

Revised Nov. 2022

Transcript of 1959 gubernatorial inaugural speech by Governor William Quinn, delivered on August 29, 1959. Transcribed from the records of Governor Quinn at the Hawai‘i State Archives (see GOV12-92, Speeches–1959) by Perry Arrasmith, 2022, under the auspices of the School of Communication & Information, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.

The 1959 Inaugural Address of William Quinn August 29, 1959

Mr. Chairman, Honored Guests, My Friends:

The inspired pen of Thomas Jefferson wrote that man was endowed by his Creator with unalienable rights. He, and those who signed with him, declared that these rights could not lawfully be denied by governmental power.

The power that stifled the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—the power that obstructed the people's participation in their government, and stilled their voice in legislative assemblies—could not be binding on the people.

American institutions are founded on this declaration of implicit faith in the divine origin of man. These innate rights were set forth in the Bill of Rights.

Much of the strife and tension of our internal history has come from the continuing problem of accommodating these liberties with the security of the nation and the stability of the federal government.

The nation nearly split asunder on whether Negroes should enjoy the same rights. Still, we survived--we survived to develop a body politic where “all men are created equal” and will enjoy equal rights under the law.

True, the tensions continue. The tragic aftermath of the institution of slavery and the civil war will be with us for years to come. The protection of inherent rights—the enforcement of equal treatment—is today a heated and emotional issue in some of our sister states.

The division in the thinking and philosophy of Americans of good faith was a far deeper chasm in 1898 than it is today—in 1898 when our fair islands were annexed to the United States. Few then believed that sovereignty equal to the great states of the federation would be extended to these distant islands.

Revised Nov. 2022

Gradually Hawaii's people awakened to the knowledge that the unalienable rights of free men were not really ours to enjoy. Under the leadership of great men in our history, we began to cry out ever more loudly against our lowly territorial status.

As we gained ground, we found ourselves obstructed by concepts foreign to our thinking—concepts not compatible with the great Jeffersonian declaration. Strong members of Congress and their constituents opposed us because we are what we are, brown, yellow and white.

A great war intervened; a war which found hundreds of Hawaii's people suspect. But the war called forth the best from the sons of Hawaii and forever laid to rest the doubts about the loyalty of our people.

Still the opposition persisted—opposition rooted in historic prejudice against the non-white and found in powerful segments of our land.

Through the dedicated efforts of our delegates to Congress—through increasing familiarity with our people and our customs by an ever-growing number of visitors—through the expansion of interdependent business interests between us and the mainland—and through inspired leadership of friends in the Congress—the whole country began to accept the idea of citizens of Polynesian and Asian ancestry.

Information about our standard of living, our political awareness and maturity, our expanding economy, was widely disseminated by the Statehood Commission, and it helped us overcome the prejudices against us.

Now it is come. The excitement when Congress passed the bill. The thrilling margin of acceptance of the statehood plebiscite. The hard fought and exhausting political campaign. The crowning triumph of a 93% turnout at the polls.

Despite the tensions and frictions of racial problems in our land, we have in a glorious way reaffirmed the principles of the independence declaration.

We Americans have, for the first time in our history, take into our union of sovereign states an island community separated by a wide expanse of water from the rest of the country.

For the first time, our American has enfolded its people of Polynesian and Asian ancestry in its warm embrace. The banner of man's equality in a free world has been lifted high for the free and the enslaved worlds to see.

Revised Nov. 2022

The dramatic impact of a new Senator of Chinese ancestry and a new Representative of Japanese ancestry is still being felt in the nation and the world. The election of a Caucasian and Hawaiian Chinese to lead our state has intensified the impact and brightened the image of democracy.

There is a strength in our state which can imbue our nation with renewed faith in the equality of man. There is a genius in our people which can do more for peace in our time than the billions we spend for defense.

I am proud to have been the last governor of the Territory of Hawaii. I am humbly grateful for having been elected the first governor of our great state.

We of Hawaii, of whatever ancestry, should drink deep of the cultural heritage that is ours from all of the many races that make up our people. True, it is impossible for each of us to have and feel the blood of all our races flowing in our veins.

But our state government should and will draw its character from the crucible of mixed races which is our strength.

Our founding fathers formed a republic as the governmental genus best able to secure the unalienable rights of all. Our state government is similarly patterned. The powers of government centralized in one man at the time of the American revolution have been separated into three parts. The composite man of government can gather his strength from the infused blood and culture of men and women of all our races. This is further testimony to the wisdom of the framers of democracy.

I shall draw upon all races and all talents in forming my administration. We shall be representative in composition; our standards shall be the highest degrees of honesty and integrity.

Ours is not a perfect society. Our poor, our disabled, our aged are living proof of our deficiencies. Our youth need more educational and economic opportunities.

I am determined that we shall raise the standard of living of all of our people on all of our islands.

We have realized our political potential—we have come to maturity as a state. Now we must strive for economic and social self-realization. Now we must develop the undeveloped, and provide the services which will care for our own and encourage the full realization of our resources.

You have elected your governor. You have demonstrated your faith in me. With God's help I shall justify that faith.

Revised Nov. 2022

My faith—and it is strong, deep, and abiding—is in you. I believe that you will be the sparkling beacon of free democracy in the Pacific—that from you the peoples of the free Pacific world will draw new strength and new faith in American ideals. As the preamble to the state constitution says, you have “an understanding heart toward all the peoples of the earth.” It is your obligation to offer this understanding to the peoples of Asia and the Orient. It is your duty to spread this understanding among our own people. I believe you will do it.

I believe, too, that you will rise to the social and economic challenges which we face and meet them with the courage and creative vision which is characteristic of you.

I pledge all my talents and energies to the common good. I ask God that I may have the wisdom to discern the good and the will to do it. I ask you for your encouragement, your help and your prayers.

—