a government, the first order of business, so to speak, is to provide and maintain order, between those who believe that on the one hand and those on the other hand—and I claim to be one of them—who believe somehow that the basis of society, that the fundamental value the government ought to be preserving and its citizens ought to be working for, is the individual liberty of the citizen. Now, granted that these are not two exclusive things; they're not things that can't be blended, and that in any decent society you've got to have a high degree of order and you've got to have a high degree of personal liberty. The two come together.

The question is, which is fundamental? Which is basic? Which lies at the root of our values? In my judgement, you see—and I'm here offering only an opinion, not necessarily a fact, because there will be many in this audience who disagree with me—in my judgement, you see, if you believe that order lies at the front, that it lies at the very root; if that is the most basic proposition, why then anything one has to do ultimately out at the end of that line of reasoning to preserve order, is well worth doing. Whereas if you believe that liberty is the fundamental issue, and anything that one has to do to preserve liberty will be well worth doing; and that is why this is such a fundamental conflict. In our society it seems to me it's coming rapidly to some kind of a head, and rather than rather than demagoguing issues like law and order, and rather than mindlessly or deliberately, if that's what it is, trying to extend matters like wiretapping far beyond what... and surveillance of various kinds far beyond what has ever been authorized by anybody, far beyond what many of us can see as being the mandate of the Constitution, it seems to me that we have not really had, at high political levels, we've not really had a serious discussion of the considerable difficulties that are involved here in a sensible and judicious balancing of the questions of order and liberty.

The question, for instance, at what point dissent—expressed either violently or in ways that that are detrimental to order—at what point descent simply becomes anarchy, or at what point dissent... if order has been emphasized too much, at what point dissent becomes the only means people have for getting social change—which may well have been the case in '67, in '68, and '69, in the major cities where the upheavals took place in the ghetto. There may have been no other way that those people had to bring their case to the attention of those in power. I don't assert that that's necessarily the case; I say it may have been the case, and we haven't had, in my judgement, enough rational discussion of these very difficult questions that arise in the whole struggle of order versus liberty.

Finally, of course, it almost goes without saying, the great area in which leadership in America must address itself is the question of racism, which is so pervasive in our lives. Here in Oregon, where the Black population is not as large as it is in some of our Eastern and some of the other great industrial states, it may seem to you that racism in American life is a product of a few bigots down the South, or that it's something that's confined to a ghetto here and there in big cities where you go and you never see the ghetto... but that's not the case. I mean, that *is* the case, but the case is far greater than that. This is something that's ingrained into all of our lives everyday, and it's something that I daresay is far more deeply rooted in Oregon than many of you may realize.

I'll give you just a few examples without trying to document the whole case tonight; I don't think it needs documentation, but just a few examples of what I mean. I tore from the newspaper—I flew out here today, an AP story that the Civil Rights Commission has accused the federal government itself of complicity with the private housing industry in maintaining racially segregated housing. And the fact of the matter is that anyone who's worked in a local community where there is a racial division knows that federally supported housing, particularly public housing in that sense, does tend basically to extend the segregation of the races. That's an accusation of the Civil Rights Commission. Just recently, in late September, the city of Detroit was found guilty of deliberate segregation of the races in its school system. This is not a question of the old Southern dual system, where you've got openly and admittedly a white school system and a Black school system. No, it's that the entire machinery of the state, without ever admitting what it was doing, tended to operate in effect to have two separate school systems, without every saying that that was the situation. In the city of Detroit, as a matter of fact, two-thirds of the school pupils are Black, yet there are thirty schools—there are 30 schools in Detroit where there are no whites at all. Whereas in 1961, during that very period when we were supposed to have been desegregating in American life, there were only eight schools had no whites. So that's up by 22 schools in 9 years. There are 11 schools in Detroit where there are no Blacks; 11 schools even today where there are no Blacks. And the court found that quote, “the entire machinery of the state had worked to create a living pattern that fostered segregated schools,” and that included, so the court said, state agencies. It included the Detroit Board of Education; it included the lending institutions of that city; it included the real estate associations; it included the brokerage firms; it included the federal housing administration and the veterans' administration. All of whom had worked together to create a pattern that in effect produced a segregated school system.

Almost everywhere you look you find this same kind of thing: almost mindless racism. That is, not something where people have said, “All right, we're going to segregate those Black people over there, and we're going to keep the white people over here.” It's that their policies have

worked to that effect whether or not they meant it. Another story I saw in the paper just this week: the Law Enforcement Administration, the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration of the Justice Department, which is set up to help local police departments modernize themselves, cope with modern urban problems and so forth, has no policy of what to do when a police department, a local police department, is known to be a segregated department, when its hiring and promoting policies are affected by segregation. The Law Enforcement Assistance Administration has no policy on the cut-off of funds or giving extra funds to some police department that will desegregate; it simply has no policy; it does nothing about it.

The Air Force recently asked the Department of Justice; it asked the Department of Justice to intervene in federal court in Texas to permit the Air Force on one of the bases there to bus 850 students, dependent students, to an Anglo school district, passing through a school district which was predominantly Mexican American. And, the Air Force said to the Justice Department, if you can't do that, if you're not going to intervene in this court suit for us, then will you please help us get the funds to build our own school on the base, so that we won't have to send our Air Force kids to school with Mexican Americans.

I could go on this theme, but I don't think that I'm giving any news, particularly to anyone in the audience. I could talk about the building trade unions and their policies of exclusion from the very jobs in which people who are beginning to work their way up out of poverty and out of ignorance and out of disadvantage—in a very job one might expect that they would be... that they would first turn to in the construction unions—the systematic exclusion of Blacks from those jobs is well-known. There was recently a case where the civil service investigated the Housing and Urban Development Department of the federal government on grounds that its promotional policies within the department, within civil service, was affected by an attitude of trying to maintain segregation. They cited a case of a Black female with 28 years' service, who had made GS4 after 18 years and managed finally to get to GS5 after 28, and this was a person who had trained numerous whites who had risen as high as GS12—who had *trained* those whites who had risen up in the same period.

And everywhere one turns—I'm trying to make the point here that this is a cancer in American life; it's something that is as American, as [...] would say, as apple pie, and it's something that has affected all of our lives. I grew up... when I was a boy, it was not possible for me to go to the movies if I didn't go to segregated theaters. Now, that situation has changed in the South today, but I'm saying that for most of us, as white Americans, it's not possible to live our lives day in and day out unless we are condoning in some way the racist system that makes second-class citizens out of our Blacks and second-class citizens, in many ways, out of our Mexican Americans. Although there was an interesting story out of the Census Bureau recently that even

the Spanish-speaking Americans do better economically than the Black citizens of America, although factually speaking, Black citizens have a higher education level than Spanish-speaking citizens, have a higher education in English level than Spanish-speaking citizens. Nonetheless, even the Spanish speakers are better off economically in America than the Blacks, and this is an area in which any enlightened political leadership must address itself, in my judgement, in the most mature, the most thoughtful, the most bold, and the most courageous fashion, because this is the cancer—if there is any cancer that will mean that America ultimately cannot be anything like the America of the myths and the legends and the dreams—this is the cancer of all that will mean that, in my judgement.

So I think that the kind of radical leadership that I'm talking about within our traditional political modes, that kind of leadership is possible. I said that I was a mystic, and I believe that the way we'll get that leadership—if we ever do—we'll get it fundamentally from the conjunction of a man and circumstances. I don't mean necessarily just one man, although I'm thinking now in terms of the presidency. I'm talking about the effect of one man, I think has a very broad... it has a spreading effect through our political life. A great leader in a great political party, who will make a great political party, means that there'll be great leaders in state houses. It means that there'll be people who'll come along in the Senate, in the House of Representatives, in local offices, who will be emboldened, who will be enlightened, who will themselves be led to lead their constituencies. Leadership has its effect outwards that way.

And there's a certain contradiction in what I'm saying here that I understand, in that I'm placing a great burden on presidential leadership, where I have already said that there's a great danger in the growth of the imperial presidency. So there is a contradiction there, but I don't think the contradiction is inherent, because I think that the great leader in that office will understand that it isn't merely the necessity to stack up powers for himself that he faces. The necessity that he will have is somehow to find ways through our institutions, reforming our institutions, changing them, metamorphosing them, somehow to find ways of getting things done and approaching problems that affect people's lives. More power in the presidential office is certainly not going to do that, because we have for the past 40 years been steadily increasing the powers of the presidential office, and all that means is that steadily at the same time, the responsibilities, the expectations that we place in that office rise. Until today, no matter how much power the president has, there really isn't any way that he can do very much about the educational system in American life through his powers, through his statutory and inherent and implied powers. What he can do, the way he can do something about these things is through the example that he sets and through the leadership that he gives and through the teaching that he does to the American people.

And I believe that at some point in the coming years, perhaps not in '72, but at some point when the crisis is grave, and the crisis is grave, not less grave, I would say, than it was in 1860 and 1932, we will find a man; a man will come forward out of the great American people, or perhaps he may even be in one of those that I spoke about before. No one knew in 1932 that Franklin Roosevelt would be the leader that he was. It isn't necessarily revealed in someone's political campaign. It comes about through what a man does when he's there. But I believe that we will find that leadership. We will find a man who understands the gravity of the problems we face, who will have some instinctive grasp of those problems, if not of all its details, because people can be found to surround him who will understand the details and who will know something about the actual tactics of meeting the problem, as long as he understands what the problem is, and as long as he is unafraid to think anew, to, in Lincoln's phrase, to disentrall himself from the old and outmoded solutions.

I have a little... I think parable is kind of a pretentious word, but I'll use it to tell of what I think is needed in many ways. I thought this in 1968—it didn't work that way—that on January 20th, 1973, we'll inaugurate a new president, and he will spend most of January 20th watching the parade and going to the ball that night, and he'll get up the next morning, January 21st, and he'll read the *New York Times* [laughter] my column, and then he'll go to the Oval Office and he'll get down to work. And at about 8:30, the door of the Oval Office will open and the entire federal bureaucracy will walk in—and I always think of the entire federal bureaucracy as looking rather like Mike Bundy—[laughter] and it will put the papers on the desk in front of the president, and he will say, "What's this?" And the entire federal bureaucracy will say to him, "Mr. President, these papers are the problems, and then these papers are the solutions." And the president we need is the one who will push all those papers on the floor and say to the entire federal bureaucracy, looking as it does like Mike Bundy, "No, we're gonna think all these things through again." We need someone who will have the courage to do that and not to be overwhelmed by the presentation of the papers to him on the first morning, because that's precisely what will happen.

And above all, a president who will be able, as he thinks anew, as he disentralls himself, as he tries to approach these problems, a president who will be able in his manner, in his personality, in the example that he presents to the American people, in the whole presentation of himself and conduct of himself in his office, who will be able to inspire the confidence of the American people—not necessarily just the total acquiescence, but the confidence that here is a man who is trying to attack the problems that actually affect people's lives. I think such a man, if he arises, as I said I have confidence that he will, I believe America is possible, I believe politically speaking it's possible through this route, through the route of leadership; I think such a man will be able to inspire the confidence of the American people if he preaches a doctrine of generosity

to the weak, and protection from the predatory, and justice to the disadvantaged, and equal treatment for all. And if he says... if he gives the American people what in my judgement they are crying out for, if he gives to them a call to the best that's in them rather than playing upon the worst that's in them.

Thank you very much.

[applause]

HOST: We've got time for some questions. Let me raise the first one to get the ball in motion. This is a question about the validity of answering the question in political terms at all, in the first place. And let me put this in terms of a question that your teenage daughter might ask you. "Daddy," she says, "you've given a very convincing description of the possible political answer to the question about America's survival. But Daddy, it's very utopian, and you virtually admit that nothing in '72 looks like meeting the needs of it. And so, in effect, you've told me, without really honestly saying so, that '72 isn't gonna make it and therefore, Daddy, I don't really believe that politics is possible in '72, and I'm gonna cop out. I'm gonna cop out in religious terms, or in aesthetic terms, or in psychedelic terms, or in commune terms. And in effect, you've invited me to do so, because the vision that you've given me as to the conditions under which a political solution is possible is so absurd when I apply that to existent human realities that I don't really see it's possible at all." What do you say to your daughter?

WICKER: Well, I said to her last week that... [laughter] I said that when I call for political leadership in a way, what is the necessity of the American citizen on this score? You know, the person who's not running for office or anything of the sort. The necessity is to respond. Now, I take it that most of the men who might compete for the office of president next year—or governor of this state, or senator, or whatever—most of those men are, with some exceptions, but in my experience, most of those men are men who want to do well, who want to lead, who have within them the desire to make things better, and too often, they don't get a response. So there's a thing here, it's almost a cyclical matter. Leadership requires response, and if you are going to have a response for very long, a response that means anything, it's gotta have something to respond to. I concede that it's a cyclical thing, but I think it's a real thing here.

Now, if everyone is going to say—I very carefully hedged my dismissal, if that's the right word, of candidates next year by saying that no one understood either, that either Lincoln or Roosevelt would be a great leader. In fact, there was quite a bit of... both were derided in those terms at the time. Now, if, just generally speaking, if young people or any other kind of people are gonna take a look at the political situation and say, well, there's no hope there, hence I'm

off to the commune, or I'm off to wherever I'm off, then they are saying, well, there's no hope in Muskie. I think that this is a reciprocal thing, and leadership will feed on response, and response has got to have leadership to respond to.

I may be presenting something of a utopian view of this, but I don't really think so, and the one thing I would say, now that my particular focus on political activity and political prospects is over here for the night, I would say that it's a mistake always to put too much emphasis, to put too much faith in what politics alone can accomplish. I wouldn't want to suggest that merely a revitalization of American politics, *that* alone, is going to solve all American problems and make, in terms of the subject of this conference, make America possible. That's not so. There are so many more things that are needed on the personal level, on the community level, at the corporate level, in almost everywhere you want to turn, in the churches, the universities. Of course, there are many other things needed that don't necessarily respond, in a sense, to political leadership.

But I'm saying almost the first requirement, it seems to me, is for us to regain a political direction, to regain confidence in American politics, to regain confidence in the fact that if we are willing to engage in that political system and work at it, that there can be a political leadership, that political leadership can function, it can give direction, it can give meaning to that part of our lives, and if that is done, then it seems to me that will have a spin-off effect on other things. I'm not saying that politics is the only area in which we need to move, but I'm saying that, in my judgement, I would give it first priority because it seems to me that, of all the functions and processes of American life, it's in politics that we have most nearly lost confidence.

HOST: Do we have any other questions? May I dare to give priority to the questions of the students at the university?

[AUDIENCE MEMBER asks question off-microphone]

WICKER: What conditions do I see as necessary for genocide, the elimination of the Black population, to become... ? [AUDIENCE MEMBER responds]

WICKER: Yes, I read Sam Yette's book on this... [AUDIENCE MEMBER continues speaking]

WICKER: I'm going to restate the question for the audience down here, I hope fairly. The questioner is saying that a number of books have been written and a number of people believe that the possibility of genocide, that is the elimination of the Black population in America, is a

distinct and near possibility. What conditions do I think are needed in order for that to become an actual decision of American political leadership? Well, I suppose in many ways, you'll want to take 10% off the top for a white man's answer to that problem, but quite frankly, I can't conceive of the conditions in which a rational—it wouldn't be rational, but I mean through rational processes—a decision would be made officially through governmental process to eliminate the Black population in America. I can't conceive of those conditions.

Now, if you narrow the question somewhat and say, under what conditions would there be such widespread reaction on the part of local communities or local governments or individuals or organizations of some kind, as to amount, if not to genocide, at least to wholesale attacks, wholesale slaughter of Black people in America, I suppose those conditions could be imagined if Black protest, dissent, activism had become so onerous to the American population that they felt that there was no alternative but to strike back. But I don't... I find, frankly... I read my friend Sam Yette, who works for *Newsweek*, wrote one of the books I think you're talking about, and I wrote a comment about it. And I found the chief—which was on the jacket—I find the chief virtue of a book of that kind, and I think it has virtue, is that it awakens or should awaken many of us who perhaps didn't realize it before to the real fears and to the real misapprehensions and... animosity, I guess, is a word. But to the real feelings of many Black people looking out through the Black community at the white community surrounding them—and I think to that extent, books of that kind are a very valuable proposition. But in all frankness, I find it very difficult to conceive. I find it impossible to conceive of any official policy of genocide, as you put it, and I find it very difficult to conceive of policies that would lead to wholesale organized attacks on Black people.

AUDIENCE MEMBER [on mic]: In your discussion of what radical leadership should do, you used the phrase, “they should have discussions with the American people, they should initiate conversations with the American people,” and in the terms of your remarks, which were both thoughtful and liberal, I'm a little concerned along with other people that it may not be at all possible to have any kind of discussion with the American people over network television, that it would be very difficult to even initiate that kind of conversation in America. And I'd like you to comment, if you would, on how you see that situation, what the chances are, and how a politician would begin to speak to the deeper issues.

WICKER: Well, I'm not sure I understood. You mean that there's some reason that television couldn't be used in that way?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Right. Well, most Americans get their news from network television, and network television is organized in such a way that it doesn't do anything in depth, and it

maintains a conversation with itself. Now, it doesn't seem that the deeper issues are being approached by that kind of media, and I don't think, for all the merit that your column has, that many people read your column. [laughter] Many of the people in this audience may read it, but many people in America may not. So, I see a problem in such kind of radical leadership beginning to talk to the American people in terms that they won't be completely misunderstood at the outset.

WICKER: Well, I don't know that I share that. In the first place, even though I'm dependent upon what is known as the print media anymore—it used to be called newspapers—I'm dependent upon newspapers for my livelihood and for my work. And so I'm not as much of a critic of network television news as you appear to be. And I think that there's this to be said. I mean, even if you assume—which I don't fully—but even if you assume that network news dissemination is at a fairly low intellectual level, nonetheless it reaches an enormous number of people. And I think that... in fact I'm quite sure that a great number of people who not too many years ago had almost no interest in problems of a national kind, much less did they know anything about it, who were much more involved just simply with what was right at their touch, now, by the magic of television, are brought very effectively into a knowledge of national problems. Surely this must be one of the reasons why, it must be that more than any other episode in our history, the war in Vietnam has been such a controversial matter because so many people have been brought into what is almost live, living touch with it every night on the television programs. So that I don't really accept your premise that television news is that ineffective, nor do I quite accept your apparent premise that it's pretty lousy stuff. It is in some cases, that's true.

But I think that there's been a growing trend towards more intelligent, deeper, and more sound presentations of difficult issues on television. By no means has it gone as far as it should, but I think the trend is evident. Beyond that, I'm talking primarily about using television as a medium—you raised the question of television, but I would have said—using television as almost a direct transmitter between leadership and the people. Now, President Nixon went on TV... I've forgotten the precise number of times, but in a period of about 18 months, he went on TV like six or seven times to talk to the American people about Vietnam directly and specifically. Millions of people watched, these were well-advertised in advance. I wouldn't want to term any of those episodes enlightening from my point of view, but nonetheless the potentiality for what a man could do is there. And I don't think there's any doubt, for instance, that in his November speech in 1969, I think it was, I think President Nixon in one speech, which went on about 20 minutes—which I thought was pretty terrible—but nonetheless I think in that one speech, he very effectively changed the entire national mood on Vietnam, which at that point was building up through the moratorium and demonstrations in Washington to a climactic point, and he

came on and took quite a different line, and almost overnight the mood of the nation changed, for the worse in my judgment, but nonetheless it did.

So I think the potentiality of that medium for leadership has scarcely been explored as yet. You'd have to remember too that in the decade of the sixties when the full impact of this thing had become available to us in a way—it was only after President Johnson went in the White House, I believe, that we got the White House studio built in there. Neither President Johnson nor President Nixon, I believe it's fair to say—and they're both of two parties so I can be bipartisan about it—neither of those is what one would term a persuasive performer on television. [laughter] President Kennedy may have been. We don't know what the future holds, and while it's perfectly true that if you got really an effective demagogue on there, that has certain frightening possibilities. One has only to imagine Hitler, you know, with the satellite communications at his disposal; that's a fairly scary thought, but nonetheless the potentiality is for good and for education on there too, I think.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yeah, you may have already answered the question. I was a little late. I was sitting in a class waiting for a midterm. It seems the professor was going to give it, got waylaid by Tom Wicker, and didn't quite show up.

WICKER: That's good. Claim a pass. [laughter]

AUDIENCE MEMBER: The question concerns Attica. It's been several months now since Attica, and I was wondering if you could kind of give us your interpretation of how it's affected American thought, political thought. Has it been for better or for worse?

WICKER: Well, I don't know. I wouldn't want to venture an answer to that question. I think the superficial response so far, insofar as one can read it, has been better than one would have expected. Better from my point of view, that is, that people have been shocked and disturbed by the violence that transpired there, ultimately, and hence have been in something of a mood to do something about prison conditions and so forth. But I think that's superficial, and in my judgement this is, I mean, it now appears to be one of those episodes where there will be many investigations and thick reports filed and nothing done. Already the guards' union, the corrections officers union in New York, which is a very strong union apparently—that's surprising to me; I didn't realize they had a union until this happened—and now they have already wrested from the state a pledge to build a maximum-maximum security prison. And of course when that fails and you have a revolt there and somebody gets killed, they'll have another strike, and then you'll get a maximum-maximum-maximum security prison, and that won't do any good either.

So I don't know, I don't want to estimate what the balance of public opinion is here in this, because I don't know. And for one thing, this is my first real trip away from New York and Washington, the Eastern liberal establishment and so forth, until tonight, since that time. But there are two things that I would say about the Attica situation that were sort of revelations to me at the time that I think in the long run are hopeful.

The first of which is that among the grievous social problems that we face, for instance, all those that I talked about tonight in somewhat general terms, I think that among those grievous social problems, the problem of penal reform probably is the most finite problem that we have. We know for instance that—the figure varies all the time, but at any given moment there's something like a quarter of a million people behind the walls, that is people who've been convicted of something, not those who are awaiting trial or charge, but people who've been convicted and are serving sentences. Now that's not an unmanageable number of people. We know where the institutions are. Some states have one or two, others like California have many institutions. It's a finite matter. We know where the people are. Generally speaking, it wouldn't be hard to get yourself up a rating system of good prisons versus bad prisons, and penologists could tell you where there's likely to be an explosion. I can tell you from my mail that they're very worried that the Brushy Mountain Prison in Tennessee is going to go up in a moment. You've already had one out here some years ago. The Lorton Penitentiary, which is the District of Columbia's corrections institution, euphemistically called, is down in Virginia, and that could go at any time. We know it's a finite problem, unlike so many other things. When I say it's finite, I don't mean it's manageable or simple or easy, but it's quite definable as compared to such things as racism. That's one point that interested me.

The second point that struck me very forcibly at Attica—and this is something I really hadn't thought of before—was the extent to which all those fellows behind the walls, like a quarter of a million people, and it's more than that because it's changing all the time. It's a constant quarter of a million. Almost all of those people are coming out. They're going to come out from those prisons, and they're going to come back and live among us. Maybe not right next door, because we're a little too middle-class for that mostly, but they're going to come out and live among us. Of the 1,400-odd prisoners who were in revolt in the D block in Attica, there were only 200 lifers, and the lifers by and large have got some means, if they do well, of getting their sentence commuted or whatever. Even they might come out, but the other 1,000 or 1,200, all of them are in for two years, five years, eight years. They get paroled, so they serve the time and come out. They're coming out. Now, if you understand that, if you get over the notion that some fellow who's raped a lady or who's mugged somebody or who's broken into the local bank or whatever, if you get over the notion somehow that you can send him up there to Attica or the

Oregon State Pen or wherever it is and turn the key in the lock and throw the key away, and you've solved that problem by golly, you put him out of sight, and if you get over that notion, then it comes clear to you: those fellows are coming out. They're coming out to live among us.

Now, if they're coming out to live among us, ask yourself the question. It's very plain. It's very simple. This seems to me to be a matter of almost unassailable logic. If the guy is coming out and will live among us, how would you rather he would come out? After you've beaten him, after you caged him like an animal, after you fed him slop, after you've allowed him to be sexually abused or allowed him to sexually abuse other people, after you've paid him slave wages for medieval work, after you've mistreated him in every way you can, after you have convinced him that he has lost his membership in the human race, that he simply lives in the gutter and has been forgotten by the human race? Now, if that's what you want, then you've got to reckon with the fact that that man is going to come out, and he's going to come out coiled up like a spring full of hatred for humanity, and he's going to strike when he gets a chance, and that's what's happened. That is what happens, and that's why the recidivism rate is so high in America. It's one of the main reasons why the recidivism rate is so high.

Is that what you want, or on the other hand, would you rather take the attitude that, yes, this man is coming out again, and, no, he hasn't lost his membership in the human race. He's transgressed, he's erred, but he hasn't sacrificed his membership in the human race. He's got to be treated like a human being. If possible, you give him some opportunity at education, you allow him to perform some decent work that might train him for the future, rather than making license plates. Nobody makes license plates except prisons. There's no way to get a job making license plates once you get out of prison. [laughter] Even though people recall in horror, it makes sense to pay prisoners, even murderers. It's interesting about murderers. Most murderers are people who lose their temper and bash somebody with a bottle of beer, or stick a knife in them. Murderers are people you know in the neighborhood bar. They're your friends, or they're members of your family. Ramsey Clark used to say, if you don't want to get murdered, then you shouldn't have any friends and don't get married. [laughter] A murderer is a man who's least likely to commit his crime all over again, because most of the time—it's not true in every case, of course—but most of the time, a murderer is a man who's committed a crime of passion, and he thoroughly regrets it, because there he is in jail, and he wouldn't do it again if he kept his temper the first time. So even murderers, it makes a lot of sense, for instance, to pay them the minimum wage, or better, for their work in prison.

Why does that make sense? It makes good sense, because in the first place, nobody wants their families to go on welfare. That's one of the great scandals in this country, all the families on welfare. Well, pay the man a wage, and maybe his family won't go on welfare. And secondly, if

he's able to put aside a little nest egg while he's doing his eight years, and if he comes out with \$500 or \$1,000 instead of the \$10 that the state gives him in its generosity, or \$25, maybe he won't go out and mug somebody the first night he's out, because there's one thing, sure, he's not going to come out with a job. People don't hire ex-cons, by and large. I mean, we like to think we do, but by and large, we don't. It's very hard to get a job when you come out.

So what I'm trying to say in all of this is that there is a very strong, if you look at it, there's a very strong public interest in treating prisoners with some form of humanity and with some form of intelligence about what their future is. This is particularly true when you apply it to the first offender. After all, when you pick up a guy for the first time, and he's stolen a hubcap or he's stolen a car, whatever it is, when you pick him up for the first time, you've identified the future of crime. You know that here's a guy who, for one reason or another, unless something is done, is likely to engage in a life of crime, and the crime is likely to get worse. And if you throw him in the state penitentiary, almost any state, he is going to get worse, because our state penitentiaries are universities of crime.

So not to go on and filibuster too long about this. I've tried to make two points, the first of which is that penal reform, more than most of our grievous social problems, is a finite matter. You know, you could sit down and fairly closely estimate how much money it would take to rebuild all of our state penal institutions. And it wouldn't be a sum of money that would even come close to the defense budget for a given year. So it's a finite problem. And the second problem is that there's a real public interest, if people would only recognize it. And this whole idea of putting a guy in jail and locking the key and throwing the key away and cracking down on him and being hard-nosed is simple madness, because those guys are coming out. Unless we want to put everybody away for life or resort to genocide, as the questioner up here said, those guys are coming out again. And what's the use of turning them into maddened, enraged animals who want nothing more than to take out their revenge on the society that treated them as if they were dirt in the gutter?

HOST: Do you want to say something about... [interrupted by applause]

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yeah. I was hopeful in your original... in your prefacing, in your wading into the political waters, especially the presidential political waters of '72, that your conclusion was going to be that orthodox political means will probably not solve the problems of America in the '70s and beyond. I was very disappointed when I found that you were a subscriber to the "great man" theory of history.

WICKER: Yeah, it shocks me, too. I fought against it. [laughter]

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Do you think that you perhaps could have served keynoting a conference of this kind better by, instead of giving us a brief and cursory summary of symptomatic problems of the existing institutions, to have talked about some of the institutions which are causing those problems. And by solving the symptoms, you're not getting at the root of the problems, so that that will not solve the "is America possible" in the '70s. [applause]

WICKER: Well, indeed, I am trying to answer that question in the spirit in which it's offered. I thought that I had suggested that malfunctioning and frozen institutions in many ways were the root of our problems, probably not quite in the same way you would think, but I think that. But I made a speech to some group early this year in which I discussed at some length—and at a time when I believed in it more than I do now—discussed the possibility, for instance, of action outside the normal political process, not perhaps as far outside as you wish, but, for instance, a fourth party, assuming Wallace is a third party. And I think that is possible, and I made the points then, and it has some validity, I think; I made the point then that you can envision Wallace as having been one of the more successful minor party candidates in history, not because of the number of votes he got or anything of that sort, but because of the very strong influence he then had on the Nixon administration, so that he moved the Nixon administration in certain ways. Hence, what you could hope for conceivably through a fourth party, if a Democrat was to be elected, perhaps a fourth party of the left could have something like a similar influence on one of the major parties.

But the more I've contemplated these prospects, the less I think that that's likely. Now, I think you can say that as we have moved... you *could* say; I don't, but you could say that as we moved into a particular kind of society that we have, as we've gotten in a continental democracy, as the built-in checks and balances and stumbling blocks of the kind of federal system we have have become more pronounced, as it becomes less and less easy, as I said, even for a very powerful institution like the presidency, actually to use those powers to accomplish anything that means anything to people's lives. You can say, therefore, the whole political system has got to be thrown over and we've got to start anew. Well, I tell you, frankly, that may be true or you may think it's true, but I don't believe in revolution, and I'm not a revolutionary, and I don't know of many revolutionary cases. Your history on this may be different or better than mine, but I don't know of many revolutionary situations where the net effect in the long run has been except to replace one inefficiency with another inefficiency or one tyranny with another tyranny.

And I think that if we are to solve our problems in the country, this is the judgement that I've come to after as much study as I can give to it by my own limited lights. I think that if we can't do it by, as I put it, radical action in the terms that I mean it, within the traditional modes of our political system, then what it is that we could do by overthrowing our traditional political system

is not something that I would welcome, nor do I want to have any particular part in bringing about. [applause]

HOST: I think we have time for one more question, yes.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: A previous questioner referred to genocide as a possible solution or end of the racial situation in the United States. The ultimate solution, it would seem to me, would be integration in a racial... that is, by intermarriage in American society. How likely do you view that possibility of a solution or an end of the racial situation in this country?

WICKER: See, I just don't know. [some laughter] No, I'm quite serious. I don't know where we go in this, because while I think that the logic of a successful integration policy, that is a policy that ultimately produces a colorblind nation... I mean the logic of that is inescapable; if you're colorblind, in that sense, why then even the whole idea of an interracial marriage disappears because you're not even thinking in those terms. It's just one person marries another person. And I think that's what all of us—I won't say all of us either—but that's certainly what I'm for, out at the end of the line, and the sooner the better, a colorblind society. But if you ask me what I think are the practical prospects of that anytime soon, it seems to me that that's probably very far off.

I'm not saying that the acceptance of what we would now refer to as racial intermarriage is not going to increase by leaps and bounds. I think it is, and I think the incidence of that is going to increase by leaps and bounds, but it still seems to me for many years to come going to be the kind of thing that society notices. I mean it will not be just the boy next door marrying the girl next door; it'll be the sort of thing that society notices. And I think the arrival of a colorblind society is something that's so far out in the future that I wouldn't expect anyone in this audience to see it. That's my judgement, but it's purely a judgement.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you.

HOST: We'll dismiss the meeting for tonight. All right, one more? Okay.

WICKER: There's not a male chauvinist bone in my body. [laughter]

AUDIENCE MEMBER [female voice] Yes. [some applause] In your entire speech, when you've been mentioning the problems of America, and speaking of presidential candidates, you have not used once the word "woman"; you've always used "man." You have never used the word "person" ... [applause] you have not mentioned any problems that are applicable to women,

such as abortion. And I would like, if I am correct, and I am... [laughter] Women make up 50% of this America, this possible America that you're speaking of. And I want to speak for the women in this audience, and I want an apology. [applause]

WICKER: I would demur to only one thing that you said; the one specific you raised was abortion and reform of abortion attitudes, and laws. And while I didn't specifically mention that, I did raise the question of population and population control, and if I had been speaking on that general subject, I certainly would have. But to the extent that, I mean, other than for that, I think you're quite right. And I had an interesting example recently. I had written an article for a magazine, and the person who read the proofs apparently was quite consciously feminist, and I was astonished. I was literally astonished, to tell you the truth, when she sent the proofs back to me, because in addition to just the ordinary proofreading that she had done, and done quite capably, she had written quite a bit of marginalia in the proofs. And I was astonished to find that in, I would say, in a 5,000-word article, about every third paragraph, I had put some elocution on the paper, or used some phrase, or not used some phrase, or whatever, that she found objectionable from her point of view. And my first reaction to this was, oh, by golly. [laughter]

And then I began to study it—and I'm using these figures arbitrarily—but let's say if she had put down 25 points, and it was about that, I would say; I began to look at those things, and I found that in at least 20 of those cases, she was absolutely right. And there wasn't any reason that I should have done it. There were a couple of other cases I thought were kind of marginal. For instance, I had referred at one point to "men of goodwill," [laughter] and she said, "What about women?" And I really thought that the word "men" there was inclusive in that sense. But even that, I guess, is questionable. But in any case, what I'm trying to say is here that while I don't remember precisely all the words that I used tonight, out of the experience that I've had in this other event, I'm sure you're right, and I gladly offer my apology and I hope that next time I'll do better. [applause]

HOST: The meeting is adjourned.

[program ends at 01:33:17]