

# EXCURSUS III

## From the Archives of the Still Great Society

The charges against recent American liberalism do have a foundation. We liberals have been tempted, especially in the recent decades of comparative wealth and comparative complacency, to a certain excess in language and rigidity in method, to grandiloquence and predictability. In the days of the Great Society one could observe some of the features of liberalism that are desirable and also some that are not. The outpouring of significant legislation, bill after bill, came mostly in 1964 and 1965; the Promethean atmosphere seemed to cover most of Lyndon Johnson's years. The pretentious label the "Great Society" reflected some of its less desirable qualities.

A certain recognition of direct hits made by the critics may be implied by reproducing here the following document. It was found (as the humorists say) beside a shattered typewriter in a room much like thousands of other rooms off a corridor much like a hundred other corridors in a mammoth rectangular building, much like other such buildings, at the end of a long, long, long day in the Johnson era.

As will be seen, it deals, as did so many of the efforts of those years, with an aspect of public life that had been around for a long time prior to the Great Society, and that is with us still, but that nevertheless was addressed by Johnson with a peculiarly sweeping grandeur.

### EYES ONLY

*Augmenting Our Prose Resources for All America:  
A Message to the Congress of the United States*

Thirty-five years ago our great President Franklin D. Roosevelt said, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." And I say to you today, let us face the messages of the future without fear.

Although commitments in Vietnam make this a time of restraint, it must not be a time of retreat. We can—and we will—meet the crucial challenge of official statements at home, while carrying on the sober responsibility of official statements abroad.

In the last four years a wealthy and abundant America has produced more official prose than ever before in the entire history of this great land.

We have done much.

But we must do *more*.

Our annual rate of message output rose by 16% over the previous year, 150% over 1960—more than three times the rate of growth of the Gross

National Product, of which it is itself an increasingly important part.

In producing this prose flow we have employed 16,804 persons with advanced degrees, 64% of whom are members of Phi Beta Kappa, and 34% of whom—more than one in three—were graduated *cum laude* or higher.

We have composed more paragraphs in the past four years than was done by the entire federal government from the Presidency of George Washington through that of Harry Truman.

This is a record of which we can be truly proud.

But it is a record which—working together—we must now surpass.

Despite our efforts in these last four years there are still many Americans untouched by this rich outflow.

—Our senior citizens, for too long left in the shadow of neglect, have been isolated in their Golden Years from the vital mainstream of American messages.

—Our children and our youth, our nation's greatest resource, have not received the full Enrichment of our messages.

—Millions of our new babies have yet to hear their first syllable of governmental prose.

—Many Americans who suffer from message-neglect are the victims of poverty and racial discrimination.

34.6 million disadvantaged Americans have incomes below the poverty line; of these, 34.6 million, or one out of every one, are blocked from official proclamatory documents by the cruel blight of poverty.

—Among our Negro males, the average rate of those who show no interest whatever in messages is 100%.

—Among our white males, the average rate is also 100%.

—Among our females—both Negro and white—the rate is the same.

We are not reaching our sturdy farmers on our tranquil farms, our strong workmen in our mighty factories, our great Indians on our great reservations, our lovely streetwalkers on our broad and lovely streets.

Let us recall the words of the poet, "No man is an Island, Entire of Himself."

We must attack this deprivation with every weapon at our command—and we will.

Our goal must be clear: Abundant messages for an Abundant America. A compassionate society will insist that every American, whatever his color, his income, his blood type, or the section of this great land from which he may come, from the giant boiler-room attendant in Peoria, to the little Shoshone grandmother in Thermopolis, to the medium-sized karate instructor in the farthest

reaches of the Bronx, shall have all the official prose that he can stand.

### *Creative Federalism in Preserving Our Rhetorical Heritage*

Official statements are not the work of the federal government alone. They are produced by every agency at every level throughout this great land.

State and local government, which are closer to the people and their needs, do their part in producing messages, speeches, and prose of every kind.

Private and voluntary agencies have always done much in this critical field. Many of our individual citizens produce prose on their own initiative.

But the federal government must also do its part.

—The message gap, like the pollution of our air and the contamination of our water, recognizes no political boundaries.

—The pressures of a rapidly expanding population will require more prose each year. It is estimated that by 1980 our population will require 3.2 paragraphs of official prose per day, for every man, woman, and child.

—We are increasingly an urban nation, and vital unmet message needs increase by seven to one in our great metropolitan areas as against our rural areas and our small towns.

The Task Force on the Nation's Future Message Needs and Prose Personnel Requirements, in its distinguished report, "A Voice for the Voiceless," estimates that the average sentence in Government Documents for fiscal 1968 will bear the stamp of twenty typists, thirty-three research assistants, and forty-seven editors for every actual writer. In some cases there may be no original writer whatever.

Thus we must take action to:

- upgrade vital stapling skills;
- strengthen programs for comprehensive and coordinated cutting and pasting services, especially in areas of severe prose deprivation;
- expand research into innovative techniques of message production, by computer, Xerox machine, and closed-circuit electronic typewriter.

As the prophet has written, "Where there is no vision the people perish."

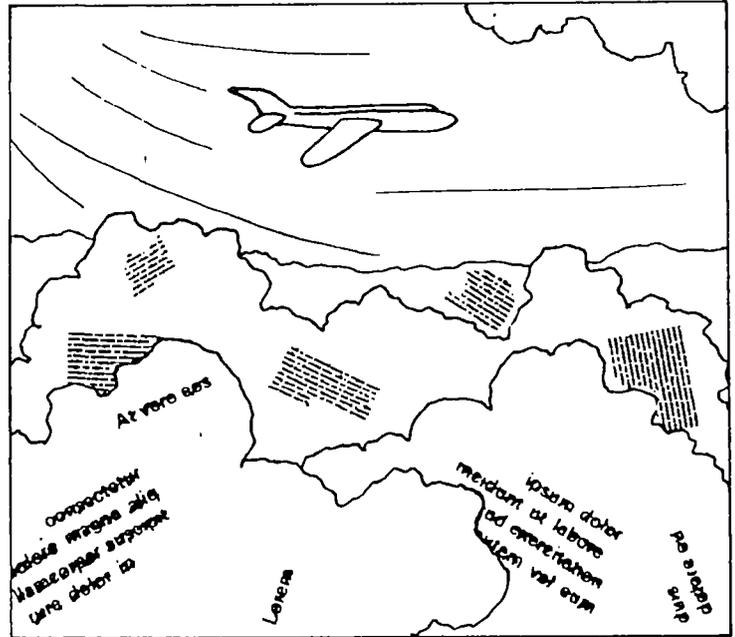
*I recommend the enactment of the Partnership for Prose Manpower and Training Act of 1968.*

This will:

- provide for two prose production centers, on a pilot-project basis, scattered throughout this great land;
- foster regional development of arrangements to coordinate more efficiently our governmental language production with that of our great foundations, our great business corporations, and other

representatives of our private sector;

—initiate a program of grants-in-aid to our states and our cities to fund initial planning for innovative programs in the dispersal of prose facilities and the delivery of prose services to all our people in areas of dire prose needs.



*Conclusion*

We are a great people. We have done much. We have come a long way. But we must do more.

Just over a century ago Abraham Lincoln said, "The world will little note nor long remember what we say here."

Marching forward together on this solid foundation, we must do our part to make Lincoln's promise come true.

**William Lee Miller**

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## QUOTE / UNQUOTE

### **Change of Heart**

The UN "needs a new heart, but, unfortunately, I can't transplant that sort of heart," said Dr. Christian Barnard. The pioneer heart transplant surgeon visited the UN yesterday to plead for a change of heart there toward his homeland, South Africa.