

# Paradox and Reason

## *President Blends Religion and Politics In a Strong Appeal for Faith and Unity*

By **JAMES RESTON**

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 20 — President Johnson's Inauguration was a dramatization of the American Dream. It was all there, "bigger and better" than ever before: The poor boy, the country boy at the pinnacle of the world; the lovely wife hold-

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ing the Bible for the oath; the eternal American combination of religion and politics; and

above all, the optimism of America transmitted by a man-made satellite in the sky to a distracted and pessimistic world.

The ceremony was one long paradox: A sermon and a circus; a prayer and a parade; the Bible and the ballyhoo. Change is our problem, said the

36th President of the United States; reason and faith our shield; unity our only hope—this thrown out with painfully slow evangelical overtones to an unreasoning, skeptical and dis-united world.

The echoes of past Presidential inaugurals were unmistakable today. "The problems are new," said Teddy Roosevelt in his Inaugural Address, "the tasks before us differ from the tasks set before our fathers who founded and preserved this republic."

"Ours is a time of change," said President Johnson, "rapid, and fantastic change, baring the secrets of nature, multiplying

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the nations, placing in uncertain hands new weapons for mastery and destruction, shaking old values and uprooting old ways."

"These dark days," said Franklin D. Roosevelt in his first depression Inaugural Address, "will be worth all they cost us if they teach us that our true destiny is not to be ministered unto but to minister to ourselves and to our fellow men."

John F. Kennedy said it better in his famous statement, "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country."

And Lyndon Johnson reiterated the same theme today.

"Each of us," he said, "must find a way to advance the purpose of the nation, and thus find new purpose for ourselves. Without this, we will simply become a nation of strangers."

The parallels could be extended a dozen times in the inaugural addresses from Washington to Johnson—and even to the words of that tragic Johnson who followed Lincoln into the White House—but the question about today's Inaugural Address was clear enough.

Is it reasonable to apply reason to an unreasoning world? Will a divided and disbelieving world listen to the counsels of unity and faith?

Lyndon Johnson was his mother's son today—an unbeliever who believes in believing. In the poignant moment of commitment, he went back to the eternal things: justice, liberty, and unity. He was William Jennings Bryan on the Chautauqua circuit. He was Franklin Roosevelt telling us that we believed what he wanted us to believe and what we probably should believe.

"We are one nation and one people," he said. "Our fate as a nation and our future as a people rests not upon one citizen but upon all citizens. This is the majesty and the meaning of this moment."

Nobody who watched him up close could doubt his sincerity. He was tanned and strongly masculine. He spoke every word as if it were his last. He was asserting that the faith of the old frontier could be relevant and even triumphant on the new frontier of science and regional and international contention.

And he went beyond this: He asserted that in a land of great wealth, families must not live in hopeless poverty, that in such a land, rich in harvest,

children must not go hungry; that in a country of healing miracles, neighbors must not suffer and die untended; that in a nation of learning, young people must see the glories of knowledge.

"The American covenant," he said, "called on us to help show the way for the liberation of man. And that is our goal today. . . . Justice requires us to remember — when any citizen denies his fellow, saying, 'His color is not mine,' or 'His beliefs are strange and different'—in that moment he betrays America, though his forebears created this nation."

What he was saying was said many years ago by other men in other times. "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away," it says in Revelations. "Is our world gone?" President Johnson asked. "We say farewell. Is a new world coming? We welcome it—and we will bend it to the hopes of man."

Obviously, a weary and disillusioned world does not believe that America will bend this radically changing world to the "hopes of man" or that Lyndon Johnson or anybody else can liberate the human race or produce "justice and unity" upon earth.

But the inauguration of an American President is one of the few remaining ceremonies of man's hopes and dreams. It is a time for talking as Lyndon Johnson did today about "the uncreased desert and the unclimbed ridge, the star not reached and the harvest sleeping in the unplowed ground."

He was talking in the old American idiom today. "Have the elder races halted?" Walt Whitman asked. "Do they droop and end their lesson, wearied over there beyond the seas? We take up the task eternal, and the burden and the lesson, pioneers! O pioneers!"

All the hoopla—the high school bands, the Tournament of Roses atmosphere, the blue-kneed twirlers, the red-faced pols, the cheerful guests, rendering unto Lyndon the things that are Lyndon's, and the preachers rendering unto God the things that are God's—merely adds to the main point of an American inaugural, namely, that America is still young enough to hope and dream and believe.

The rest of the world, having lived longer and suffered more, may think it is all a little naïve, but they probably accept Lyndon Johnson's promise: "I will lead and I will do the best I can."