

MY CONCERNS ABOUT AMERICA ARE MUCH BROADER  
THAN AGRICULTURE AND FOOD

by

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Texas A&M All-University Lecture

October 25, 1990

Were Thomas Jefferson's apprehensions well founded?

It is human nature for each generation of mankind to accept, only with skepticism and reservations, the improved standard of living that it inherits from its parent's generation and indirectly from many previous generations. Seldom is much thought given to the dedicated collective struggle of 15 to 20 generations of Americans - in pursuit of the "elusive dream of a better life" for their descendants - that has made the present high standard of living in the U.S.A. a reality. Almost certainly no individual has contributed more toward making possible the present high standards of living and wealth enjoyed by most Americans today, than President Thomas Jefferson. His visionary creative leadership during the early turbulent formative years of the nation, charted a course that subsequently paid off handsomely. He was a man of great intellect and wisdom; he was a man deeply interested in the history of mankind's struggle and progress from its earliest pre-history through to the development of the early civilizations - their foibles and demise - and resurgence later in civilizations in other geographic areas. He was an agriculturist in the broadest sense, interested in, and involved in, developing better farming practices, in evaluating new agricultural crops and tree species, in inventing new tools and machines. He was concerned about expanding education. During the French-English-Spanish conflicts in Europe at the end of the 18th Century, he became concerned about continued availability of export outlets to Europe via the port of New Orleans, for American agricultural produce from the Ohio-Kentucky-Tennessee area. He initiated negotiations with France to assure use of the port for exports but ended up buying the Louisiana Purchase thereby extending the nation's frontier westward to the Rocky Mountains and beyond. A year later in 1804 he dispatched the Lewis and Clark Expedition to explore the new acquisition and they continued their trek westward to the Pacific. Although he must have been deeply pleased with the new nation's progress - much of it achieved under his leadership - he was concerned about the nation's long term destiny, because of his knowledge and fear of the foibles which led to collapse of many early civilizations.

Nearly 200 years ago President Thomas Jefferson, while acknowledging the great achievements of the United States on the social, economic and political fronts, during its first four decades as a nation, was apprehensive about its longtime future, and expressed them as follows:

**"Ease and Security were these the drugs that abated the external challenges in the minds of men? And did nations, like men, grow sluggish and apathetic when well fed and bodily comfortable?"**

When I return home to the U.S.A. after living and working for more than four decades in food deficit developing countries I have become fearful Thomas Jefferson's apprehensions are likely to become realities unless we wake up soon. During the 20th century, the United States developed into the world's greatest political, industrial, agricultural, and economic power. It became a world leader. Our democratic traditions, hard work, level of general education, and inventiveness were the envy of the world. Now, when I return home after 46 years of working in the Third World, I think I see the United States afflicted with the debilitating co-viruses of affluency and complacency. The fiscal irresponsibility of our federal government has led to horrendous indebtedness, resulting in massive and growing debt-servicing charges that, if continued, forebodes ruinous inflation. During the past three decades I have seen protracted deficit spending give rise to explosive ruinous inflation which destroyed the savings and retirement plans of individuals, and the economies of six different Latin American countries. In each case democratically elected governments were replaced with dictatorships of either the right or left.

Our American industries today, in many cases, despite the advantages of our generous natural resource base, can no longer compete, cost-wise or quality-wise, with Germany, Japan, or the Pacific rim countries, while the threat of an increasingly more efficient European Economic Community looms ahead. Meanwhile, many U.S. financiers and corporate leaders are engaged in preying on one another in hostile take-overs for short-term gains, while others are stripping the Savings and Loan Association for personal gain, and still others are becoming millionaires by using inside confidential information to wheel and deal on the Stock Markets, rather than dedicating their energies to the long-term growth and vitality of the American economy. We appear to be losing both our work ethics and our moral ethics.

I fear that our past national goals of excellence and achievement are being replaced by the pursuits of pleasure and comfort. We seem to want more pay for less work, yet don't know how to use the additional free time constructively. We live more privileged and healthy lives than any previous generations. Average life expectancy at birth has increased from 47.3 years in 1900 to 74.7 in 1985, and continues to increase. But we continue to search for the fountain of perpetual youth and immortality. Wouldn't it be a disaster if this unrealistic impossible dream were to become a reality? Moreover in our search for immortality, we are increasingly traumatized by synthetic chemical compounds and processed foods, suspecting them of being carcinogenic, mutagenic, or teratogenic, while at the same time we are the worlds greatest "pill-poppers" and consumers, by far, of a broad spectrum of illegal hallucinogenic hard drugs. In the case of trying to control illegal hard drug trafficking, we seem to rely on supply-side economics and up to now, we ignore the basic fact - that in drugs "demand drives

supply" - and we put the onus for stopping illegal drug traffic largely on the nation where the drugs are produced without developing a major effort to reduce demand through education here at home. How can we rationalize these enormous contradictions?

While we pursue this and other utopian will of the wisp objectives we appear quite confident if we pass a few more laws we will soon achieve a risk-free immortal life. But in this pursuit we fail to realize that one of the greatest biological risks over which we have no control takes place in the second in which we are conceived, when we draw the genetic hand of cards that we will live with for life. Although we can exploit more of the potential longevity of that genetic hand of cards by living a healthy lifestyle—eating a balanced diet, getting adequate exercise, and plenty of sleep—we all still have a biological clock with us, as all life species do, that will determine longevity, barring accidents. It seems we are fast becoming a nation of "healthy" hypochondriacs with a diminished gene frequency for common sense. Yet, we remain oblivious and unconcerned about the dangerous course that our nation steers. I pray we will wake up in time to realize our folly before it is too late.

## **THE POPULATION MONSTER**

I would be remiss if I did not express my concern about the growing menace of the population monster which threatens the future advancement of mankind on many fronts in all nations. We who work on the food production front, I believe, do have a responsibility to warn the political, religious and educational leaders as well as to educate the general public in all countries, that producing more food and fiber while protecting the environment can, at best, be only a holding operation while the population monster is being tamed. Let us glance at the magnitude of the problem. It took from the time of the appearance of the first woman and man up until about 1850 for human population to grow to one billion (several million years). World population currently is about 5.3 billion; during my life time it has increased from 1.7 to 5.3 billion and is now growing at a rate of 95 million each year, which means we will add another billion to the world population in eleven years, if present growth rate continues. In recent years, the "human rights" issue has generated much interest and debate around the world. It is a Utopian issue and a noble goal to work toward. Nevertheless, in the real world, the attainment of human rights in the fullest sense cannot be achieved as long as hundreds of millions of poverty stricken people lack the basic necessities for a decent human life.

I take issue with those who ignore the growing threats of the population monster, and speak glibly and sanctimoniously about "right to life," while ignoring the morality of the "quality of life." This only adds confusion to this complex issue for which a solution is imperative. Why does mankind continue to irresponsibly and inadvertently try to see how many additional people can be "heaped" onto the planet earth? Why do we continue to apparently always believe that future, newer and better technologies will expand the carrying capacity of our planet, while, at the same time, assure an improved standard of living for all? It appears to me that we are behaving in a most irrational and

irresponsible manner. Our behavior implies that when we can no longer provide the good life for the ever increasing number of people on the planet earth, we will always be able, at the appropriate time, to dispatch the excess numbers to colonize beautiful hospitable virgin planets in other solar systems in outer space. Oh, were it so simple!

### **A Word to Texas A&M Students:**

Finally, a word to the Aggie students. I want to challenge you to utilize your years at the university to the fullest to develop the potential genetic talents that you have inherited from your parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, etc. Don't waste these golden years; don't be satisfied with mediocrity; reach for a star! Although you will never reach the star, if you exert yourselves sufficiently you will get some stardust on your hands. With that as a catalyst, you will be surprised by what you will be able to accomplish for yourselves, your families, your community, your state, your nation, and for the well-being of humankind in the broadest context. Moreover, to all adults who have finished their formal education, remember that education should be lifelong continuing process, as has been so poignantly put by the late Will Durant, the philosopher-historian, when he cautioned us to distinguish between knowledge and wisdom:

**"In my youth, I stressed freedom and in my old age I stress order. I have made the great discovery that freedom (liberty) is a product of order, not of chaos. Sixty years ago, when I was 19, I knew everything and my father knew nothing. When I was 29, I was surprised to see how much my father had learned in the past 10 years. Now, at 79, I know nothing. So, in effect, education is a progressive discovery of our own ignorance."**

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Perhaps Will Rogers, the late Oklahoma country styled philosopher-humorist, said it even better in fewer words: **"We're all ignorant, the only thing is that we are ignorant about different things."** To this I might add, as we become more and more specialized—unless we continue to study so as to keep informed of developments in other fields—our ignorance becomes more and more expansive.

Now, good-bye, good luck, and keep reaching for that star of knowledge.

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Basis of the Texas A&M University  
Lecture October 25, 1990  
Republished in "The Bryan Eagle" November ?, 1990