



**Remarks as Prepared for Delivery by Community Relations Service Director  
Ondray Harris at the Department of Justice African American History Month  
Program**

February 18, 2009

Good morning, I want to thank you, Attorney General Holder, for your inspiring words on such an important topic and for sharing your personal history with us. Welcome back to the Department of Justice. I am pleased to provide the closing remarks on behalf of the Community Relations Service (also known as CRS) here today.

As you know, CRS is a unique agency here at the Department charged with the important task of mediating conflicts based on race, color, and national origin all across the U.S. Created in 1964 by Title X of the Civil Rights Act, CRS is tasked with being the “Nation’s Peacemaker.” This congressional mandate is just as important today as it was 45 years ago. When the agency was created, however, “race relations” usually referred to conflicts between “blacks and whites.” However, within its jurisdictional limits, CRS- from the ‘60s to present day- is charged with working with communities of all ethnic and racial backgrounds to restore community stability, when such stability is threatened by violence and civil unrest.

Today, CRS and America faces ever-changing racial demographics and socio-economic shifts that cause tensions in our communities. CRS’s work helps to resolve disputes and prevent violence that often divides neighborhoods, diminishes the effectiveness of schools, and stunts the capacity of communities to reach their full potential.

With the heroic help of other DOJ Bureaus, divisions, and components, like the Civil Rights Division, FBI, U.S. Attorneys, and ATF, CRS has succeeded in breaking down many of the barriers that prevented peace and equality in American communities. Nevertheless, as a country, however, we must recognize the need for continuous progress. We must accept that the principles of progress and equality are not limited to any one race. To state the obvious, “race relations” in the U.S. is no longer exclusively a “black and white” issue.

While it is important for us to reflect on African-American history, we must persist in making strides in promoting peace amongst all racial groups in the U.S. For the American idea to continue to work, the words “I have a dream” must transcend the ownership of a single race.

We must be a nation of inclusion. A nation of tolerance. A nation of compassion. We must endeavor to embrace each other first and foremost as Americans -- steadfastly united in the concepts of the universality of freedom, equality, and equity.

As the Director of CRS, I pledge to continue to work with communities across America in accomplishing their honorable goals – of ending race, color, and national origin conflicts. I ask that each one of you here today assist me in this noble cause. Thank you all for coming today. Thank you.