

BOULDER TOWN MEETING
March 22, 1975

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NEW HUMAN

This is a fine day to celebrate--bicentennial, centennial, just life itself. Look at the mountains out there, the beautiful sky. Everything looks great, doesn't it? I heard some conversations between people as they came out of looking at the issues and the challenges. A fantastic kind of wonder bubbled from all of the wisdom that is gathered in this group of people in this room. Look around the room. There are teachers, philosophers, professors, students, housewives, a meter reader, and a TV announcer. I could go on and on about the crosssection of society sitting around this table involved this morning in looking at what in the world it would mean to be engaged in the world in which we live. That world always comes down to a local situation, and this local situation is called Boulder. It is a fantastic time to be engaged in life, and to have this opportunity to look into the future. When people talk about looking into the future today, they say you don't even look to tomorrow, you look a hundred years, two hundred years, one thousand years. That almost seems terrifying. Doesn't it? We sense that the kind of engagement that we are involved in, any kind of act that we do, has long range implications. Was it any wonder that someone like John Glenn, when he was elected, talked about an America in the midst of the Dark Night of the Soul? When you encounter that kind of wonder, what you experience is the kind of terror-filledness that comes when you encounter the actual situation that you show up in, the community which you find yourself engaging in, or the job which you find yourself participating in.

I was amazed the other day when my nine-year old daughter insisted that I see a TV show called the Six-Million Dollar Man. The hero is a bionic man who creates energy within his own being; the kind of power that he has is fantastic. In this particular show, a woman was crushed in the midst of an accident, and she too became one who was given a new arm, two new legs, an ear, and, I don't know what else. She was a mess after she had that accident. What I got caught up in was the wonderment of seeing that man and that woman beginning to have to deal with what it meant to reforge their lives out of their own imagery, out of their own being.

Wherever you show up in society today, you find yourself encountering the technology that we have on our hands through TV shows, movies and magazines. No city from the smallest to the largest misses the kind of urban secular society that we live in. Is it any wonder that a man like Ortegay Cassett says that Man anticipates more or less clearly his entire future at every moment? Now that is awesome. Isn't it? Take one step and you begin to see the possibilities or see the implications of that step's effect on the universe. I was talking with a group of businessmen the other day about what was going on in their office. One of the men told about a time when he was aspiring to be an up-and-coming businessman. He said that one of the things that he longed for was to have a corner office with his name plate on the door. One day he noticed that a co-worker didn't show up, and about the same time, they took his name down from the nameplate which was not solid at all, they just slipped his name out of the nameplate.

The businessman said that, he didn't aspire much more for that corner office. Another man told this story. "You won't believe this, but the other day we had this machine that we needed a part for. We sent off to New York for the part so that we could continue our work. We waited, and we waited for that part to arrive. We were getting a little disgusted, so we called some of the top level management back in New York to say that we needed the part for this machine so that we could get our work going. A few days later, sure enough, a package showed up. We opened up the package and we found that all there was in the box was the packing slip. That is all there was. It probably was not that empty box that struck me so much as that I could see in my mind that this man sitting back on the assembly line packing one box after another, not really caring whether he put that part in there or not. The third story went like this: Wouldn't you know, the other day we were all getting ready to go home in the afternoon from our work. We started to tell our fellow worker at the next desk that it was time to go home and we noticed that he was dead. The man had been dead two or more hours and we didn't even know it."

I suppose that today you pick up on that kind of thing whenever you have any kind of conversation with anybody, and they began to share with you the experiences they have had with their jobs, with their family, and with their community. You begin to experience the kind of collapse that happens in any society where a new kind of possibility looms ahead. When one sees the implications of his life, or he sees that in every relationship, there is suffering at the very bottom, he experiences pain. At the same time, the complexity is that one has to finally decide, do they not, what the next step is going to be.

What is that new American citizen going to look like? And the world that he lives in, what is that going to look like? I think that a few years back there must have been a group of people who sat down and began to decide what that world was going to look like and what the qualities of Americans were going to be. It probably came out looking like all of those lists of things for boy scouts and girl scouts. Remember some of those things that it meant to be a boy scout? Loyal, trustworthy, reverent, honest, brave. We all know them, don't we? Well, I had fun making up a list about some qualities for the future American citizens. Let me share some of these: humorous as Jack Benny. As hardheaded as a midwestern farmer. As fearless as a mountain climber. Do any of you climb mountains around here? As courageous as an astronaut. As hard working as a coal miner. And as much richness and earthiness as Barbara Streisand. How about that? Or with as much ingenuity and fortitude as Henry Kissinger. Well, at least as resourceful as a businessman. You could go on and on. It would be great to get out some of yours to see how would you talk about the qualities of the American citizen. What is that going to look like in the future? When you begin to talk, like this all kinds of questions get raised. What is the meaning of life? What is my vocation? What am I going to be about? What am I going to do with my life? Those kind of questions begin to be raised as you look into that future to decide what kind of engagement you are going to get involved in. You look at the TV and there are all different kinds of signs,

aren't there? There is Kojak, Colombo, Maude, and Rhoda. Did you ever see that show of Rhoda's when she just could not get out of bed one day? She was just paralyzed in the midst of possibilities, and could not get up. Her mother could not get her up. Day after day, she just stayed in bed. You have all those kinds of TV shows and movies to propose what that new style is about. Everybody talks about them on the Dick Cavatt Show, the Johnny Carson Show and if it is not there, you can at least watch it on "AS the World Turns," if you want to take time around noontime. What you people experience is that they are not in control. Have you ever experienced that in your life? You are just not in control of your life. You see all of the panorama of the possibility of what that style could look like, and then you look at the news and you just want to crawl back into bed, or just turn the TV set off because what you find is that you are finally not in control of life itself. You find that you care, do you not? You find that you care and you wish that somehow there were ways to turn off your caring, if I just didn't have to care today about what is going on across the world...If I just did not have to care about what is going on in my family...If I just did not have to care about what is going on in my local community or within my city, or within my nation...Then, maybe, The problem is, is it not, you just care. And in the midst of that you see that your life as being that one who meets life as it is. There is certainly not another one like you, is there? Some say that is really the way it should be. No one else like you yourself showed up in history. That one unique life that you have is one filled with radical creativity. I suppose that there are those who say that life is somewhere else. Life is really going to be meaningful or really going to have everything all wrapped up some other day. Or somewhere else. Or life will really be full then. But is it not so that today what we experience is that life is full. I mean it is so full that it is just running over and that fulfillment is not something that takes place somewhere else. That fulfillment in one's life takes place today, takes place as who you are and where you are. That is where we show up and we experience ourselves as being infinitely related. That is, we are not only related to our family or one here or one there. We experience ourselves as related to every aspect that is going on in society. Would you ever suppose that there actually is any relationship between the Peruvian anchovy market and the Iowa soybean farmers? That is pretty far-fetched, is it not? But you look at those and they both are competing on the protein market. So you see, the Iowa farmer does a lot of his planting relative to what the catch is in the Peruvian anchovies. You begin to see, that well, if that kind of far-out relationship is there, everything I do is related. And everything that you touch affects something else.

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You have four great times to be the life style that you engage within that and the act that you do in the midst of that. Four great times. How many of you around here show up in what is called an adventurous, testing-the-limits, youthful phase of your life? You see that going on--the kind of adventure that is there. Or how many of you show up seeing that you are always the one that has to do the nitty-gritty, hard work in family, society, whatever? This phase is the

emerging adult. Once you get past twenty, you know you cannot put it off on someone else. How many of you are in that phase, somewhere between 20 and 60? How many of you are in that phase of the 40's when you really get to live-- isn't that what society tells us? How many of you are in that phase before you get to retirement? All right. Now how many of you around the table are in that phase or time of your life that is almost like your fourth time? To recreate your life. To be the one who has all the wisdom. Look at all the time you've lived; there is a lot of wisdom packed in that to give to society. You are ready to retire and what does retirement look like today? Certainly something new, doesn't it? There is a whole chance that all you will be there. For you see today that the elder is being a great sign to every other human phase of what it means to pick up their life and say that it is not over yet. If you look at that, you see four chances in life to re-engage in a whole new way.

We also have a chance to reengage as a male and a female. There is no way finally to get out of whosing up either one dimension or another of being that one who forges the dynamic of life or one who conserves. Those dynamics have always been part of society. Today you sense the tension like we have not sensed the tension in a long time. Isn't it fantastic that in our global-local society today, like in none other, you have the male and female, the youth and the elder and the adult all ready to move. That is, they have all had their revolution. They have all had their time to decide to stand up and engage in life out of the time and phase and whatever situation they have. That is just their chance in life. Our society is ready for that chance.

We have a new way of talking about what it might mean to be American. I suppose that one of our gifts is just being rational human beings at the same time that we know there is great irrationality in life. Being that rational human being, you know that in any situation you show up in, whether ~~we know whether~~ you have it or are excited about it or wish it wasn't so, you have the possibility of taking a total new relationship to that; we can decide to be proud of being Americans in the midst of all the struggles and all the tragedies we know are going on. We have that kind of chance to recapture a new story of what it means to be an American and decide to be that one who says, "I am an American." Whatever it was that got me to this point, that is who I am. Every man creates a story. What is the story that you would create that would enable a person to live out of that kind of story of possibility before the world. In one sense the new citizen of America is that one who stood in the midst of his local situation, who stood in the midst of this world that we have on our hands, looked at it very objectively, saw what the situation was, thought things through very carefully, trusted his intuitions, and then began to move out of that to discern what the future is going to be. His affirmation of his situation and decision to discern trends and what the next step is going to be is what that new citizen is. He is the one who discerned what the practical vision was. He looked at every dimension of life and began to pick up and lay out what that practical vision needed to be relative to the future, in which all men could focus their cares and see that care is just day after day after day. He does that kind of task.

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It is not just some time or some other time, but the day after day. That new citizen is the one who creates out of the midst of his situation, day-by-day tactics or those day-by-day implementaries that allow that practical vision to be seen through. He sees something happen over the long-long range picture. And that, what if, he decided to work within the structures that he had on his hand, to work within the local community that he has in the world that he has, in order to bring off that which enables the whole society to move in a new direction? Just what if it was a possibility for every human being to move in a new direction? What if that was a possibility for every human being, and is that not? Is that not indeed the situation that every man has on his hands today? To begin to forge what that style and what that engagement is going to be? One time somebody talked to Gandhi. If you ever look at pictures of Gandhi, you know that he was just a little old dried-up raisin of a man, wasn't he? He was just a nothing. They began to ask him about his work in India and how it was going and what he was all about and why he was doing that and he just kind of stopped and said. "Well, what I am really concerned about is not India. What I'm concerned about is all mankind."

Well, I suppose it always takes a risk, doesn't it. Did you see the movie the Immigrants? Remember the struggles they had in deciding to take that next step and the pain that was involved in doing that. Yet in the very midst of that pain of the struggle of forging out the future, a new land emerged, a whole new people. In the Continental Congress a group of ordinary men decided to take a few steps. What if we could make a new step? What if we decided to create a new story which would stand in the obligation that every man finds himself in, that is, the obligation to a local community, or to see there's no way finally to get out of that obligation? A story that one shows up obligated to some locale that shows up living in the universe that they have on their hand. What if this is the day to propose possibilities for the emerging struggle of the new American citizen. What would that look like? That is what we want to talk about this afternoon as we begin to look at the proposals to deal with the issues and challenges of our day. It just might be a great day to do it. Why don't we move on?