

FOIA MARKER

This is not a textual record. This is used as an administrative marker by the William J. Clinton Presidential Library Staff.

Collection/Record Group: Clinton Presidential Records

Subgroup/Office of Origin: Speechwriting

Series/Staff Member: Terry Edmonds

Subseries:

OA/ID Number: 10987

FolderID:

Folder Title:

Ole Miss

Stack:

S

Row:

0

Section:

0

Shelf:

0

Position:

0

Chancellor Khayat, Trustees[Ricki]Garrett and [James] Luvene (pronounced Levine), faculty, distinguished guests, parents and members of the class of 1997:
Congratulations, . . .

. . . congratulations for working hard; . . .

. . . for making your parents proud ; . . .

. . . and for convincing the Board of Trustees that Ole Miss needs a Fall break.

* * *

I know that all of you will take time today to thank your families for their love and support that got you to this day.

I also want to remind you that hard working people all over Mississippi – people you will never meet – pay taxes to maintain this great public university.

You must thank them too.

I am honored to come to this remarkable university – this place of great history; . . .

... of intellectual achievement; ...

... and two of the best tennis teams in the SEC.

Being in the Tad Smith Coliseum, I'm reminded how important sports are to a great university life in this country.

I have never made an apology for their special role in creating a sense of community.

There is no greater feeling than being young on a Saturday in the Fall and walking with friends to a football game on a great American university campus.

Three years ago, John Grisham came here and explained why he went to law school instead of joining the Peace Corps.

I joined the Peace Corps and skipped law school.

Now I live in a city called Washington, ...

... where *everyone* is a lawyer, and lots of people write fiction – mostly about themselves.

Washington is actually the place where adult day care was invented.

We call it Congress.

As Chancellor Khayat mentioned, before I decided to make Washington my home, I was Chancellor of a Big Ten university.

That's that *other* great conference.

There I experienced lots of long hours; late night pizzas; and people longing for a real job.

In Washington, my life is still long hours; late night pizzas, . . .and yes, people longing for a real job.

All of which goes to prove that William Faulkner was right in *Absalom, Absalom* when he wrote: "Nothing ever happens once and it's finished."

Our lives repeat themselves because what we do is often a mirror of who we are.

For example, I've come to the University of Mississippi with my funny accent.

Where I come from up north, we all talk this way.

And I also come with political values and beliefs deeply rooted in my past.

My religion; my heritage; my working class background; and my activist days in the 1960s.

I was at a university very much like this one when, in 1966, Robert Kennedy came to Ole Miss to heal old wounds, and to encourage young people everywhere to "put their talents to work in the service of the American dream."

That dream was my dream, and now it is your dream.

So I have to change – but only slightly – the words Chancellor Khayat spoke at his inauguration just over a year ago.

My message to each of you is this: I come as a stranger, but I am one of you.

Because before region. Before race. Before age. Before gender. Even before history – there is humanity.

We can – and should – hold on to our individual cultures and traditions, . . .

... but, we are linked to each other – and to our creator – by the joys we experience; the losses we endure; the yesterdays we remember; and the tomorrows we imagine.

So, not only am I one of you. As Americans we are one.

Today, every road leads to Oxford.

And every hope your parents and I have for the future is a hope for your future.

Because, more than anything else on this earth, I believe in you – and your generation.

But our hope for you will not be fulfilled until we complete this century's most important task: Building an American house that can never be divided by race or religion.

At a time when blacks and whites still see the justice system through very different eyes.

When churches are still burned and synagogues defaced.

And when inequality still plagues our boardrooms and our neighborhoods; . . .

. . . the time has come for *every* corner of our nation to end what Faulkner in the "The Bear" simply called the "curse" of race.

We should do this because it is right and just.

And we should do this because when the doors of opportunity open; . . .

. . . when no person's creativity and intelligence is held back; . . .

. . . when the engine of freedom is linked to the entrepreneurial spirit – our entire nation prospers.

The fact is, race is not a southern dilemma. And race is not a northern dilemma.

Race is an American dilemma – and we must solve it together.

That is why I don't believe it is for me to tell you where Ole Miss or the south should go from here.

Those decisions are for you to make – just as they must be made in every other community across this land.

But I will say that the great dream of America – that we all be judged on our talents, respected for our common humanity; and welcomed in the American Promised Land – is not yet realized.

And until it is, the words of poet T.S. Eliot can be a warning for the 21st century:
“Time past and time present are both perhaps present in time future.”

We want to learn from time past – but not be a prisoner of it.

We want to appreciate time present – but not be satisfied with it.

We want to reach time future – but not regret what we might have changed.

This is not to say that over the past 30 years we haven't made enormous progress – we have.

Not only have laws changed, hearts have changed.

When he was Lt. Governor, Paul Johnson, Jr. tried to keep James Merridith from registering at the University of Mississippi.

But when he became governor of this great state he said, "If we must fight, let it not be a rear guard defense of yesterday, but let it be an all out assault on our share of tomorrow."

That's what the south has done over the last 30 years.

You turned toward a new day and found your share of the American Dream.

The south is no longer perceived as trying to catch up with the rest of America.

The south is America.

An America of growing wealth and prosperity.

An America of expanding opportunity.

An America respected and emulated around the world.

But also an America still plagued by poverty, infant mortality, and millions of children living without health insurance.

The question is, as we enter the 21st century, how will we re-write the fate of this other America?

I've already suggested one answer: By continuing the racial progress we've already made so that no person is either locked out – or made to feel left out – of the American dream.

But I have another answer. It's actually more of a prediction.

I predict that Mississippi's first President will come from the Ole Miss Class of 1997.

I predict one of you will lead our country in the 21st century, . . .

. . . and will lead in a way that politically; socially; and economically, we – in the words of Dr. Martin Luther King – “live out the true meaning of our creed.”

Thirty years ago, a President from Mississippi might have seemed like a long shot.

But not today.

With so much of our political leadership coming from the south – including the Senate Majority Leader – I invite you to take a look around.

One of you could be President.

One of you will be President.

As graduates of one of America's great universities, there are no longer any serious obstacles separating you from any of your dreams.

Not your race. Not your gender. Not your history. Not your geography.

The only obstacles in your way are the ones you create.

Which brings me back to my recruiting trip.

Today, I'm not here as a partisan.

The first President from Mississippi could be a Democrat, Republican or Independent.

He – or she – might be a doctor, lawyer, teacher, or journalist.

An athlete.

A blues singer.

Or both.

I cannot say what you will be.

But I can say that whether or not you run for President, you will be judged by three things: Your courage, your integrity, and your compassion.

Courage to finish our nation's fight for equality, for dignity, and for economic independence for people of every race, religion and gender.

Courage to stand up when you fall; . . .

. . . to stand up for what you believe; . . .

. . . and to listen with an open mind to what others believe.

Courage to read great books, challenge great myths, and set great goals.

And don't forget – the courage to laugh at yourself – and often.

Our Presidential candidate from Mississippi will also need great integrity.

Real honesty, truthfulness and believability are crucial for modern leaders.

William Shakespeare once wrote, "The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose."

And that's why in public life, words alone are never enough.

Integrity also means taking action, setting a high standard for others to follow – and being willing to meet that standard yourself.

But Mississippi's first presidential candidate must have even more.

Our candidate must have compassion.

As many of you know, when William Faulkner won the Nobel Prize in Literature, he gave one of the most memorable acceptance speeches ever.

I'm going to paraphrase, slightly, what he said.

'We are immortal, not because we alone among creatures have an inexhaustible voice, but because we have a soul capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance.'

In other words, we survive by helping others to survive.

And what kind of compassion should we look for in the first President from Mississippi?

A compassion whose roots grow deep in the soil of Mississippi.

A compassion that tempers a strong belief in self-reliance with a strong belief that some problems – from taming the flood waters of the mighty Mississippi River to reducing poverty – can only be accomplished by all of us working together.

A compassion for all human beings.

That's why our Presidential candidate will be a determined advocate for everyone whose face is still pressed up against the window pane of the American Dream.

That's why our Presidential candidate will fight for the health of every American.

And that's why our candidate will know that the true measure of our country's strength is preserving families, promoting work and creating opportunity.

You are about to enter a world where you will no longer be judged by your grades, but by your character.

By the promises you keep, and the changes you shape.

By the love you give and the help you repay.

By the examples you set, and the challenges you meet.

By your guts and your heart.

These are the standards by which we will judge the first presidential candidate from Mississippi.

And they are the standards by which we will judge each one of you – no matter what profession or dream you choose.

* * *

The great Irish poet, William Butler Yeats wrote a poem called "September 1913."

In it he said, "Romantic Ireland is dead and gone."

Despite these words, his poem was not about despair.

It was a poem about letting go – and about seizing tomorrow.

Seizing change.

At the doorstep of the 21st century, you must be your own messengers of change – honoring the past while having the courage, integrity and compassion to re-write the future.

As you begin this long journey, I promise you it will be both enormous fun and serious business.

Thirty years ago, I sat in a seat much like yours – not knowing exactly where life would take me, but promising myself that, . . .

. . . I would never play it safe.

I've kept that promise.

As you prepare to leave Ole Miss, my deepest hope is that you *won't play it safe either.*

That you'll stand your ground – and when necessary, stand conventional wisdom on its head.

I wish for you the best of everything.

I wish you courage, integrity and compassion.

I wish you good health, great friendships, and uncomfortable but exciting lives.

And I wish you fun. Yes, I said fun.

I look forward to voting for one of you in the future.

But for today, I'll simply say: Each of you has my vote – and my warmest
congratulations. Thank you.