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Race - Race Initiative: Speeches

Race initiative - speeches

THE HARVARD LAW SCHOOL
CAMBRIDGE MA 02138

2/12/98

To: Sylvia Mathews
Deputy Chief of Staff

From: Christopher Edley, Jr.
Professor of Law

Re: Short List of Speech Topics and Themes for the President

As you requested, here are my recommended priorities for serious speeches by the President or the Vice President, reworked from my *November 30th* matrix.

1. **America Without Hyphens:** Defining One America; how we will recognize racial and ethic justice

Pres. speech @ last meeting

Lay out the vision: the model of national identity that embraces, celebrates, and benefits from our differences; a shared civic ethos framing a culturally rich tapestry. Provide historical background – the legacy we face, both positive and negative. *Including not just slavery, but conquest and colonialism.* Discuss trends in housing hypersegregation; racially identifiable K-12 schools; evidence on social interactions. Does this matter? Ambivalence about school desegregation – about busing as remedy, but also about mixing. Data on interracial dating and marriage. Taboos that die hard. Cite promising practices that attempt to break down the walls; that help us escape the prisons of our experiences. *Other nations and societies have been destroyed by difference, but ours can and must thrive on it.* And with this vision we can mark our progress towards racial justice and One America.

2. **Discrimination and Stereotypes – how real, and how significant?**

Unfinished agenda on fundamental fairness; we must study and face the facts honestly. (Speech can be broader than race.) Widespread deep denial of what the social science evidence shows about continuing stereotypes and discrimination (not just disparities). Critical need for public education. Rich, compelling examples, anecdotes. (Disseminate background documents to provide statistics.) Acknowledge the here-and-now socioeconomic and attitudinal legacy of discrimination; call on Congress to fund the budget request. But discrimination, past or present, is not an explanation for every disadvantage or disparity. The limits of race. Promising practices to transcend prejudice and dismantle stereotypes.

3. Opportunity Agenda

Rebuilding the opportunity engine for One America in the New Economy. Use three issues to interweave themes of community; national identity; education excellence; personal responsibility. *Issue (1): Bilingual education.* Immigration heritage. California ballot initiative. Substantial division of opinion among educators. Useful research evidence not broadly known. Ambivalence within Hispanic and Asian communities. Issue implicates identity and community themes of One America. Tied to K-12 excellence, and to opportunity. Tied to personal and family responsibility. Breaks out of the black-white paradigm. Significant Federal role, through both education and civil rights statutes. *Issue (2): Education of poor children.* As bad as poverty is, *concentrated* poverty produces special difficulties and is a particular affliction for racial minorities. (Cite data.) And nowhere is this more evident and tragic than in many of our high-poverty urban and rural schools. Take on the cultural pathology question; distinguish conservative "pathology" critique from Clintonesque "responsibility" theme. How do we get out of it? Describe several pieces, including high expectations and accountability *for everyone* in the system. *Issue (3): Higher Education.* Opportunity as fundamental right; defend inclusion; cite progress, and cite the risks of backsliding. College opportunity as an increasingly critical gateway. Selective college admissions can't turn back to the 1950s. Affirmative action is one tool: mend it, don't end it. But the heat of the debate has obscured some important issues. What's the mission of higher ed. What is merit? Why is inclusion (properly pursued) an ingredient of excellence, rather than in conflict with excellence? Fix the pipeline too, as mentioned earlier, but meanwhile keep the doors open.

new policy w/ this to break through.

4. Promising Practices and Soldiers for Justice

Building bridges to connect people across lines of color and class is not rocket science; it's harder than rocket science. (1) But we have a lot of **promising practices** for on how to do it. Happening all over the country. Describe some critical do's and don'ts. *Give examples.* **Propose** an on-going award program modeled after Malcolm Baldridge awards and the Kennedy School/Ford Foundation "Innovations in State and Local Government" program. Program to be a public-private venture, jointly funded with Federal funds (perhaps through the DOJ Community Relations Service or the U.S. Civil Rights Commission) and foundation/corporate funds. (2) This is about more than programs, its also about **leaders** and service and civic engagement. We need not only the promising ideas, but also a cadre of Soldiers for Justice (MLK allusion) who will work in their communities and institutions to build One America. *Examples* of individuals. **Propose** recruiting and preparing this core of new leaders for this generation. If each Member of Congress nominates 20 constituents, we'd have 10,000 soldiers who would learn and use the promising practices.

w/ release of promising practices compilation

5. Religion (?)

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Race Initiative - speeches

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary
(Chicago, Illinois)

For Immediate Release July 17, 1997

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
TO THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BLACK JOURNALISTS

Hyatt Regency Hotel
Chicago, Illinois

7:30 P.M. CDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. I must say, when Arthur was speaking, I thought to myself that he sounded like a president. (Laughter.) And I said to myself, if I had a voice like that, I could run for a third term, even though -- (laughter).

I enjoyed meeting with your board members and JoAnne Lyons Wooten, your Executive Director backstage. I met Vanessa Williams, who said, you know, I'm the president-elect; have you got any advice for me on being president? True story. I said, I do. Always act like you know what you're doing. (Laughter.)

I want to say to you, I'm delighted to be joined here tonight by a distinguished group of people from our White House and from the administration, including the Secretary of Labor, Alexis Herman; and the Secretary of Education, Dick Riley; and a number of others from the White House. Where is my White House crew? Would you all stand up -- everybody here from the administration, the Department of Education, Department of Labor. (Applause.)

I don't know whether he is here or not, but I understand Congressman Bobby Rush was here earlier today, and I know there are some other local officials from Chicago who are here. And this is a great place to come. Chicago is such a wonderful city that there was an article this morning in the New York Times bragging on Chicago. (Laughter.) And I saw the Mayor today. He said, I know we have finally arrived. If they're bragging on us in New York, we have made it.

And I congratulate all the people here on the remarkable improvements they've made in this magnificent city in the last few years. I'd also like to say a special word of thanks to Reverend Jesse Jackson. I see him here in the audience and I know he's here. Thank you. (Applause.)

I always kind of hate to speak when Jesse is in the audience. (Laughter.) You know, I mean, every paragraph gets a

grade. (Laughter.) Most of them aren't very good. I can just hear it now -- all the wheels turning.

I want to thank Reverend Jackson for agreeing to co-chair, along with the Secretary of Transportation, Rodney Slater, an American delegation to an economic conference in Zimbabwe, where he'll be going next week. And I know you all wish him well on that. We are doing our best to have a major initiative reaching out to Africa, recognizing that more and more countries in Africa are becoming functioning, successful democracies; that half a dozen countries in Africa have had growth rates of 7 percent or more last year and will equal that again this year; and that this is an enormous opportunity for us not only to promote better lives for the millions and millions of people who live on that continent, but also better opportunities for Americans and better partnerships with Africa in the years ahead.

Well, you heard your President say that I promised to come here in 1992 if I got elected. And I'm trying to keep every promise I made. And I'm sure glad I got a second term so I didn't get embarrassed on this one. (Laughter.)

In the years since I assumed office, I have worked very hard to create an America of opportunity for all, responsibility from all, with a community of all Americans, a country committed to continuing to lead the world toward greater peace and freedom and prosperity. And that begins with giving every person in this country the chance to live up to his or her God-given abilities.

Many of you chose to become journalists because you thought it was the best way to use your God-given talent -- your gift with words, your knack for asking tough questions, which some of us find maddening -- (laughter) -- and for getting the answers, your instincts with a camera or a microphone, your ability to connect with people and get them to understand what it is you're trying to get across. And you did not just to make a living, but to make a difference. I thank you for that. And I think that all of us want that opportunity for everyone in this country.

Last month in San Diego, I called upon Americans to begin a dialogue, a discussion over the next year and perhaps beyond, to deal with what I think is the greatest challenge we'll face in the 21st century, which is whether we really can become one America as we become more diverse; whether as we move into a truly global society, we can be the world's first truly great multiracial, multiethnic, multireligious democracy. I asked the American people to undertake a serious discussion of the lingering problems and the limitless possibilities that attend our diversity.

I came here tonight to talk a little more about this initiative, to ask each of you to examine what role you can play in it and the vital contributions as journalists and as African Americans you might make in leading your news rooms, your communities, and our nation in the right kind of dialogue.

Five years ago, I talked about how we could prepare

our people to go into the 21st century, and we've made a lot of strides since then. Our economy is the healthiest in a generation and once again the strongest in the world. Our social problems are finally bending to our efforts. But at this time of great prosperity, we know we still have a lot of great challenges in order to live up to our ideals, in order to live up to what we say America should mean.

And it seems to me that at this time when there is more cause for hope than fear, when we are not driven by some emergency or some imminent cataclysm in our society, we really have not only an opportunity, but an obligation to address and to better resolve the vexing, perplexing, often painful issues surrounding our racial history and our future.

We really will, whether we're prepared for it or not, become a multiracial democracy in the next century. Today, of our 50 states, only the state of Hawaii has no majority race. But within three to five years, our largest state, California, where 13 percent of us live, will have no majority race. Five of our school districts already draw students from over 100 different racial and ethnic groups, including the school district in the city of Chicago. But within a matter of a couple of years, over 12 school districts will have students from over 100 different racial and ethnic groups.

When I was a boy, I knew that a lot of people went from my native state in Arkansas to Detroit to make a living because they couldn't make a living on the farm anymore. Many of them were African Americans, and they joined the white ethnics, many of whom were from Central and Eastern Europe and from Ireland in the Detroit area, working in the car plants, getting the good middle class jobs, being able to educate their children, looking forward to a retirement. Some of them actually are coming back home now and buying land. And Nicholas Lehman (phonetic) traced that movement in a great book he wrote not so long ago.

But now Detroit is not just a place of white ethnics and African Americans. In Wayne County, there are over 145 different racial and ethnic groups represented today. So the paradigm is shifting. And so, as part of our engagement in this national dialogue, we have to both deal with our old, unfinished business, and then imagine what we are going to be like in 30 years and whether we can actually become one America when we're more different. Is there a way not only to respect our diversity, but even to celebrate it and still be one America? Is there a way to use this to help us economically and to spread opportunity here?

Why are there so many people in the Congress in both parties excited about this Africa initiative? Because we have so many African Americans -- even people who were never concerned about it before understand this is a great economic opportunity for America. Why do we have a unique opportunity to build a partnership with Brazil and Argentina and Chile and all the countries in Latin America? Because we have people from all those countries here in our country. Why do we have the opportunity to avoid having Asia grow, but grow in a more closed and isolated way, running the risk of great new problems 30, 40,

50 years from now? Because we have so many Asian Americans who are making a home here in America with ties back home to their native lands and cultures. We are blessed if we can make this work.

We also may have a chance to make peace in other parts of the world if we can make peace within our borders with ourselves. But let's not kid ourselves -- the differences between people are so deep and so ingrained, it's so easy to scratch the surface and have something bad go wrong, and we see that in countries less privileged than ourselves when things go terribly wrong -- whether it's between the Hutus and the Tutsis in Rwanda and Burundi; or the Catholics and the Protestants in the home of my ancestors, Ireland; or the Croats, the Serbs, and the Muslims who are, interestingly enough, biologically indistinguishable, in Bosnia; or the continuing travails of the Jews and the Arabs in the Middle East.

If you look through all of human history, societies have very often been defined by their ability to pit themselves as coherent units against those who were different from themselves. Long ago in prehistory, it probably made a lot of sense for people that were in one tribe to look at people in another tribe as enemies, because there was a limited amount of food to eat or opportunities for shelter, because people did not know how to communicate with each other so they had to say, people that look like me are my friends, people that don't look like me are my enemies.

But why, on the verge of the 21st century, are we still seeing people behave like that all over the world? And why here even in America do we find ourselves, all of us at some time, gripped by stereotypes about people who don't look like we do?

So we shouldn't kid ourselves. This is not going to be an easy task. But there is hardly anything more important because we know we have a great economy; we know we have a strong military; we know we have a unique position in the world today with the fall of communism virtually everywhere and the rise of market economies and the success that we've offered. But we know we also have these lingering inequalities and problems in America. And if we can overcome them and learn to really live together and celebrate, not just tolerate but celebrate our differences and still say, in spite of all those differences, the most important thing about me is that I am an American, that there is no stopping what we can do and what our children can become.

This week in Washington, John Hope Franklin convened the first meeting of the advisory board I appointed on racial reconciliation. The executive director of that board, Judy Winston, who has been our Acting Under Secretary of Education, is also here with me tonight. I am very proud that she has agreed to do that and very excited about what has happened. The first meeting was full of lively debate and honest disagreement. I like that. We should discover quickly that people who are honestly committed to advancing this dialogue will have honest differences and they ought to be aired.

Earlier today, as your President said, at the NAACP Convention in Pittsburgh, I reiterated my long-held belief that we will never get to our one America in the 21st century unless we have both equality and excellence in educational opportunity. We have to give every American access to the world's best schools, best teachers, best education. And that means we have to have high standards, high expectations and high levels of accountability from all of us who were involved in it.

But I want to say to you, we know our children can learn. For years and years, ever since 1984, when the Nation at Risk -- 1983 -- when the Nation At Risk report was issued, people said, well, you can't expect American education to compete favorably with education in other countries because we have a more diverse student body and because we have so many more poor children and so many immigrants and because, because, because.

This year, on the International Math and Science Tests given to 4th and 8th graders, for the first time since we began a national effort to improve our schools over a decade ago, our 4th graders -- not all of them, but a representative sample, representative of race, region, income -- scored way above the national average in math and science -- disproving the notion that we cannot achieve international excellence in education even for our poorest children. It is simply not true.

This year, again, our 8th graders scored below the international average, emphasizing the dimensions of the challenge, because when the kids who carry all these other burdens to school every day -- the burden of poverty, the burden of crime and drugs in their neighborhoods, the burden of unmet medical needs, often the burden of problems at home -- when they hit adolescence and when they are pressured and tempted to get involved in other things, it gets to be a lot tougher. So we haven't done everything we need to do. But the evidence is here now; it is no longer subject to debate that we can't compete. And that's good, because we need to. And because our children, however poor they are, are entitled to just as much educational opportunity as anybody else.

Now, I believe that we made a big mistake in the United States not adopting national standards long before this. And I believe our poorest children and our minority children would be doing even better in school had we adopted national standards a long time ago and held their schools to some measure of accountability. It is not their fault, it is the rest of our faults that we are not doing it. (Applause.)

So when I say by 1999 we ought to test all our 4th graders and all our 8th graders -- the 4th graders in reading, the 8th graders in math -- it's not because I want the individual kids to get a grade, it's because everybody ought to make that grade. If you have a standard, everyone ought to clear the bar. And if they're not, there is something wrong with the educational system that ought to be fixed. And you can't know it unless you understand what the standard is and hold people to some accountability. But don't let anybody tell you that these kids can't do it. That is just flat wrong. They can do it. (Applause.)

Today I did announce one new initiative that I think is very important, and that is a $350 million multiyear scholarship program modeled on the National Medical Service Corps. You know, a lot of us come from places that have a lot of poor rural areas that are medically under-served. We got doctors into those areas, into the Mississippi Delta, because we said, hey, if you'll go to medical, we'll help you go to medical school, but you've got to go out to a poor under-served area and be a doctor to people who need you. Then later you can go make all the money you want somewhere else. But if we help you go to medical school, will you go out here and help people where they don't have doctors? And the National Health Service Corps has done a world of good.

So what I propose today, and what we're going to send up to Capitol Hill with the Reauthorization of Higher Education Act is a series of scholarships that will go to people who say, I will teach in a poor area for three years if you will help me get an education. (Applause.)

This is the first specific policy to come out in connection with our year-long racial reconciliation initiative. There will be more policies. But it's not just a matter of public policy. There will also be local actions, private actions which will have to be taken. And we also need the dialogue, the discussion. It is about the mind and the heart. And, therefore, I say again, your voices and your observations are going to be very valuable.

In the communities where we have a constructive, ongoing dialogue, where people not only talk together but work together across racial lines, there are already stunning stories that stir the heart and give us hope for the future. There is nothing people can't do. Most people are basically good. Their leaders have to give them a framework in which the best can come out and the worst can be repressed. And that's what we have to do here. We've got to learn how to deal with a fundamentally new and different situation as well as deal with a lot of old, unresolved problems in our past that dog us in the present.

As journalists, you have experienced firsthand both the progress and the continuing challenge of race in our country. Some of you in this audience are pioneers in your field, perhaps the first people of color ever to claim a desk, a phone, a typewriter in the news rooms of our big-city papers and stations. Some of you, when you were beginning your careers, knew that it was hard enough to find just one editor who would consider your work, let alone the hundreds of newspaper and broadcasting executives who this week have descended on this job fair that you sponsored to recruit the young people who are here today.

They've come here not just because they recognize the value of a diverse and racially representative staff, but also because they know from experience that they'll find some of the best talent in American journalism here at this convention. (Applause.)

But our news rooms are like all of our other working environments -- they've come a long way, they've still got a ways to go. (Applause.) Just as in other work places in America,

minority representation on many staffs and mast heads is not what it ought to be. Wide gaps continue to exist in the way whites and minorities perceive their workplaces and in the way they perceive each other. We have to bridge this gap everywhere in America.

But it is especially important in the press because you are the voice and, in some ways, the mirror of America through which we see ourselves and one another. I encourage you to continue to reach out to your colleagues; to listen to each other; to understand where we're all coming from; to lead your organizations in the writing, the editing, the broadcasting fare and the thought-provoking stories about the world we live in and the one we can live in. We have a lot to do to build that one America for the 21st century, but I believe we're up to the challenge, and I know that you are up to the challenge.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. FENNELL: Thank you very much, Mr. President. As is customary in these forums here at our national convention, at this time, we bring forth our questioners. We are journalists, after all, and you knew this was coming. (Laughter.)

We have selected four journalists who will ask the questions of the day. Eric Thomas, reporter and anchor at KGO-TV in San Francisco; Chinta Strausberg, reporter of the Chicago Defender; Cheryl Smith, a reporter at KKDA-Radio, Grand Prairie, Texas --

THE PRESIDENT: I know where that is.

MR. FENNELL: Yes. And Brent Jones, our student representative, a junior at the University of Florida in Gainesville. (Applause.)

To the questioners.

Q Chinta Strausberg, the Chicago Defender newspaper. Mr. President, do you support an $8 billion superhighway, NAFTA superhighway at a time when Congress has reduced funding for mass transit in Chicago as well? And if that superhighway is built, sir, will black contractors be a major part of it as a down payment on reparations?

THE PRESIDENT: What superhighway? Say it again? Did I -- what's this project?

Q It's a proposed congressional plan -- $8 billion NAFTA superhighway that would connect the United States with Canada and Mexico, and it is being discussed in Congress.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't know that I'm familiar enough with the project. I do believe we need to continue to improve our infrastructure. Secretary Slater and I have argued that we should not under-fund mass transit and urban transportation. And indeed, in the transportation bill I sent to Congress, we asked for several hundred million dollars more directly targeted to help people on welfare who are required to

go to work, get to where the jobs are if their jobs aren't within walking distance. Only about 10 percent of the people on public assistance own their own cars. And we believe we need more investment in mass transit in the cities. So -- and I don't think it should be an either-or situation.

And in terms of contracting, I support affirmative action programs generally in employment, in education, and in economic development. And I've done everything I could to fix what were the generally recognized shortcomings of some of the programs that graduate out the firms that may not need it any more, but to continue it where I think it is appropriate. So I continue to support that.

And I think it is a mistake for us not to have initiatives to help create minority-owned businesses. I think we should -- as a matter of fact, let me just back up and say, when I was in San Francisco at the Mayors Conference not very long ago, I said to them that I thought we ought to develop a private-sector, job-related model for high unemployment areas in our cities and -- because there was no way the government social services could ever create enough economic opportunity for people. And I thought, if we couldn't do it when the national unemployment rate was the lowest in 23 years, when could we do it?

So I think we need to do more to help people organize and start their own businesses, to help build economic clusters of activity, to help give people models as well as opportunities to work, to see that we can do this. I don't think we're doing nearly enough in this area, and I think we have a new opportunity to do it because the unemployment rate is low in the nation.

As I've heard Reverend Jackson say for 20 years, the biggest undeveloped market in America are the poor unemployed and under-employed people in our inner cities and our rural areas. Now is the time we should be creating more businesses there, not having fewer businesses. That's what I believe. (Applause.)

Q Mr. President, your scholarship proposal notwithstanding, there is still an assault on affirmative action in this country. In my home state of California in the wake of Proposition 209 and last year's vote by the University of California Board of Regents, minority applications and enrollment in the UC system this year are down. There will be not one new black student enrolled at the prestigious Bolt Hall School of Law at the University of California this fall. What specific programs, scholarship program notwithstanding, do you propose to stem this tide and make sure that there is diversity in higher education in this country? (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: First of all, I think we need to make sure that we continue to use federal law to the maximum extent we can to promote an integrated educational environment -- (applause) -- so that we have to review, whether in the Education Department, in the Justice Department, whether there are any further actions we can take legally to promote an integrated educational environment in higher education in the states where

these actions have been taken.

Secondly, I think we need to look at whether there is some way by indirection to achieve the same result. I know that the legislature in Texas, in an attempt to overcome the impact of the Hopwood decision in Texas, just passed what they call the "Ten Percent Solution," which would be to guarantee admissions to any Texas public institution of higher education to the top 10 percent of the graduating class of any high school in Texas. And because of the way the African Americans and Hispanics living patterns are in Texas, that may solve the problem. Whether that would work in California, I don't know. I haven't studied the way the school districts are organized enough. But I think we have to come up with some new and fairly innovative ways to do that.

Thirdly, I think, on the professional schools, my own view -- I'm a little stumped here. We have to really -- we're going to have to reexamine what we can do. I don't know why the people who promoted this in California think it's a good thing to have a segregated set of professional schools. It would seem to me that, since these professionals are going to be operating in the most ethnically-diverse state in the country, they would want them to be educated in an environment like they're going to operate. I don't understand that. (Applause.)

But there may be some ways to get around it, and we're looking at it and working on it. But I think it's going to be easier to stop it from happening at the undergraduate level than at the professional school level. And we're going to have to really think about whether there is some way around it, whether it would be some sort of economic designation or something else. But we're working on that.

And finally, let me say, I think we need to continue to provide more resources, because one of the real problems we have is, even in the last five years, when we've had economic recovery, the college enrollment rates of minorities in America have not gone up in an appropriate way. And in this budget that I'm trying to get passed through Congress, we've got the biggest increase in education funding in 32 years, the biggest increase in Pell Grant scholarships in 20 years, another huge increase in work-study funds, and the tax proposal, as we structured them, would, in effect, guarantee two years of college to virtually everyone in America and help people with two more years of college.

We've got a huge dropout problem in higher education among minorities that I think is having an impact on then what happens in the graduate schools and in the professional schools. I don't think there is a simple answer. And I think, frankly, the way 209 is worded, it's a bigger problem even than the Hopwood case in Texas. But I can tell you we're working on it: first, is there anything the Justice Department or the Civil Rights Office of the Education Department can do? We're examining that. Second, is there a specific solution like the Texas "Ten Percent Solution" that would overcome it at least in a specific state. Third, come up with some more funds and some more specific scholarship programs to try to overcome it.

It's a great concern to me, and I think it is moving the country in exactly the wrong direction. And I might say, if you look at the performance of affirmative action students, it doesn't justify the action that was taken. That's another point that ought to be made.

So the one thing that I believe is, I believe that the rather shocking consequences in the professional schools in both Texas and California will have a deterrent impact on other actions like that in other states. And I believe you will see more efforts now to avoid this. I think a lot of people who even voted for 209 have been pretty shocked at what happened and I don't believe the people of California wanted that to occur. And I think the rhetoric sounded better than the reality to a lot of voters.

So I can tell you that, while I'm very concerned about it, I think if we all work on it, we can reverse it in a matter of a couple of years. And we just have to hope we don't lose too many people who would otherwise have had good opportunities because of it. But it is an urgent matter of concern to me. (Applause.)

Q Good afternoon, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Good afternoon.

Q My question also has to do with education for more at a high school and middle school level. The dropout rate, crime, and drugs are more prevalent in inner city schools than in suburban schools, consequently leading to a lower quality education in many inner city schools. What will your administration do through government-aided programs or initiatives to combat these problems and ensure everyone in America is receiving a comparable education? (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: I want to answer your question, but first I'd like to start with a compliment to the African American community. Last year, the high school graduation rate nationally among African Americans was well above 80 percent and almost at the level -- almost equal to the level for white Americans. And it's a little known and appreciated fact. And it's a great tribute, since, as you pointed out, people who are in inner city schools, particularly where there's a lot of violence, a lot of drugs, a lot of problems, have to struggle harder to stay and get through and come out -- it's a stunning achievement that the differential in graduation rate is now only about 4 percent. That's a stunning thing. That's very, very good. (Applause.)

Now, I'll tell you what we're trying to do. We're trying to do several things. We're trying, first of all, to help these schools work better with helping the teachers and the principals to operate drug-free and weapon-free schools; with supporting juvenile justice systems like the one in Boston where, I might add, not a single child has been killed by a handgun in nearly two years in Boston, Massachusetts. (Applause.)

So we've got to create a safe and drug-free environment. Then we're trying to support more parents groups in establishing their own schools. For example, I met with a number

of Hispanic leaders recently -- a lot of you are familiar with the group, La Raza. They are operating, La Raza is operating 15 charter schools, where the parents have been permitted to work with teachers to establish their own schools within the public school system, and set up the rules which govern them and make sure that they're good for the kids.

There are a number -- there's no magic bullet here, but what we're trying to do is to take the lessons from every public school that is working in a difficult environment where there's a low dropout rate and a high performance rate, and say, they all have five or six common elements; and then we're trying to provide the funds and the support to people all over America to replicate that.

I want to take my hat off to the people of Chicago here who have had a very difficult situation in their schools, and they have been turning it around and raising student performance quite markedly in the last couple of years with the involvement -- aggressive involvement of parents and students. There's a student who sits on the local board governing the schools here now. And I think that's -- I guess the last thing I'd say is, I would favor having communities have someone like you one their governing boards because I think if they'd listen more to the young people about what it would take to clean up and fix up the schools, I think we'd be ahead. (Applause.)

Let me just make two other comments. I think there are some places where money will make a difference. I mentioned one in trying to get good teachers there. We're going to have to replace 2 million teachers within the next decade -- 2 million with retirements and more kids coming to school.

Another is old school buildings. I was in Philadelphia the other day. The average age of a school building in Philadelphia is 65 years of age. The school buildings in Philadelphia should be drawing Social Security. That's how old they are. (Laughter.) Now, a lot of those old buildings are very well-built and can last for another 100 years, but they have to be maintained. We have school buildings in Washington where they're open -- where there are three stories in the school building, and one whole floor has to be shut down because it's not safe for the kids to be there. So we've got to be careful about that. We need and initiative to help repair the school buildings.

And finally, let me say that I think technology offers young, lower-income kids an enormous opportunity. If we can hook up every classroom in America to the Internet by the year 2000 -- (applause) -- get the computers in there -- a lot of you do things with computers that people who are in your line of work couldn't even imagine five years ago. When I go on a trip now on Air Force, I go back and watch the photographers send their pictures over the computer back to news room.

If we can hook up every classroom to the Internet, have adequate computers, adequate educational software, properly-trained teachers, and then involve the parents in the use of this to keep up with the school work and all that and get to the point where the personal computer is almost as likely to

be in a home -- even a below-income person has a telephone -- we can keep working in that direction.

I think technology will give young Americans the chance, for the first time in history, whether they come from a poor, a middle class or a wealthy school district, the first time ever to all have access to the same information, at the same level of quality, at the same time. That has never happened in the history of the country.

So if we do it right and the teachers are trained to help the young people use it, it will revolutionize equality of educational opportunity at the same time it raises excellence in education. So those are basically some of my thoughts about this.

And thank you for asking and for caring about the people that are coming along behind you. (Applause.)

Q Mr. President, Cheryl Smith, KKDA-Radio, Dallas, Texas. Every four years, African Americans cast their votes for a presidential candidate who will hopefully address some of the issues affecting black Americans. Do you feel African Americans should be pleased with your efforts thus far? And what can we expect from you in the future, especially in the area of judiciary appointments? (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Well, the short answer is, yes. (Laughter.) I do. I mean, if you look at what's happened to African American unemployment, African American homeownership; if you look at the fight that I've waged on affirmative action and what I've tried to do for access to education, as well as quality of education; if you look at my record on appointments in the administration, in the judiciary, which far outstrips any of my predecessors of either party -- (applause) -- if you look at the larger effort that I've made to try to get Americans to come together and bridge the racial divide and to make people understand that we are each other's best assets, I would say that the answer to your first question is, yes.

Now, what else do we still have to do? First thing that I think is terribly important is, we have to, in addition to what I've talked about -- I've already talked about education and the racial initiative, so we'll put those to the side, I've already talked about them -- I think we have got to recognize that there is a legacy here which has not been fully overcome, and that the United States is consigning itself to substandard performance as a nation if we continue to allow huge pockets of people to be under-employed or unemployed in our inner city neighborhoods and in our poor rural areas, who are disproportionately minority.

At a time when we have a 5 percent unemployment rate, we ought to be able to seriously address what it would take to put people to work and to give people education and to create business opportunities.

But let me just give you two examples. We've had a Community Reinvestment Act requiring banks to make loans in traditionally under-served areas for 20 years. We decided to

enforce it. Seventy percent of all the loans made under the Community Reinvestment Act have been made in the four and a half years since this administration has been in office. (Applause.) In the 20 years -- 70 percent of all the loans. That's the good news. The bad news is, not enough money has been loaned.

We set up these community development banks modeled on the South Shore Bank here in Chicago. A lot of you are familiar with it if you've been around here. In our new budget agreement, we have enough funds to more than double that. We set up the empowerment zones and the enterprise communities. In our new budget act, we have enough funds to more than double that. We have a housing strategy that we believe can attract middle class people as well as low income people to have housing together in the inner cities so that we can also attract a business base here.

We know a lot more than we used to do about what it would take to have a thriving and working private sector in our urban areas. I have not done that yet. And that's what you ought to expect me to be working on.

And then there are a lot of unmet social problems that we need to deal with. It's still -- you know, I got my head handed to me, I guess, in the '94 elections because I had this crazy idea that America ought not to be the only country in the world where working families and their children didn't have health care. It seemed to be a heretical idea, but I still believe that and I'm not sorry I tried. (Applause.) So now we're trying to give our children health coverage. And I think you ought to expect all the children in the African American community to be able to go to a doctor when they need it.

I think you ought to expect us to continue our assault on HIV and AIDS. And until we find the cure, I think you ought to expect us to stay at the task. (Applause.) I think you ought to expect us to continue to make headway on other medical problems which have a disproportionate impact in your community.

These are some of the things that I think that you should expect of us -- more opportunity, tackling more of the problems, bringing us together.

I have tried to be faithful to the support I have received, not only because it was the support I have received, but because I believed it was the right thing to do. And I believe that when our eight years is over, you'll be able to look back on it and see not only a lot of efforts made, but a lot of results obtained.

Thank you very much.

END 7:00 P.M. CDT

Race Initiative - speeches

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary
(Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania)

For Immediate Release July 17, 1997

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
TO THE NAACP NATIONAL CONVENTION

David Lawrence Convention Center
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

11:45 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. First, let me thank all of you for that warm welcome and for what you do. I thank Myrlie Evers Williams for the wonderful comments she made and for the distinguished service she has performed as your chair. (Applause.) And I thank your President of the United NAACP. (Applause.) That was pretty good, Madam Mistress of Ceremonies, you did a good job. (Laughter.)

Let me say that when Kweisi called me and told me he was going to leave the Congress to because President of the NAACP, I had very mixed feelings. I felt a little bereft. I don't like it when a great member of Congress leaves. But I thought it was higher calling and my instinct it was -- it would be a good thing for him and for our country. And I think it has certainly proved to be. And I thank him for that. (Applause.)

Of the many things that I have to be grateful for, I thank you for the extraordinary effort you've made to bring young people into the NAACP. I think that is a great, great thing. (Applause.)

I'm glad to be joined here by the Mayor of Pittsburgh, my good friend, Tom Murphy. And I'm glad to see all the board members. I have many friends on this board. Bishop Graves is my bishop. And if they let me go home, I'll be in his jurisdiction again. (Applause.) And I know that -- I've been looking for them out of my eye, but I know there must be a delegation from Arkansas here -- Dale Charles and the others. Where are you? Where are my people from home there? Thank you very much. (Applause.)

I want to thank you for honoring a number of the people that you have honored here. And I'm especially grateful for your giving meritory service awards to two members of my Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Fogelman and Admiral Kramek -- the Commandant of the Coast Guard. Thank you for that. (Applause.)

I know you have undergone some losses. And our

grief goes out to you in the untimely death of the President of the Maryland Chapter, Mr. Norment, who was killed shortly before this convention. I thank you for honoring Dr. Betty Shabazz, a wonderful, remarkable woman. And I thank you for the resolution you passed just a few moments ago for Aaron Henry, who was a long-time personal friend of mine and a very great man. (Applause.)

I am joined today by a distinguished array of people from the administration -- the Secretary of Education, Dick Riley; the Secretary of Labor, Alexis Herman -- (applause). I know you know them. The Chairman of our Advisory Board on Race Relations and our Executive Director, Dr. John Hope Franklin and Judy Winston -- they're here. (Applause.)

And there are a number of other people from the White House here. I'd just like to ask all the people from the administration who are here to stand up and be recognized, including -- I see Chris Edley, who is helping us at the Advisory Board who is now a professor at Harvard. He doesn't fool with us mere mortals anymore. And Terry Edmonds, my speechwriter; Maria Echaveste; Minyon Moore, Ben Johnson, Sylvia Matthews -- there are a lot of people here from the administration. You all stand up and be recognized here. Look at all of them. (Applause.)

Anything good I do, they had a hand in; the mistakes are mine. (Laughter.)

I am honored to be here to add my voice to yours in discussing what we have to do to prepare our people for this new century. Since 1993 I have worked hard to build one America on a simple formula: opportunity for all, responsibility from all, a community of all Americans prepared to continue to lead the world toward peace and freedom and prosperity. Much has been done, but much remains to be done.

I believe, especially as it relates to bringing us together, the keys are education, economic empowerment, and racial reconciliation. It is fitting that the NAACP has made education the focus of this conference because you have always emphasized the importance of education.

That was true in 1909 when you issued a mighty call for America to do its -- and I quote -- "elementary duty" in preparing African Americans through education for the best exercise of citizenship. It was true in 1954 when Thurgood Marshall and the Legal Defense Fund led the successful fight to end segregation in the schools. It is true today when we know that more than ever, knowledge is power, and the struggle in education today involves two things that are inextricably bound -- a fight for equal opportunity and a fight for educational excellence. (Applause.)

Each generation must embrace its won battle in the ongoing struggle for equal rights. A generation ago, it was simply a fight to open the schoolhouse door that united Americans of every race and background. Today, though much segregation remains, the schoolhouse doors are open. Yet behind too many doors too little learning is taking place. (Applause.)

Therefore, the struggle for excellence for all must be our great mission. We must demand high standards of every student; our schools and teachers must meet world-class standards. But we must demand that every child be given the opportunity to meet those standards. Every child must have a chance to succeed in this new economy. We must not replace the tyranny of segregation with the tyranny of low expectations. (Applause.)

We know that in this new world we're moving into so quickly, new technologies and the globalization of information and communications, and the economy, will require of all us new skills. We know already from what has been happening in the last 20 years that those that have the skills to succeed will do so in this new economy. They will thrive. And those who lack the skills will not.

We know that we can never make real our ideal of one America unless every American of every background has access to the world's best schools, the world's best teachers, the world's best education. This means first, not only high standards, but high expectations and high levels of accountability of students and parents, schools and teachers and communities.

Second, we know that we can't have high standards and high expectations unless all our students have the tools they must have to meet the standards and master the basics. If we do this, all our children, no matter where they live, can achieve.

When I came to Washington, the old Title I program called for watered-down curricula and watered-down standards and tests. We ended that, thanks to Secretary Riley. Now the new Title I says, we're going to have the same high standards for all of our children. We're not going to sell any of them short just because they're poor. (Applause.)

In the State of the Union address, I called for national standards for the basics -- not federal government standards, but national standards -- of what every child must know to do well in the world of the 21st century beginning with reading and math. English is, after all, the same in the Bronx as it is in Appalachia. Mathematics is the same in Portland, Oregon and Tampa, Florida.

And by 1999, I believe strongly that we should give every 4th grader an examination in reading to see whether these standards are being met, and every 8th grader and examination in math just to make sure the standards are being met. This is not a normal exam that you grade on the bell curve; this is an exam where you say, here's what everybody ought to know to do well in the world and to be able to go on in school. Everyone should be able to get over this bar. And these exams should never be used to hold children back, but to lift them up. And if there are not meeting the standards, the school must change until they can. (Applause.)

We don't do anyone any favors by not holding them to high standards. Often when we see people in difficult circumstances, we feel compassion for them, and we should. But when this compassion leads to expecting less of their children,

that is a mistake, for it sells their future down the drain. I am tired of being told that children cannot succeed because of the difficulties of their circumstances. All we do is consign them to staying in the same circumstances. It is wrong. (Applause.)

We now have fresh evidence, by the way, that our children can succeed. For years and years and years, we have been told that Americans always lagged behind the rest of the world on any test that fairly measures our competence and knowledge and achievement of our children against children in other countries. And for many years it was true, not the least because we were unwilling to hold ourselves to high standards. Hiding behind the cherished value of local control of our schools, which I support, we pretended that there were no national standards. But for more than a decade now, people of goodwill all over this country in all kinds of circumstances have been working to improve our schools.

This year, on the international math and science tests, given to 4th- and 8th-graders, for the very first time our 4th graders scored well above the international average, near the top. And it was a representative sample by race, by region, and income. The children can learn. The children can learn. (Applause.)

Now, that's the good news. The challenging news is that the 8th graders still scored below the international average. And you know why, don't you? Because when these children start to reach adolescence, then all the problems of their circumstances, plus what goes on in everybody's life when they reach adolescence, reach a collision point. And we have not yet mastered how to take children in the most difficult circumstances through adolescence and keep them learning and keep their schools working.

But you look at those 4th grade test scores. Don't tell me that children can't learn because they are children of color, they are children from poor neighborhoods, they are children with only the mother at home taking care of them. We can do this. But we have to believe we can do it, and, more importantly, we have to believe they can do it. (Applause.) And then we have to understand that it is our responsibility -- not theirs, ours -- to make sure they do it. (Applause.)

So I ask you to work with us. No one has all the answers. The NAACP has always had high expectations for America. When we were living through the worst of the civil rights movement, you had high expectations for white people. You knew we could do better. (Laughter and applause.) You knew we could do better. This is a high expectations organization.

You had high expectations for yourselves, which is why you have revived the NAACP and you're riding higher than ever. (Applause.) Do you seriously believe we would be where we are today, with this chair and this president and this board and this crowd and all these young people here, if you had had no expectations, no dream, no discipline, no drive? Of course not. You got here because you worked for it, because you had a dream, and because you expected things of yourselves. (Applause.)

It is no different in this education business. We know it's going to be hard, and we know we have to do it together. But it is a solemn duty we owe to our young people. The children will follow the lead of their parents and of the people in the community who may not be their parents but do have a responsibility for them. My wife was right about that -- it does take a village to raise a child. (Applause.)

We do have to do more to give all our students the tools they need. We know, for example, that many of our urban schools and our rural schools in really poor areas are succeeding. We know that every city can actually point to some schools where committed teachers and other staff members, working with parents, manage to inspire and equip students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed.

For example, Hansberry Elementary School in the Bronx has made a remarkable turnaround. It was once shut down by the Board of Education, it was doing such a poor job. But when it reopened with a renewed commitment to excellence, the percentage of students passing the New York State Math Skills Test went from 47 to 82 percent. The New Visions Charter School in Minneapolis is known as the reading school. This public school has helped students who formerly struggled to make 12 to 18 months of progress in reading each year, and is training teacher now in other Minnesota schools to do the same thing.

These schools are just two of hundreds of examples that show us that, given proper support, all our children can learn despite the extra hardships they carry with them to school. We have to answer the question, if it can happen somewhere, why isn't it happening everywhere? And we have to provide the answer. (Applause.)

Because we know that far too many schools are not servicing our children well and too many children from our inner cities and poor rural areas are graduating without the skills they need. And I say again, that is not their failure; that is our failure. Along with demanding more of our students, we must hold schools and teachers and parents and communities to higher standards. We must have a bold and a national effort to improve schools that serve predominantly minority, inner city and rural areas.

First, we have to make sure these kids do have the help they need to meet the standards. And that means, in the beginning, that every parent and every community leader must join the teachers. That's why we're mobilizing a million volunteer tutors to make sure that by the beginning of the next century, every 8-year-old, wherever he or she lives and whatever their native language may be, will be able to read independently by the 3rd grade. If you can't read, you can't learn the rest of what you need to know. (Applause.)

The second thing we have to do is make sure that every school has good, well-qualified, well-trained teachers. (Applause.) Our nation faces a very significant teacher recruitment challenge. Over the next decade, we will need to hire -- listen to this -- over 2 million teachers because of

increasing teacher retirements and an enrollment boom that will bring more students than ever into our classrooms -- a total of 54 million students by the year 2006. Just over the next five years, we must hire 350,000 teachers in high-poverty urban and rural schools.

Now, for years, the government worked to reduce the shortage of doctors in many urban and under-served rural areas by offering scholarships to students who agreed to work in those communities. When I was Governor of Arkansas, I don't know how many rural communities we had that were literally saved by physicians who were serving there because they had their way to medical school paid in return for their commitment to go out to poor areas and tend to people who would never have had a doctor otherwise.

Today, I am announcing a similar initiative, to help recruit and prepare teachers to serve in urban and rural communities. (Applause.) Next month, as part of the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, I will forward to the Congress a proposal for a new national effort to attract quality teachers to high-poverty communities by offering scholarships for those will commit to teach in those communities for at least three years. (Applause.)

We will have a special emphasis on recruiting minorities into teaching because while a third of our students our minority, only 13 percent of their teachers are. We need a diverse and an excellent teaching force. (Applause.)

Our proposal also includes funds to strengthen teacher preparation programs so that those who go into teacher are better prepared to teach their students. We know students in distressed areas, who need the best teachers, often have teachers who have had the least preparation. For example, right now, 71 percent of students taking physical science courses like chemistry and physics, and 33 percent of English students in high-poverty schools take classes with teachers who do not even have a college minor in their field.

So our proposal will focus not only on training future teachers well, it will also improve the quality of teaching in those schools now, through partnerships between the schools and the teacher training institutions.

And finally, there is a national board for certifying professional teachers as master teachers. In our budget -- there are only a few hundred of these teachers now, and they are infectious in the enthusiasm and skills they breed in the schools where they teach. Many states are offering them higher salaries. Our budget contains enough money to have 100,000 of these master teachers so that every single school in America will have one, including every poor school in America. We cannot stop until we have given the best teachers the opportunity to teach the children who need them the most. (Applause.)

Third, let me say I believe that charter schools can be an important tool for improving education, especially for children having difficulties in traditional public schools.

Charter schools give parents and local communities the flexibility to create performance-based schools -- open to everyone, and they work. Our budget has enough funds to create 3,000 of these schools by the year 2001. They're open to all; they offer excellence and accountability; they can infect the atmosphere of an entire school district and help other public schools to perform better, by offering parents and community residents the chance to take matters into their own hands and to be held accountable for the results.

I am pleased that Rosa Parks, who taught us a lot about dignity and equality, is now working to open a charter school in Detroit. And I urge you to consider doing so in your communities. If you believe it will help the Department of Education will help you. (Applause.)

Fourth, I think we have to commit to rebuilding rundown schools. Many of them are located in our central cities. (Applause.) When I was in Philadelphia the other day, at a beautiful old school building, the superintendent of schools told me that the average age -- the average age -- of the physical facilities in the Philadelphia school system was 65 years. Now, a lot of these old buildings were very well built and will stand up a long time, but they have to be rehabilitated if they're going to be serviceable.

I have been to school districts -- there are school buildings in Washington, D.C. where two floors are open and a whole floor has to be closed because they are literally not inhabitable. This is wrong. Forty percent of the school buildings need major repair or replacement today. My tax plan includes tax credits to finance the rehabilitation and construction of schools in distressed neighborhoods. Students cannot be expected to learn in buildings that are falling down, in serious disrepair or painfully overcrowded. (Applause.)

Fifth, we have to recognize that all this new technology, which seems so far beyond the reach of a lot of ordinary citizens, actually gives us a chance to jump-start quality and opportunity in our poorest districts. I have challenged every school and library in the nation to be connecting all this classrooms to the Information Superhighway by the year 2000. We have got a plan working with the private sector, headed by the Vice President, to put the computers in the classrooms, to get the educational software out there, to train the teachers. The Federal Communications Commission has offered steep discounts and rates for hooking on to the Internet for schools and libraries so that all of our children can do it.

If we do this right, for the first time in the history of this country, the children in the poorest school districts will have access to the same information, in the same way, at the same time as the children in the wealthiest school districts in America. And that's what ought to be the rule. (Applause.)

The last thing I want to say is that we've got to send our children to schools that are safe and drug-free. (Applause.) There are still a lot of children who do not learn every day because they are afraid. And if you think of the times

in your life when you have been afraid, it was hard to think about anything else. We must take the fear out of our schools. It is unacceptable to have children falling behind because of that.

We fought hard to keep weapons and drugs out of our classrooms. We supported parents and communities who wanted to have things like school uniform programs, tougher truancy programs, who wanted to have curfew programs -- things that they thought would improve the safety of our students lives. But the bottom line is this: We can have equal opportunity and excellence in education, we can have it only if we are determined to have both. We will not have one without the other. (Applause.)

And lastly, let me say, in addition to that, if you look at what this modern economy requires, we must open the doors of college education to every single American by the year 2000. (Applause.) We must make at least two years of college as universal by the time the century turns as a high school diploma is today. (Applause.) We must do that.

If you look at the high school graduation rates for African Americans, it's very encouraging to see how much they have increased. There is not much difference now in the high school graduation rates between African Americans and the white majority in America. There is a world of difference in the college completion rates. We have got to do more.

Our budget has the biggest increase in Pell Grants in 20 years and provides tax credits in a way that would make the first two years of college opportunity literally open to everyone. We have got to keep going until we push more and more and more of our minority children into higher education. First, finish high school; then at least get two years more of college so that you can compete and get a decent income with prospects for growth and opportunity in the years ahead. That must be our shared objective. (Applause.)

Now, let me just briefly say, in addition to education, I think there are two other things we have to focus on if we're going to get where we want to go. The first is economics. We have got to rebuild the economic life of our inner cities and our poorest rural areas. They are the biggest economic opportunity today for the rest of America. Unemployment in this country is at a 25-year low -- 23-year low. When you hear that the unemployment is 5 percent, don't be fooled -- that's a national rate. We've got 10 states with unemployment rates below 3.5 percent. And there are that many people just moving around all the time. If you get around 3 percent, it's almost functionally zero, because people are just moving around in their lives.

But you know as well as I do, there are cities or their a neighborhoods within cities that still have double-digit unemployment. There are poor rural counties that still have double-digit unemployment. There are people who are employed but grossly underemployed, who are working part-time just because that's all they can do. There are places where people get up and go to work every day, but they're always going somewhere else to

work because there are no businesses in their neighborhoods.

Now, that is a huge opportunity. We have development funds in the United States with countries that used to be communist countries because we want to help build a private sector economy. We have got to move in our thinking from the idea that our inner cities and our poor rural areas should have their future dependent primarily on government payments, to saying, no, no, they're entitled to the same range of economic opportunities as all other American communities. (Applause.)

We've got to have a private sector, job-related, investment-related, business-related strategy to bring economic opportunity to the young people who live in these areas. It is not true that these folks don't want to work. Most of them are working like crazy. They're working like crazy. (Applause.) Last year, for every entry-level job that opened up in St. Louis, Missouri, there were nine applicants -- nine for every job that opened up.

Now, if we can't do something to revitalize the economy of our poorer areas when we've got the lowest unemployment rate in 23 years and business is out there looking for new opportunities to invest, when can we do it? We have to do it now.

What should we be doing? We've been working on this since 1993, to try to create the environment in which people would wish to invest and give people a chance -- empowerment zones, enterprise communities, community banks that loan money to people who live in the neighborhood to start small businesses, cleaning up the environment of our cities so people will feel free to invest and they won't worry about somebody coming along and suing them because we've already cleaned up the problems, giving tax relief to our lowest-income working people through the Earned Income Tax Credit, strengthening the Community Reinvestment Act so that more banks would invest money in the inner cities, opening up housing opportunities.

I heard you say that before -- if you want the schools to be integrated, we've got to have middle class housing with poor people's housing in the cities again. We have to have housing back in the cities where people are living together and working together. (Applause.)

A real serious strategy to move people from welfare to work, and a serious strategy to do something about crime, because people won't invest money if they don't think that they're going to be safe in their business operations. Now, we've been working on that. When I spoke to the mayors in San Francisco, I said, here's what we're going to do for the next four years. We want to double the number of empowerment zones and enterprise communities. We want to double the number of these community banks to make loans in the inner cities. We want to clean up the Brownfields of these cities so that nobody refuses to invest because the environmental problems are out there. We want to clean up 500 of the worst toxic waste dumps. Who's going to put a plant next to a toxic dump? We want to do this so that people can get investment.

We want to pass a juvenile crime bill that will be modeled on what Boston has done, where not a single child has been killed with a handgun in over a year and a half now -- almost two years in Boston -- not one. (Applause.) And I'll tell you something -- just for the record, because we're going to debate this all year -- yes, they're tougher on gangs and guns, but they also give kids something to say yes to. They have probation officers and police officers who get in the car at night and make house calls to homes of children who are in trouble. (Applause.) And just like a doctor making house calls, you can always find a patient there. They have 70 percent compliance with probation orders in Boston -- 70 percent -- unheard of. Give our kids something to say yes to. So we've got to do that.

We have to do something about homeownership, as I said. We have to do something about public health -- more basic services, do more to fight HIV and AIDS, include millions more children with health insurance.

All these things we intend to do, but you have to help us. The NAACP has always done a good job of involving business leaders of both parties in your endeavors. But we need to go back to the business community and say, now is the time. I will do everything I possibly can to create the environment in which people can invest and work.

Creative mayors have ideas about how to do this. But if we can't do it now with the national unemployment rate at five percent, when can we do it? It is America's best opportunity for continued growth. If we had this many consumers in a nation 50 miles out in the Gulf of Mexico, we would be pouring money into it, and investment money. I say to you, our cities and our rural counties, where these is unemployment and underemployment, is our next big avenue of growth. And we have to get together and make sure it gets done. (Applause.)

The last thing I want to say is, economics, education; thirdly, racial reconciliation. Look at the world. You pick up the newspaper any given day and you find people killing each other halfway around the world because of their racial and ethnic and religious differences. The Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda and Burundi. The Catholics and the Protestants in Ireland. My people still argue over what happened 600 years ago. The Muslims, the Croats, the Serbs in Bosnia. The Jews and the Arabs in the Middle East. And here we are with our long history of black-white issues rooted in slavery, with the appropriation of a lot of Mexican Americans after the war with Mexico into our country, and then with wave upon wave, upon wave of immigrants.

Now, in a global economy, in a global society where we're being closer together, it is a huge asset for us that we have people from everywhere else. We just announced an initiative on Africa, on promoting economic development in Africa. (Applause.) And there was a lot of excitement about it. And we had a lot of Republican congressmen interested in it because they think we can make a lot of money there. (Laughter.) I don't mean that in a bad way. I mean several African countries grew at seven percent or greater last year and are doing the same

thing again this year. And more than half the countries on the continent are democracies.

Now, we can all understand that. But why are we in a good position to do well there? Because of you. Because of you. Why are we in good position to unite all of Latin America with us in a common economic group early in the next century? Because of the Hispanic Americans, all the Latinos. Why are we in a good position to avoid having Asia become a separate economic block and a destabilizing force in the world? In no small measure because of all Asian Americans in this country. Why do we have some hope of being a major force for peace in the Middle East? Because of all the Jewish Americans here and the increasingly active and constructive Arab American community here.

In other words, it's a good deal that there are so many of us who are so different from each other. This is a good deal, not a bad deal. This is a good thing -- (applause) -- if we can find a way not only to respect and tolerate, but to celebrate our differences, and still say, but the most important thing is I'm an American. I'm bound together, I'm part of this country, I believe in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, and I have an equal chance. (Applause.)

Now, that's what Dr. Franklin and Judy Winston and all the people who are working with me over the next year, that's what we're trying to figure out how to do. And we know we have to do certain things that are government policy, but we also know that this is an affair of the mind and the heart , as well.

First, the law. The law makes a difference. We've had a Community Reinvestment Act requiring banks to invest money in our under-invested areas on the books for 20 years. But since I became President and we said we were serious about it, of all the 20 years' investment, 70 percent of it has been done since 1993. The law matters. The law matters. (Applause.)

We have to enforce the civil rights laws. I hope you will help me to secure the confirmation of my nominee to be the next Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, Bill Lee. (Applause.) For 23 years, this son of Chinese immigrants has worked for the cause of equal opportunity; for many years as a lawyer of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. I thank you for your support of him, but I ask you now to stay with him and let's make sure he will be confirmed. (Applause.)

And then I ask you to continue to work with Dr. Franklin and Judy Winston and our advisory panel. We have to do this together. For this whole century, the NAACP has been a moral beacon, reminding us that in the end we have to become an integrated society, or one America. (Applause.) That's going to be more important than ever before.

Today, the only state in America without a majority race is Hawaii, but within five years there will be no majority race in California, our biggest state, with 13 percent of our population. In Detroit -- Wayne County, Michigan, which we used to think of as the great melting pot of white ethnics and black

folks from the South that couldn't make a living on the farm anymore that went to find a job in the car plants -- there are now more than 145 different racial and ethnic groups in that county -- in Detroit. We are changing very rapidly. And we have not given much thought -- not only to how we're going to heal our old wounds and meet our old challenges, but how we're going to become one America in the 21st century. We need your help.

In September, I'm going home to Little Rock to observe the 40th anniversary of the integration of Little Rock Central High School. (Applause.) When those nine black children were escorted by armed troops on their first day of school, there were a lot of people who were afraid to stand up for them. But the local NAACP, led by my friend Daisy Bates, stood up for them. (Applause.)

Today, every time we take a stand that advances the cause of equal opportunity and excellence in education, every time we do something that really gives economic empowerment to the dispossessed, every time we further the cause of reconciliation among all our races, we are honoring the spirit of Daisy Bates, we are honoring the legacy of the NAACP.

We have to join hands with all of our children to walk into this era, with excellence in education, with real economic opportunity, with an unshakable commitment to one America that leaves no one behind.

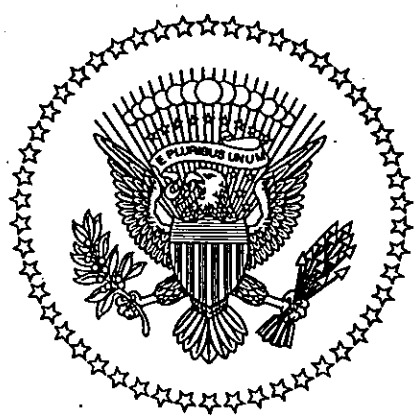
I came here to offer you my hand and to thank you for your work and to challenge you for the days ahead. Thank you and God bless you. (Applause.)

END 12:25 P.M. EDT

Race Initiative – Speeches

ONE AMERICA:

The President's Initiative on Race Relations



JUNE 14, 1997

"ONE AMERICA IN THE 21ST CENTURY"

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT AT UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT SAN DIEGO COMMENCEMENT

Rimac Field
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT SAN DIEGO
San Diego, California

JUNE 14, 1997

Ladies and gentlemen, I want to thank you for offering our nation a shining example of excellence rooted in the many backgrounds that make up this great land. You have blazed new paths in science and technology, explored the new horizons of the Pacific Rim and Latin America. This is a great university for the 21st century.

Today we celebrate your achievements at a truly golden moment for America. The Cold War is over and freedom is now ascendant around the globe, with more than half of the people in this old world living under governments of their own choosing for the very first time.

Our economy is the healthiest in a generation and the strongest in the world. Our culture, our science, our technology, promise unimagined advances and exciting new careers. Our social problems, from crime to poverty, are finally bending to our efforts.

Of course, there are still challenges for you out there. Beyond our borders, we must battle terrorism, organized crime and drug trafficking, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, the prospect of new diseases and environmental disaster.

Here at home, we must ensure that every child has the chance you have had to develop your God-given capacities. We cannot wait for them to get in trouble to notice them.

We must continue to fight the scourge of gangs and crime and drugs. We must prepare for the retirement of the baby boom generations so that we can reduce the child poverty rate. We must harness the forces of science and technology for the public good, the entire American public.

But I believe the greatest challenge we face is also our greatest opportunity. Of all the questions of discrimination and prejudice that still exist in our society, the most perplexing one is the oldest, and in some ways today, the newest: the problem of race. Can we fulfill the promise of America by embracing all our citizens of all races, not just at a university where people have the benefit of enlightened teachers and the time to think and grow and get to know each other, but within the daily life of every American community? In short, can we become one America in the 21st century?

I know, and I've said before, that money cannot buy this goal, power cannot compel it, technology cannot create it. This is something that can come only from the human spirit — the spirit we saw just now when the choir of many races sang as a gospel choir.

Today, the state of Hawaii, which has a Senator and a Congresswoman present here, has no majority racial or ethnic group. It is a wonderful place of exuberance and friendship and patriotism. Within the next three years, here in California no single race or ethnic group will make up a majority of the state's population. Already, five of our largest school districts draw students from over 100 different racial and ethnic groups. At this campus, 12 Nobel prize winners have taught or studied from nine different countries. A half-century from now, when your own grandchildren are in college, there will be no majority race in America.

Now, we know what we will look like, but what will we be like? Can we be one America respecting, even celebrating, our differences, but embracing even more what we have in common? Can we define what it means to be an American, not just in terms of the hyphen showing our ethnic origins but in terms of our primary allegiance to the values America stands for and values we really live by?

Our hearts long to answer yes, but our history reminds us that it will be hard. The ideals that bind us together are as old as our nation, but so are the forces that pull us apart. Our founders sought to form a more perfect union; the humility and hope of that phrase is the story of America and it is our mission today.

Consider this: we were born with a Declaration of Independence which asserted that we were all created equal and a Constitution that enshrined slavery.

We fought a bloody civil war to abolish slavery and preserve the union, but we remained a house divided and unequal by law for another century.

We advanced across the continent in the name of freedom, yet in so doing we pushed Native Americans off their land, often crushing their culture and their livelihood.

Our Statue of Liberty welcomes poor, tired, huddled masses of immigrants to our borders, but each new wave has felt the sting of discrimination.

In World War II, Japanese Americans fought valiantly for freedom in Europe, taking great casualties, while at home their families were herded into internment camps.

The famed Tuskegee Airmen lost none of the bombers they guarded during the war, but their African American heritage cost them a lot of rights when they came back home in peace.

Though minorities have more opportunities than ever today, we still see evidence of bigotry — from the desecration of houses of worship, whether they be churches, synagogues or mosques, to demeaning talk in corporate suites.

There is still much work to be done by you, members of the class of 1997. But those who say we cannot transform the problem of prejudice into the promise of unity forget how far we have come, and I cannot believe they have ever seen a crowd like you.

I grew up in the high drama of the Cold War, in the patriotic South. Black and white southerners alike wore our nation's uniform in defense of freedom against communism. They fought and died together, from Korea to Vietnam. But back home, I went to segregated schools, swam in segregated public pools, sat in all-white sections at the movies, and traveled through small towns in my state that still marked restrooms and water fountains "white" and "colored."

By the grace of God I had a grandfather with just a grade school education but the heart of a true American, who taught me that it was wrong. And by the grace of God, there were brave African Americans like Congressman John Lewis, who risked their lives time and time again to make it right. And there were white Americans like Congressman Bob Filner, a freedom rider on the bus with John Lewis, in the long, noble struggle for civil rights, who knew that it was a struggle to free white people, too.

To be sure, there is old, unfinished business between black and white Americans, but the classic American dilemma has now become many dilemmas of race and ethnicity. We see it in the tension between black and Hispanic customers and their Korean or Arab grocers; in a resurgent anti-Semitism even on some college campuses; in a hostility toward new immigrants from Asia to the Middle East to the former communist countries to Latin America and the Caribbean — even those whose hard work and strong families have brought them success in the American Way.

We see a disturbing tendency to wrongly attribute to entire groups, including the white majority, the objectionable conduct of a few members. If a black American commits a crime, condemn the act — but remember that most African Americans are hard-working, law-abiding citizens. If a Latino gang member deals drugs, condemn the act — but remember the vast majority of Hispanics are responsible citizens who also deplore the scourge of drugs in our life. If white teenagers beat a young African American boy almost to death just because of his race, condemn the act — but remember the overwhelming majority of white people will find it just as hateful. If an Asian merchant discriminates against her customers of another minority group, call her on it — but remember, too, that many, many Asians have borne the burden of prejudice and do not want anyone else to feel it.

Remember too, that in spite of the persistence of prejudice, we are more integrated than ever. More of us share neighborhoods and work and school and social activities, religious life, even love and marriage across racial lines, than ever before. More of us enjoy each other's company and distinctive cultures than ever before.

And more than ever, we understand the benefits of our racial, linguistic, and cultural diversity in a global society, where networks of commerce and communications draw us closer and bring rich rewards to those who truly understand life beyond their nation's borders. With just a twentieth of the world's population, but a fifth of the world's income, we in America simply have to sell to the other 95 percent of the world's consumers just to maintain our standard of living. Because we are drawn from every culture on earth, we are uniquely positioned to do it.

Beyond commerce, the diverse backgrounds and talents of our citizens can help America to light the globe, showing nations deeply divided by race, religion and tribe that there is a better way.

And, as you have shown us today, our diversity will enrich our lives in non-material ways — deepening our understanding of human nature and human differences, making our communities more exciting, more enjoyable, more meaningful.

That is why I have come here today to ask the American people to join me in a great national effort to perfect the promise of America for this new time as we seek to build our more perfect union.

Now, when there is more cause for hope than fear, when we are not driven to it by some emergency or social cataclysm— now is the time we should learn together, talk together and act together to build one America.

Let me say that I know that for many white Americans, this conversation may seem to exclude them or threaten them. That must not be so. I believe white Americans have just as much to gain as anybody else from being a part of this endeavor — much to gain from an America where we finally take responsibility for all our children so that they, at last, can be judged as Martin Luther King hoped, "Not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."

What is it that we must do? For four and a half years now, I have worked to prepare America for the 21st century with a strategy of opportunity for all, responsibility from all, and an American community of all our citizens. To succeed in each of these areas, we must deal with the realities and the perceptions affecting all racial groups in America.

First, we must continue to expand opportunity. Full participation in our strong and growing economy is the best antidote to envy, despair and racism. We must press forward to move millions more from poverty and welfare to work; to bring the spark of enterprise to inner cities; to redouble our efforts to reach those rural communities prosperity has passed by. And most important of all, we simply must give our young people the finest education in the world.

There are no children who, because of their ethnic or racial background, cannot meet the highest academic standards if we set them and measure our students against them, if we give them well-trained teachers and well-equipped classrooms, and if we continue to support reasoned reforms to achieve excellence, like the charter school movement.

At a time when college education means stability, a good job, a passport to the middle class, we must open the doors of college to all Americans and we must make at least two years of college as universal at the dawn of the next century as a high school diploma is today.

In our efforts to extend economic and educational opportunity to all our citizens, we must consider the role of affirmative action. I know affirmative action has not been perfect in America — that's why two years ago we began an effort to fix the things that are wrong with it — but when used in the right way, it has worked.

It has given us a whole generation of professionals in fields that used to be exclusive clubs — where people like me got the benefit of 100 percent

affirmative action. There are now more women-owned businesses than ever before. There are more African American, Latino and Asian American lawyers and judges, scientists and engineers, accountants and executives than ever before.

But the best example of successful affirmative action is our military. Our armed forces are diverse from top to bottom — perhaps the most integrated institution in our society and certainly the most integrated military in the world. And, more important, no one questions that they are the best in the world. So much for the argument that excellence and diversity do not go hand in hand.

There are those who argue that scores on standardized tests should be the sole measure of qualification for admissions to colleges and universities. But many would not apply the same standard to the children of alumni or those with athletic ability.

I believe a student body that reflects the excellence and the diversity of the people we will live and work with has independent educational value. Look around this crowd today. Don't you think you have learned a lot more than you would have if everybody sitting around you looked just like you? I think you have.

And beyond the educational value to you, it has a public interest because you will better learn to live and work in the world you will live. When young people sit side by side with people of many different backgrounds, they do learn something that they can take out into the world. And they will be more effective citizens.

Many affirmative action students excel. They work hard, they achieve, they go out and serve the communities that need them for their expertise and as role models. If you close the door on them, we will weaken our greatest universities and it will be more difficult to build the society we need in the 21st century.

Let me say, I know that the people of California voted to repeal affirmative action without any ill motive. The vast majority of them simply did it with a conviction that discrimination and isolation are no longer barriers to achievement. But consider the results. Minority enrollments in law school and other graduate programs are plummeting for the first time in decades. The same will likely happen in undergraduate education. We must not resegregate higher education or leave it to the private universities to do the public's work. At the very time when we need to do a better job of living and learning together, we should not stop trying to equalize economic opportunity.

To those who oppose affirmative action, I ask you to come up with an alternative. I would embrace it if I could find a better way. And to those of us who still support it, I say we should continue to stand for it, we should reach out to those who disagree or are uncertain and talk about the practical impact of these issues, and we should never be thought unwilling to work with those who disagree with us to find new ways to lift people up and bring people together.

Beyond opportunity, we must demand responsibility from every American. Our strength as a society depends upon both — upon people taking responsibility for themselves and their families, teaching their children good

values, working hard and obeying the law, and giving back to those around us. The new economy offers fewer guarantees, more risks, and more rewards. It calls upon all of us to take even greater responsibility for our education than ever before.

In the current economic boom, only one racial or ethnic group in America has actually experienced a decline in income — Hispanic Americans. One big reason is that Hispanic high school drop-out rates are well above — indeed, far above — those of whites and blacks. Some of the drop-outs actually reflect a strong commitment to work. We admire the legendary willingness to take the hard job at long hours for low pay. In the old economy, that was a responsible thing to do. But in the new economy, where education is the key, responsibility means staying in school.

No responsibility is more fundamental than obeying the law. It is not racist to insist that every American do so. The fight against crime and drugs is a fight for the freedom of all our people, including those — perhaps especially those — minorities living in our poorest neighborhoods. But respect for the law must run both ways. The shocking difference in perceptions of the fairness of our criminal justice system grows out of the real experiences that too many minorities have had with law enforcement officers. Part of the answer is to have all our citizens respect the law, but the basic rule must be that the law must respect all our citizens.

And that applies, too, to the enforcement of our civil rights laws. For example, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has a huge backlog of cases with discrimination claims — though we have reduced it by 25 percent over the last four years. We cannot do much better without more resources. It is imperative that Congress — especially those members who say they're for civil rights but against affirmative action — at least give us the money necessary to enforce the law of the land and do it soon.

Our third imperative is perhaps the most difficult of all. We must build one American community based on respect for one another and our shared values. We must begin with a candid conversation on the state of race relations today and the implications of Americans of so many different races living and working together as we approach a new century. We must be honest with each other. We have talked at each other and about each other for a long time. It's high time we all began talking with each other.

Over the coming year I want to lead the American people in a great and unprecedented conversation about race. In community efforts from Lima, Ohio, to Billings, Montana, in remarkable experiments in cross-racial communications like the uniquely named ERACISM, I have seen what Americans can do if they let down their guards and reach out their hands.

I have asked one of America's greatest scholars, Dr. John Hope Franklin, to chair an advisory panel of seven distinguished Americans to help me in this endeavor. He will be joined by former Governors Thomas Kean of New Jersey and William Winter of Mississippi, both great champions of civil rights; by Linda Chavez-Thompson, the Executive Vice President of the AFL-CIO; by Reverend Suzan Johnson Cook, a minister from the Bronx and former White House Fellow; by Angela Oh, an attorney and Los Angeles community leader;

and Robert Thompson, the CEO of Nissan U.S.A. — distinguished leaders in their communities.

I want this panel to help to help educate Americans about the facts surrounding issues of race, to promote a dialogue in every community in the land to confront and work through these issues, to recruit and encourage leadership at all levels to help breach racial divides, and to find, develop and recommend how to implement concrete solutions to our problems — solutions that will involve all of us in government, business, communities, and as individual citizens.

I will make periodic reports to the American people about our findings and what actions we all have to take to move America forward. This board will seek out and listen to Americans from all races and all walks of life. They are performing a great citizen service, but in the cause of building one America all citizens must serve.

As I said at the Presidents' Summit on Service in Philadelphia, in our new era such acts of service are basic acts of citizenship. Government must play its role, but much of the work must be done by the American people as citizen service. The very effort will strengthen us and bring us closer together.

In short, I want America to capture the feel and the spirit that you have given to all of us today. I'd like to ask the board to stand and be recognized. I want you to look at them, and I want you to feel free to talk to them over the next year or so — Dr.Franklin and members of the board.

Honest dialogue will not be easy at first. We'll all have to get past defensiveness and fear and political correctness and other barriers to honesty. Emotions may be rubbed raw, but we must begin.

What do I really hope we will achieve as a country? If we do nothing more than talk, it will be interesting but it won't be enough. If we do nothing more than propose disconnected acts of policy, it would be helpful, but it won't be enough.

But if ten years from now people can look back and see that this year of honest dialogue and concerted action helped to lift the heavy burden of race from our children's future, we will have given a precious gift to America.

I ask you all to remember just for a moment, as we have come through the difficult trial on the Oklahoma City bombing, remember that terrible day when we saw and wept for Americans and forgot for a moment that there were a lot of them from different races than we are.

Remember the many faces and races of the Americans who did not sleep and put their lives at risk to engage in the rescue, the helping and the healing. Remember how you have seen things like that in the natural disasters here in California. That is the face of the real America. That is the face I have seen over and over again. That is the America, somehow, some way we have to make real in daily American life.

Members of the graduating class, you will have a greater opportunity to live your dreams than any generation in our history, if we can make of our many different strands, one America — a nation at peace with itself, bound together by shared values and aspirations and opportunities and real respect for our differences.

I am a Scotch-Irish Southern Baptist, and I'm proud of it. But my life has been immeasurably enriched by the power of the Torah, the beauty of the Koran, the piercing wisdom of the religions of East and South Asia — all embraced by my fellow Americans. I have felt indescribable joy and peace in black and Pentecostal churches. I have come to love the intensity and selflessness of my Hispanic fellow Americans toward "la familia." As a Southerner, I grew up on country music and county fairs and I still like them. But I have also reveled in the festivals and the food, the music and the art and the culture of Native Americans and Americans from every region in the world. In each land I have visited as your President, I have felt more at home because some of their people have found a home in America.

For two centuries, wave upon wave of immigrants have come to our shores to build a new life drawn by the promise of freedom and a fair chance. Whatever else they found, even bigotry and violence, most of them never gave up on America. Even African Americans, the first of whom we brought here in chains, never gave up on America.

It is up to you to prove that their abiding faith was well-placed. Living in islands of isolation — some splendid and some sordid — is not the American way. Basing our self-esteem on the ability to look down on others is not the American way. Being satisfied if we have what we want and heedless of others who don't even have what they need and deserve is not the American way. We have torn down the barriers in our laws. Now we must break down the barriers in our lives, our minds and our hearts.

More than 30 years ago, at the high tide of the civil rights movement, the Kerner Commission said we were becoming two Americas, one white, one black, separate and unequal. Today, we face a different choice: will we become not two, but many Americas, separate, unequal and isolated? Or will we draw strength from all our people and our ancient faith in the quality of human dignity, to become the world's first truly multi-racial democracy. That is the unfinished work of our time, to lift the burden of race and redeem the promise of America.

Class of 1997, I grew up in the shadows of a divided America, but I have seen glimpses of one America. You have shown me some today. That is the America you must make. It begins with your dreams, so dream large, live your dreams, challenge your parents and teach your children well.

God bless you and good luck.