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PRESIDENT WILLIAM J. CLINTON
REMARKS FOR THE LIZ CARPENTER LECTURE
COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN
OCTOBER 16, 1995

Acknowledgments: [The First Lady spoke in 1993]; President Robert Berdahl ["Bird-All"]; Bernard Rappaport [chairman, Board of Regents]; Nicole Bell [student; introduces you]; Chancellor Bill Cunningham; Barbara Jordan; Lucy Johnson; Congressman Pickle; Sheldon Eklund [Dean of Liberal Arts]; Jane Cummings [Chairperson of Students Distinguished Lectures]; Gary Mauro; and, most of all, Liz Carpenter.

Liz said she has a file longer than War and Peace of letters inviting me to come here. [This plays off joke in Liz Carpenter's intro.] Liz: We all know that you didn't need anything that long. The minute she asked me to come to Austin, I knew I was going.

After all, anyone whose life has been touched by this remarkable woman -- a woman who worked side-by-side with President and Mrs. Johnson, who mastered the White House press corps, who reared not only her own children, but, at the age of 70, her late brother's teenage children, too -- knows the one word that is simply not in her vocabulary is "no."

My fellow Americans, in recent weeks every one of us has been made aware of a simple truth.

White Americans and black Americans often see the same world in drastically different ways -- ways that go beyond and beneath the Simpson trial and its aftermath that brought these different perceptions so starkly into the open. The rift that we see before us, that is tearing at the heart of America, exists in spite of the remarkable progress black Americans have made in the last generation -- since Martin Luther King swept America up in his dream and President Johnson spoke so powerfully for the "dignity of man and the destiny of democracy" in demanding Congress to guarantee full voting rights to blacks.

The rift exists in a special way in spite of the fact that we have become even more racially diverse and that Hispanic Americans, themselves no strangers to prejudice, are now almost 10 percent of our population.

The reasons for this divide are many. Some are rooted in the stubborn persistence of racism. Some are rooted in the different ways we experience the threats of modern life to personal security, family values, and strong communities. Some are rooted in the fact that we have still not learned to talk frankly, listen carefully, and work together across racial lines.

Almost 30 years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King marched with sanitation workers in Memphis. They marched for dignity, equality, and economic justice. The placards they carried read, simply: "I am a man."

The throngs of men marching in Washington today -- almost all of them -- are doing so for the same stated reason, though there is a profound difference. Thirty years ago, the marchers were demanding the dignity and opportunity they were due because, in the face of terrible discrimination, many had worked hard, raised their children, paid their taxes, obeyed the laws, and fought the wars.

Today's march, too, is about pride, dignity, and respect. But it's also about black men taking renewed responsibility for themselves, their families, and their communities. It's about saying "no" to crime, and drugs, and violence. It's about standing up for atonement and reconciliation. It's about insisting that others do the same, and offering to help them. It's about the frank admission that unless black men shoulder that load, no one else can help them, or their brothers, their sisters, their children, escape the hard, bleak lives that too many of them still face.

Of course, some of those in the march have a history that is far from its message.

One million men are right to be standing up for personal responsibility. But one million men do not make right one man's message of malice and division.

No good house was ever built on a bad foundation. Nothing good ever came of hate. So let us pray today that all who march and all who speak will stand for atonement, for reconciliation, for progress. Let us pray that those who would lead will give voice to the true message of those who march.

If that happens, those men and the women who are there with them, will be marching into better lives for themselves and their families.

And they could be marching into a better future for America, if we all march with them.

Today, we face a choice. One way leads to further separation and bitterness and more lost futures. The other way -- the path of courage and wisdom -- leads to unity, reconciliation, and a rich opportunity for all to make the most of the lives God has given them.

This moment, in which the racial divide is so clearly out in the open, need not be a setback for us. It presents us with a great opportunity -- one that we dare not let pass us by.

In the past, when we have had the courage to face the truth about our failures to live up to our best ideals, we have grown stronger, moved forward, and restored a proud American optimism.

These confrontations with the truth bring about what historians call "open moments." At such turning points, Americans moved to preserve the union and abolish slavery, they moved to embrace women's suffrage; they moved to guarantee basic legal rights to Americans without regard to race -- under the leadership of the great President in whose name we gather today.

At each of these moments, we looked in the national mirror and were brave enough to say: "This is not who we are. We are better than that."

Abraham Lincoln reminded us that, "A house divided against itself cannot stand." At every moment when our divisions have threatened to bring the house down, we have moved together to shore it up. My fellow Americans, our house is the greatest democracy in all history, and with all its racial and ethnic diversity it has beaten the odds of history. But divisions remain. And we have work to do.

The two worlds we see now each contain both truth and distortion. Both black and white Americans must face this, for honesty is the only gateway to the many acts of reconciliation that will unite both these worlds at last into one America.

White people must understand and acknowledge the roots of black pain. African Americans have indeed lived long with a justice system that in too many cases has been less than just. The record of abuses extends from lynchings and trumped-up charges to false arrests and police brutality. The tragedies of Emmett Till and Rodney King are bloody markers on that road.

Still today, too many of our police officers play by the rules of the bad old days. It is beyond wrong when law-abiding black parents have to tell their law-abiding children to fear the police whose salaries are paid by their taxes.

Blacks are right to think something is terribly wrong when African American men are many times more likely to be the victims of homicide than any other group in this country...when there are more African American men in our prisons than in our colleges. When one in three African American men in their twenties were either in jail, on parole, or otherwise under the supervision of the criminal justice system.

Nearly one in three. I would like every white person in America to take a moment to think how he or she would feel if one in three white men were in a similar position.

Second, and even more fundamental: there is still an unacceptable economic disparity between blacks and whites. It is fashionable to talk about African Americans as if they were part of a protected class. Many whites think blacks are getting more than their fair share in terms of jobs and promotions. The truth is African Americans still make an average of 60 percent less than white people. More than half of African American children live in poverty.

On the other hand, blacks must understand and acknowledge the roots of white fear. There is a legitimate fear of the violence that is too prevalent in urban areas.

It is not racist for any parent to pull his or her child close when walking through a high-crime neighborhood. It is not racist to reject the few black leaders who -- in contrast to the vast majority of African Americans -- would play on hatred and venom and resentment to inspire supporters to their cause.

Police have a life and death responsibility never to abuse the power granted them by the people.

We know what works in fighting crime: community policing. We've seen it working all across this country where the violent crime rate is going down.

But for it to work, police departments must be scrupulously fair and engaged with -- not estranged from -- the communities they serve. I am committed to making community policing a reality across this nation.

We must crush the remnants of racism in our police departments and throughout our criminal justice system.

The police have the sacred duty to protect the community fairly -- but the citizens of our communities have the sacred responsibility to respect the police. Not only to respect the police, but to inspire that respect in young people and then to support them and work with them so that they can succeed.

Let's not forget, most police officers are honest people who love the law and put their lives on the line -- so that citizens, no matter what their race or income, can live in decency.

Finally, I want to speak for a moment about a crucial area of responsibility: the responsibility of fatherhood.

I want to speak to all Americans about this issue.

The single biggest social problem our society faces is the growing absence of fathers in our nation's homes.

One child in four grows up in a fatherless home -- without a father to help guide the child, without a father to care for the child, without a father to teach boys to be men and to teach girls to expect respect from men.

This is not a black problem or a Latino problem or a white problem, it is an American problem.

I know this from my own life. My father died before I was born. My stepfather's battle with alcohol kept him from being the father he could have been.

But as an adult, a father in turn, I committed myself to doing what countless men do every day.

Parenting is never easy. I know what it's like to stay up until dawn rocking a sick child. I know what it's like to watch my child go out to play -- a child whom I would defend with my life -- and know that there may be danger down the street. Every parent makes mistakes. But the point is to stay there for your child day after day. Building a family is the hardest job a man can do. But it is also the most important.

And let me say that we can only build strong families when men and women respect each other in partnership.

That means men must move as much into the
homeplace as women have moved into the workplace.
And it also means that we must end domestic violence
against women and children. Men must pledge never,
never to raise their hand against a woman.

So today, I honor the black men marching in
Washington to demonstrate their commitment to
themselves, their families, and their communities.

I honor the millions of men in America -- the majority
of men of every color who without fanfare or
recognition do what it takes to be good fathers to their
children.

I challenge all men, wherever you are, to do the same.

I say to those who are neglecting their children: It's not too late. Your child needs you. It's not too late.

I say to those men who only send money to support their kids: Keep sending those checks.

Your children count on them. We'll enforce the law and catch you if you stop. But your money is no replacement for your guiding, your caring, and for your loving your child.

And I say to those men who go home every night and love and care for their children. I say to them as a former fatherless child, as a father myself, and as the President of a country that needs you: Thank you and God bless you.

So many of us ask ourselves: Where can we even begin -- those of us who want to stand up against racism?

We can begin by each of us seeking out people in our workplaces, in our communities, in neighborhoods across town, in places of worship -- to actually sit down and have honest conversations. Conversations where we have the discipline not only to speak openly, but also to listen, to understand how other people view the world.

We can do this. This is a very great country. We have the world's strongest economy, and it's on the move.

But our success as a nation is not measured solely by the size of our GNP. This march in Washington today is a reflection of something deeper and stronger that is already running through our country.

We are reasserting our commitment to the bedrock values that made our country great and make life worth living.

The great divides of the past called for and were addressed by legal and legislative changes.

Leaders like Lyndon Johnson, for example, could enact the great civil rights laws.

But we are dealing today with problems that grow in large part out of the way we look at the world with our minds and the way we feel about the world with our hearts. And therefore, leaders and legislation may be important. But this work that has to be done by every American.

This is the ultimate test of our democracy. For today, the house divided resides in the minds and hearts of the American people. And it must be united in the minds and hearts of the American people.

Yes, there are those who would poison our progress by selling short the great character of the American people.

But they will not win the day. We will win the day.

And, with your help, that day will come soon. I will do my part. Now you do yours.

Thank you and God bless America.

The great potential of this march later today is that whites will see blacks sharing their fears and embracing their convictions; coming to realize that without change within the black community and within individuals nothing good can be done. Whites are right to say they don't understand why people put up with gangs on the corner or in their projects, or with drugs sold in the schools, or with kids standing innocently at bus stops being shot by thugs with assault weapons, or with the culture of welfare dependency.

This march will remind white people that most black people share their values.

Most black Americans work hard, care for their families, pay their taxes, and obey the law -- often under circumstances which are far more difficult than those their white counterparts face.

And white people often forget that they are not immune to the problems blacks face. Crime, drugs, domestic abuse, and teenage pregnancy are too prevalent among whites as well. They, too, have a stake in solving these common problems.

It is therefore wrong for white Americans have too often done -- simply to move further away from the problems and support policies that will only make them worse.

Finally, there is the fear that both sides will not be able to see each other as more than enemy faces, all of whom carry a sliver of bigotry in their hearts.

Differences of opinion rooted in our different experiences are healthy for democracies. But differences so great, so rooted in race, threaten to divide the house Mr. Lincoln gave his life to save.

As Dr. King said, "We must learn to live together as brothers, or [we will] perish as fools."

But recognizing one another's real grievances is not enough. We must all take responsibility for ourselves, our conduct, and our attitudes. America: we must clean our house of racism.

To our white citizens I say: clean your house of racism. Too many destructive ideas are gaining currency in our midst. The taped voice of one policeman should fill you with outrage.

Stand up and be heard denouncing this sort of rhetoric...so loudly and clearly that your black fellow citizens can hear you. White racism may be black people's burden, but it is white people's problem. Again, I say: clean your house.

To our black citizens: I honor the presence of hundreds of thousands of men in Washington today committed to atonement and personal responsibility. I call on you to build on this effort to share equally in the promise of America. But to do that you must also clean your own house of racism. Again, I say: clean your house.

There are too many today -- white and black, on the left and the right, on street corners and on the radio waves - - who for their own purposes sow division. To them I say: No more. We are one. E Pluribus Unum. Out of many, we are one. We must be one, as neighbors, as fellow citizens; not separate camps; but family: white, black, men, women -- all others who share our values and are willing to live by them.

When a child is gunned down on a street in the Bronx, no matter what our race, he is our child. When a woman dies from a beating, no matter what our race, she is our sister.

Every time drugs course through the veins of another child, it clouds the future of all of our children.

We are one nation. One family -- indivisible. Divorce or separation are simply not an option.

Here, in 1995, we dare not tolerate the existence of two Americas. Under my watch, I will do everything in my power to see that soon there is only one. One America under the rule of law; one social contract, committed not to winner take all, but to giving all Americans a chance to win. One America.

How do we get there?

First, I want every governor, every mayor, every business leader, every church leader, every civic leader, every union steward -- in every workplace and meeting place across America -- to take personal responsibility for reaching out to people of different races, for taking time to sit down and talk through this issue, to speak honestly and frankly -- and then to listen quietly with an open mind and an open heart.

I am convinced, based on a lifetime of friendships and common endeavors with people of different races, that the American people will find out that they have a lot more in common than they think they do.

And I believe, in spite of all of our problems, we will work this out. [Lend-Lease quote.]

Second, we have to defend real opportunity. I'm not talking about opportunity for black Americans or white Americans. I am talking about opportunity for all Americans.

We can do this by truly rewarding work and family. That's why I supported the Family and Medical Leave Act. That's why I am fighting to increase the minimum wage that holds families together. And that is why I will defend tax relief that helps lift 14 million low-income, working Americans and their children out of poverty.

Yes, a disproportionate percentage of them are blacks and Hispanics -- but most of them are still white Americans.

We also have to realize that there are some areas of our country that are more prone to the problems we all deplore because they don't have any economic opportunity. Which is why I worked so hard to create empowerment zones -- in New York City, and Detroit, and other cities, but also in South Texas, in rural areas across the country. So that when the people in these places assume responsibility, they will have something to say "yes" to.

But perhaps the most important opportunity of all is this -- a good education. That's what Lyndon Johnson worked for. And it still matters. More than ever.

But let's remember -- the people marching in Washington today are right. There will be no progress in the absence of real responsibility on the part of all Americans.

Nowhere is that responsibility more important than in our efforts to promote public safety and preserve the rule of law. Citizens must respect the law and those who enforce it.

Pared-down list

The Role of Government Potential Quotes

"To all general purposes we have uniformly been one people; each individual citizen everywhere enjoying the same national rights, privileges and protection." -- John Jay, Federalist #2

The Federalists were filled with an "enlightened zeal for energy and efficiency of government." -- in the Creation of the American Republic, pg. 474

"The Federal and State governments are in fact but different agents and trustees of the people, constituted with different powers, and designed for different purposes." -- Madison, Federalist #46

"The Federal Constitution forms a happy combination...the great and aggregate interests being referred to the national, the local and particular to the state legislatures." Federalist, Madison #10

"It's authority came not from a compact among the states but from being ordained by the sovereign people. It's purpose accordingly was to promote their excellence both as individuals and as a nation." -- Sam Beer, To Make a Nation.

We are united by "an indissoluble community of interest as one nation." Washington's farewell address.

"The Union is not a temporary partnership of states. It is an association of people, under a constitution of government, uniting their power, joining together their highest interests, cementing their present enjoyments, and blending into one indivisible mass, all their hopes for the future." -- Daniel Webster

"The public good, the real welfare of the great body of people, is the supreme object to be pursued." Madison, Federalist #45 ✓

"laboratories of experimentation" Justice Brandeis talks about states (1932).

There will always be "Parties of hope (change) and "Parties of Memory." -- Emerson

"[Revitalizing institutions] will take pervasive commitment to continuous improvement, the breakdown of old hierarchies, and their replacement with new patterns of citizen and worker involvement." Alice Rivlin, Reviving the American Dream.

"[Such a political center] would take the economic challenges the United States faces entering the twenty-first century as seriously as the country took the challenge of totalitarianism in the twentieth century." E.J. Dionne

"Without absolving government of any of its responsibilities to the commonweal I think we have to find ways to re-engage ourselves in community. If the troubles confronting us today teach us anything at all, it is that voting isn't enough -- William Raspberry in the Washington Post

"Far more important than the particular outcome of any election is the question whether cynicism and apathy or citizenship and participation prevail at the grassroots." David Broder, Washington Post, 11/27/94

bigger list

"To all general purposes we have uniformly been one people; each individual citizen everywhere enjoying the same national rights, privileges and protection." -- John Jay, Federalist #2

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"Government of the people -- all its offices are to be their offices, and to exercise no rights but such as the people commit to them." -- John Jay

"The Federal Constitution forms a happy combination...the great and aggregate interests being referred to the national, the local and particular to the state legislatures." Madison #10

"It's authority came not from a compact among the states but from being ordained by the sovereign people. Its purpose accordingly was to promote their excellence both as individuals and as a nation." -- Sam Beer, To Make a Nation.

The prime object was, as George Washington said "the consolidation of the Union."

"Government is not the solution to our problems; government is the problem." Ronald Reagan

"e pluribus unum" -- one from many

"And then we parted, each of us taking something of the other with him." -- Thoreau relating a conversation with his neighbor, Hosmer

We are united by "an indissoluble community of interest as one nation." Washington's farewell address.

"The Union is not a temporary partnership of states. It is an association of people, under a constitution of government, uniting their power, joining together their highest interests, cementing their present enjoyments, and blending into one indivisible mass, all their hopes for the future." -- Daniel Webster

"In a day of peace, let us advance the arts of peace and the works of peace...let us develop the resources of our land, call forth its powers, build up its institutions and see whether we also, in our day and generation, may not perform something worthy to be remembered." -- Daniel Webster recalling lessons from the Civil War.

"Their cause must be our cause." Lyndon Johnson talking about civil rights.

"The genius of Republican liberty demands not only that all power should be derived from the people, but that those intrusted with it should be kept in dependence with the people." -- Madison, Federalist #37

"We, the People of the United States, who do ordain and establish this Constitution." Preamble of the Constitution

"The public good, the real welfare of the great body of people, is the supreme object to be pursued." Madison, Federalist #45

"In the extended republic of the United States, and among the great variety of interests, parties and sects which it embraces, a coalition of a majority of the whole society could seldom take place on any other principle than those of justice and general good." Madison, Federalist #51

...Government by discussion, starting from the diverse interests and opinions of people at large, will tend toward decisions protecting justice and promoting the public interest." Sam Beer talking about Madison's view.

"The authors of the Federalist regarded efficiency as a major criterion of what they called "good government." -- pg. 287

"Everything beyond this (taxes) must be left to the providence and the firmness of the people; who, as they hold the scales in their hands, it is hoped, will always take care to preserve the Constitutional equilibrium between the general and the state governments." -- Hamilton

"Federalism enables people to try experiments which could not safely be tried in a large centralized country." -- James Bryce in American Commonwealth, 1888

"laboratories of experimentation" Justice Brandeis talks about states (1932).

Victory won by "the People, of their own choice, fighting, dying for their own idea...Down in the abysses of New World humanity there had form'd and harden'd a primal hard-pan of Union will, determined and in the majority, refusing to be tamper'd with or argued against, confronting all emergencies, and capable at any time of bursting all surface bonds, and breaking out like an earthquake." --Walt Whitman reflecting on test put to Union by Civil War.

"a coalition of a majority of the whole society can seldom take place on any other principle than those of justice and the general good." Madison #51

"Representatives need to mix with the people, think as they think, feel as they feel -- ought to be perfectly amenable to them and thoroughly acquainted with their interest and condition." -- George Mason

"Whatever possibilities we have for democratic life require us to turn government's resources to the task of protecting and reconstituting local community and private order." -- Wilson Carey McWilliams.

The New Deal worked because it was seen as a "concert of interests," not a collection of "sectarian veto groups." -- Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

"family, work and neighborhood." -- Ronald Reagan

There will always be "Parties of hope (change) and "Parties of Memory." -- Emerson's description

Everyday, Jefferson argued, one must be a "participator in the government of affairs." (ie: Fireside chats)

FDR talked about the "concert of interests" each unit thinking of itself "as part of a greater whole; one piece in a large design."

"Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." -- JFK

"I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take this any more." -- people in Network.

"Such a center would be willing to admit past failures and understand that in their respective critiques of American life over the last thirty years, neither the liberals nor conservatives hold the monopoly on wisdom. The new center I have in mind would prefer problem-solving to symbolism. It would rather govern than polarize the country around contrived themes and empty slogans. It would take the economic challenges the United States faces entering the twenty-first century as seriously as the country took the challenge of totalitarianism in the twentieth century." E.J. Dionne

"Americans want government to be effective again; they don't just want to look on as career politicians run against the very government they're supposed to have led. They want their roads in good shape, their teachers well trained, their doctors there when they need them, their police around when crime happens; they're tired of hearing that government is always the "problem" and never part of the solution. They'd like lower taxes, but they also want more fairness in the tax code and a sense that government is delivering a return on their tax dollars. They want to be challenged to take more responsibility for their country's future, and not just be told that society has no right to expect anything from anyone. Americans want a politics they don't have to hate." - E.J. Dionne

Progress was tied to the "improvability" of the human mind.

"Americans are losing hold of the idea of citizen involvement in community problem-solving as the norm...The essence of what used to be called "the American way" was citizen involvement: town meetings, barn-raising, volunteer associations of all sorts. Today, the image of everybody pulling on his own oar has given way to the idea of a society on automatic pilot...Without absolving government of any of its responsibilities to the commonweal I think we have to find ways to re-engage ourselves in community. If the troubles confronting us today teach us anything at all, it is that voting isn't enough -- William Raspberry in the Washington Post

"But as every honest conservative acknowledges, the price to be paid for eliminating intrusive, top-heavy government in Washington is increased responsibility at the community level. And that in turn demands a more engaged citizenry...Far more important than the particular outcome of any election is the question whether cynicism and apathy or citizenship and participation prevail at the grassroots. "a citizenship movement." David Broder 11/27/94 Washington Post.

"the anxious class." -- Robert Reich