

John W. Gardner

The Inaugural Address

*A call to the citizens
of a fragmented nation*

I am proud to have a part in this historic ceremony. Everyone likes beginnings, and we are witnessing today a very important beginning for the University of Oklahoma. George Cross, who many of us have admired and counted as a friend, has brought the University to a position of distinction in the nation. I believe that the years ahead will be great years for this institution and that all of you will remember this day for the rest of your lives.

Herbert Hollomon is an old friend. We have worked together on many different matters involving the national interest. I knew him first when he was a brilliant young executive of General Electric. When I served in the President's Cabinet, I knew him as an immensely effective and imaginative public servant. It was a great

day for higher education when he was chosen to head this distinguished university.

Herbert Hollomon has all of the qualifications required of a president—character, energy, judgment, drive, and the capacity to lead. But I want to stress another quality he has that is rare and important: He understands the complexities of a modern technological society. He understands the kinds of analyses and the kinds of action that

John W. Gardner, a former Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare in the Johnson cabinet, is chairman of the Urban Coalition, a non-profit corporation which encourages government and non-government organizations to work together to solve social and economic problems.

are necessary to gain command of those complexities. And he understands what must be done to make technology and large-scale organization serve human needs. It is an honor for me to have a part in his inauguration.

It has been my good fortune to have firsthand experience in many different segments of American life. I have had two tours of duty with the Federal Government. I've had a good deal of experience in the business world, including service as a director of major companies. I've had extensive experience with the military services, including a tour of duty in the Marine Corps and years of consultant work with the Air Force. And for most of my working life, I've had a close relationship to the universities, the foundations, and the professions.

Some ten years ago I came to the conclusion that we could not make this society work as it should work without far greater emphasis on state and local levels of government, far greater emphasis on local leadership in and out of government. Americans have always talked as though they cared quite a lot about local government, local autonomy, local leadership, local initiative. But the talk hasn't been matched by action. Even Americans of conservative bent, who have consistently condemned the rising power of the Federal Government, never really lifted a finger to bring about a strengthening of state and local government.

Since it is currently fashionable to speak ill of the Federal Government, I hasten to say I'm not encouraging the old conservative fantasy that the Washington bureaucracy might somehow be made to wither away. This huge and complex society cannot function without a strong and vital Federal Government. But Washington must be alert to the conditions that produce and impair vitality and strength at lower levels of government. And local leadership must not shirk its clear responsibilities. My interest in the strengthening of local leadership in and out of government is not a sentimental one. It is a cold-blooded, pragmatic interest in making this free society work.

First of all, strength and vitality at the local level accords with our tradition of dispersing power and initiative. Second, it has become apparent to everyone that complex local problems cannot be solved from Washington. Third, it is only at the local level that we will solve one of the toughest and most dangerous problems that besets any large-scale modern society—a breakdown in the relationship between the individual and society. A number of steps are necessary if we are to cope with that breakdown. We must provide increased opportunities for people to participate and to share in the decisions that govern their lives, we must restore a sense of community, and we must foster a sense of responsibility. The three aims are intimately related. All three depend on governmental arrangements that disperse power and initiative. All three depend on community and organizational arrangements that emphasize the role of the individual.

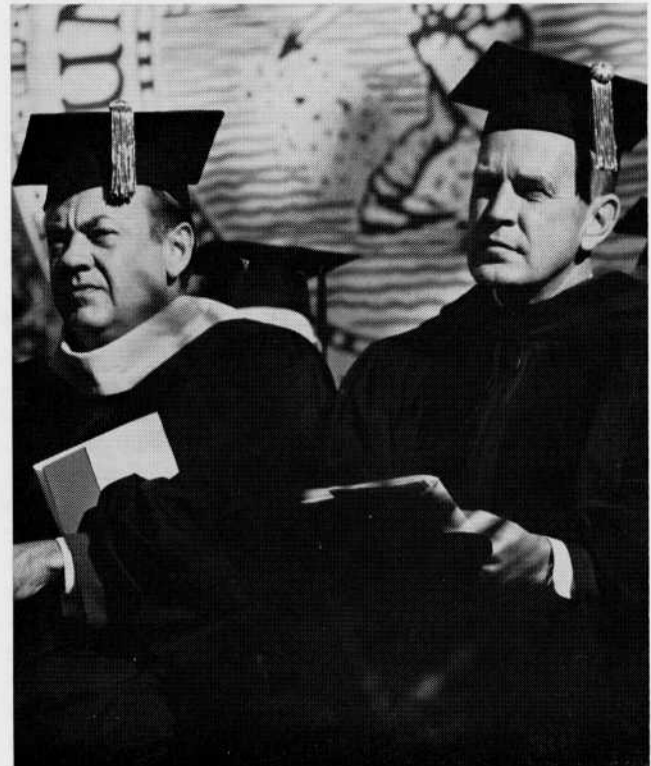
The way to restore the sense of community is to give communities some real decisions to make and to provide that citizens will share in making them. That is why it is so important to design Federal-State-local relationships so that they continually throw the challenge back to the

grass roots. That is why it is essential to give the private sector a significant role in public purposes.

Today one of the gravest handicaps to the local community, one of the things that prevent it from pursuing any of its purposes effectively, is the fragmentation of the community itself—and the fragmentation of community leadership. I saw this at first hand when, as Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, I had to visit all of our major cities—and many not so major. I found that the typical American city was split up into a variety of different worlds that were often wholly out of touch with one another. The suburbs were out of touch with the central city. Business, labor, and the universities were three wholly separate worlds—as far apart as worlds could be. City Hall was usually out of touch with the low income area and often out of touch with the ablest and most influential people in the city. The most ominous rifts, of course, were the rifts involving various minority communities, most commonly the black community, but in some parts of the country the American Indian or Mexican-American community.

In many of the major cities of this country, I observed that these fragmented worlds were often terribly ignorant of one another, and that the ignorance bred fear, and the fear bred hostility. These cities were not communities. They were encampments of strangers. Is it surprising that cities so fragmented have great difficulty in solving their problems, great difficulty in even formulating their problems? Long before the riots, it was apparent to everyone who studied these matters that communities so riven could not weather a storm without cracking wide open.

The storms came—and they cracked wide open, one after another. Like all structures under stress, they



President J. Herbert Hollomon and Gov. Dewey Bartlett

cracked along the lines of their internal weaknesses. The rift between black and white communities was usually the main issue, but when the city tried to pull itself together to face that issue, it found its capacity to do so greatly diminished by the other rifts within the community—between business and labor, between suburb and central city, between police and citizen, between young and old. Nothing is more clear: No major city can or will solve its problems without first repairing some of those devastating gaps in communication. In some respects it is harder to accomplish that repair after the troubles that have occurred. In some respects of course, it is easier. Some people respond to trouble affirmatively, redoubling their efforts to act constructively. But others, both black and white, respond to the interplay of violence and counterviolence with deepened anger, fear, hostility and a desire to strike back. We shall see a good deal more of those emotions before we're through. But they won't solve a thing.

Sooner or later we are going to have to sit down together and figure out how we can create communities that we can all live in, all believe in, all be proud of, all defend. The sooner we get on with it the better.

The Urban Coalition was formed precisely with that task in mind—so let me talk briefly about it. After the riots last summer, a group of outstanding leaders in American life came together to form the Urban Coalition. The members of the steering committee included mayors such as John Lindsay of New York and Jerome Cavanagh of Detroit, business leaders such as Henry Ford and David Rockefeller, labor leaders, leaders from the black community, and religious leaders. I would emphasize the importance of the coalition principle. Some people think of the Coalition as just another organization tackling the tough urban problems of the cities. But it is unique. Our distinction is that we bring together segments of American life that do not normally collaborate in the solution of public problems. Because of the need for such collaboration at the local level, our national organization set out immediately to form local coalitions. We now have thirty-six and we hope to double that number by year's end. As in the case of the national, each local organization includes representatives from the whole range of significant elements in the community—the mayor, business, labor, minority groups, and religion. And we encourage the participation of other relevant elements—the universities, the schools, the press, the professions.

The coalition principle requires that minority groups be represented in the effort to solve community problems. And such representation is itself a step toward solving the toughest problem of all—effective dialogue between minority communities and the dominant elements in the city or in the state. Such communication is difficult. It requires hard work and patience and imagination on the part of every person involved. Once the significant elements in the community begin to work together, once they begin to think as a community and act as a community, all kinds of things are possible. They can give city government the kind of intelligent support and criticism it needs; they can make the needs of their city felt at the state and Federal level; they can see now all the

various Federal, State, and local programs fit together; and they can provide strong citizen support for Federal programs that are working and strong citizen criticism of those that are not working.

And most important of all, perhaps, they can plan ahead. No top executive of a large corporation would consider himself a responsible man if he failed to have an effective forward planning operation that charted the future of his company. But as a citizen it never occurs to him that his community or his state is utterly lacking in any such forward planning. The only part of the typical American city that is charged with any responsibility whatever for the common future is local government. And it is commonly underfinanced, understaffed, hemmed in by archaic administrative arrangements, and, as a consequence, often relatively impotent. The mayor or city manager is not given either the money or the manpower or the authority or the citizen support to do the job. Most influential citizens don't understand what he is up against, and they don't particularly want to learn.

It goes without saying that the university has an immensely important contribution to make in helping states and communities to correct this deficiency. It can help states and localities identify their problems and inventory their resources for solving those problems. It can help to sift priorities. It can provide perspective and it can provide technical assistance. No one understands these possibilities better than Herbert Hollomon, and he has already taken significant steps to act on them.

I want to emphasize that when I talk of state and local leadership, I am not proposing new duties; I am calling us citizens back to old duties. Remember the Preamble to the Constitution? "We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity . . ." Great words, and greatest of all are, "We, the people of the United States." Not we, the public officials of the United States. Not we, who belong to the best clubs. Not we, who happen to find time to think about these things when we're not busy running our businesses or practicing our professions. Just we, the people.

Within a matter of weeks we will elect a new President. The outcome may please you or it may not. We are entitled to our preferences. But we must get over the notion that every four years we can elect a hero who will save us from ourselves. We must get the best public officials we can find. We must support them and give them the resources with which to govern. We must be grateful when they govern well. But no matter how gifted they are, no matter how expert they become, the inner mystery of democracy will always involve that old and good idea: "We, the people."

You and I and others like us, acting in our communities across the nation, can pull this fragmented society together again. You and I can create an America in which men speak to one another in trust and mutual respect, sharing common objectives, working toward common goals. You and I can return this nation to a path of confidence and well-being. You and I can do these things. No one can do them for us. □