

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: National AIDS Policy Office
Series/Staff Member: Todd Summers
Subseries:

OA/ID Number: 21081
FolderID:

Folder Title:
VPOTUS - Speeches - 7/98 - NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]

Stack:	Row:	Section:	Shelf:	Position:
S	66	6	4	1

**REMARKS BY VICE PRESIDENT ALBERT GORE, JR.
AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY
NAACP ANNUAL CONVENTION
Thursday, July 16, 1998**

It is truly a deep personal honor for me to come before America's premier civil rights organization, to talk about a goal we share -- closing the opportunity gap, so that every child in America can share in the American dream.

Thank you for what you do every day, and what you have done for nearly 90 years. The NAACP has been one of the mightiest forces for justice, righteousness, and human rights that our nation has ever known. As Joe Madison has said, "if a black person gets into trouble, he calls out two names -- Jesus and the NAACP." Well, I believe all Americans need the NAACP -- now more than ever.

It is true that this is a time of great prosperity for America. Some farmers are suffering, but our economy is enjoying good times -- and it is a prosperity that is shared by many.

Since President Clinton and I took office 5 ½ years ago, we have seen a renewal of America's economy. Over 16 million new jobs. The lowest unemployment in a generation -- and the lowest African American and Hispanic unemployment on record. Living standards are rising, and the gap between the rich and the poor is closing. We are seeing progress: the highest home ownership on record. More small businesses created than ever before in our history.

But for all our progress, we know that too many never get into the winner's circle of this new economy. We need to do more. As Kweisi Mfume has said on so many occasions, "we can do better." I believe we must use today's prosperity to expand that winner's circle -- by closing the opportunity gap in our schools, by closing the opportunity gap in our workplaces; and by building stronger families and communities all across the United States of America -- to include everyone in the winner's circle.

Now is the time to roll up our sleeves and do better. As Julian Bond has said, quoting his slave-born grandfather: "forward in the struggle."

Today, I want to talk about how we move forward in the struggle -- with a clear understanding of our past, a frank accounting of our present, and a bold and audacious vision for the future.

Let us start by confronting and understanding the past. Some people like to believe that the past is completely gone, and has no relevance in our present. They are wrong. I read a story in National Geographic last year. This article told of a town called Krakow, in Poland. Every day, to this day, in a church tower, a lone trumpeter sounds an alarm every hour on the hour -- to commemorate an invasion that happened seven centuries ago, when Mongols were about to storm their walls. The trumpeter ends his clarion mid-note -- evoking the moment at which a Mongol arrow pierced his throat, and cut off his trumpet mid-note.

So when people say the time has come to silence our clarion call for justice, I'm tempted to say: look around you. Look at the dark shadows and lingering poisons of our own past.

We hear voices now in America arguing that our nation's historic struggle is over -- that we've already reached the promised land -- that we have a color-blind society. These people who now call for the end of policies to promote equal opportunity say there's been so much progress that no more such efforts are justified. What are they thinking? Don't they recognize that the tap root of racism is hundreds of years long?

What was their reaction to Jasper, Texas? That it was a bolt from the blue? That heinous crime wounded not only the Byrd family and the Jasper community, it wounded the American spirit. And God bless the Byrd family for leading us toward healing and reconciliation. What courage and amazing grace.

And even though Jasper was a lightning bolt, but it was not the only one.

Last year in Virginia, an African American man was doused with gasoline, burned alive, and decapitated by two white men.

This month in Lawrence, Massachusetts, an interracial couple celebrating their 20th wedding anniversary was subjected to racial slurs -- and when the husband protested, he was beaten by men with baseball bats.

And just twelve days ago, on America's Independence Day, a richly diverse neighborhood in Virginia Beach was covered in racist graffiti, swastikas, and slurs.

Don't tell me that our persistent vulnerability to racism has suddenly disappeared, and that we now live in a color-blind society. We've left Egypt, but don't tell me we've arrived in Canaan.

We're not just talking about the past. Ask the watchmen in the belltowers of America. All around us, there are arrows of hatred still flying through the air -- still silencing dreams, and cutting short hope like the lost notes of that trumpet, so many centuries ago.

We need a shield from those arrows -- and that means tough, uncompromising measures to enforce our civil rights laws and make certain that they are abided by.

This January, from Dr. King's pulpit at Ebenezer Baptist Church here in Atlanta, I was proud to announce, as part of the President's Initiative on Race, the largest single increase in the enforcement of our civil rights laws in nearly two decades. And I want to say to all who would discriminate in employment, discriminate in education, discriminate in housing, discriminate in health care: we will catch you, we will enforce the law, and we will punish you.

And let me say a special word to America's black farmers: it is time to redress the decades of discrimination you faced. You deserved far better from your government. And President Clinton and I pledge to you: this is a problem we will solve, not bury.

We need to do more. We need strong measures to ensure equal opportunity.

I've heard the critics of affirmative action. I've heard those who say we have a color-blind

society. They use their color blind the way duck hunters use a duck blind -- they hide behind it and hope the ducks won't notice. And consider this: they're in favor of affirmative action if you can dunk the basketball or sink a three-point shot. But they're not in favor of it if you merely have the potential to be a leader of your community and bring people together, to teach people who are hungry for knowledge, to heal families who need medical care. Don't tell me we have a color-blind society. I have a different view: I believe that America still needs affirmative action.

So let's understand the influence the past has on the present. It is with us, and it has shaped us. And it is not sufficient to heal the wounds of our past. Before we can plan for the future, we must take stock; we must understand: what is the state of opportunity in America's present?

We have cut in half the gap between black earnings and white earnings over the past 30 years. But the wealth of black and Hispanic households still averages less than one-tenth that of white households. I say: we can do better. Forward in the struggle.

Today, more and more, people of all races and ethnicities are learning from one another, listening to each other's music, reading each other's books, living and working together. But still, too much of our culture is dangerous and destructive -- with gangs, guns, and drugs tearing apart families and communities -- with too many broken homes, too many absent fathers who fail to accept responsibility for their children. We can do better. Forward in the struggle.

In 5 ½ years, President Clinton and I have appointed more African Americans, more Hispanics, more Asian Americans, more Native Americans to Cabinet positions and judgeships and other high posts than ever before in American history. We have named African Americans as Secretary of Energy; Secretary of Agriculture; Secretary of Commerce; Secretary of Veterans Affairs; Secretary of Transportation; Secretary of Labor; Surgeon-General; Budget Director; Drug Czar; Chair of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission; Chairman of the FCC; Deputy Attorney General; Deputy Secretary of State; Secretary of the Army; Director of the National Parks Service; Director of Presidential Personnel; White House Director of Cabinet Affairs; and White House Director of Public Liaison.

My friends, the most diverse administration in history is also one of the most successful in history. And -- that's not in spite of our diversity; it's because of it!

But in so many places and professions, the glass ceiling still has not been shattered. We can do better. We know we can do better. Forward in the struggle.

We are expanding health coverage to up to five million uninsured children. And I'm proud that we are now targeting nearly 60% of our HIV prevention funds, and more than half of our funds for AIDS services, to people of color.

But there are still crushing racial disparities in health care -- in infant mortality, in cancer, in stroke and heart disease. And HIV and AIDS are growing fastest among African Americans -- accounting for 57 percent of all new infections, and 70 percent of new infections among young women. That is why we proposed a ten-year, \$400 million crusade to end disparities in American health care. And that is why we must all fight to meet the crushing burden of AIDS in the African

American community. We should be proud of President Mfume's leadership in this effort. He knows we can do better. Forward in the struggle.

Friends, we have work to do. It can't all be done from the White House. And let's face it: it won't be done by this Congress. I've seen the NAACP's civil rights scorecard for this Congress: for the House, 21 out of 100. For the Senate, 36 out of 100. No wonder they're trying to cut education. With test scores like those, they're the first people we'd keep after class.

Closing the opportunity gap is a mission not just for government, but for all of us. Today, the NAACP is in the vanguard of our most critical battles -- not just for justice in our courts, but to reduce drop-out rates through your Back-to-School/Stay-in-School program. To fight for quality health care, and for economic advancement. And I applaud your brand new initiative to combat recidivism and prevent crime. You are preparing and inspiring tomorrow's leaders today -- and must help us achieve our vision for the future.

We must start with education opportunity, above all else. In a typical year, Dr. King traveled 780,000 miles, and made more than 200 speeches. And on nearly every stop, he made a point of going to a schoolhouse door, or a library, or a college campus. He preached simultaneously integration and education because he knew that even if we are judged by the content of our character, it is education that will truly move us from separate to equal.

Incidentally, I have the high honor of formally announcing that today at this moment in the Oval Office in your White House, President Clinton is signing a new measure that will authorize the creation of a national monument to Dr. King -- right on the national Mall from which he led and moved our nation. It's about time.

As we honor him, let us remember that Dr. King was not alone in the fight for education. When the NAACP led the charge for opportunity in our nation's courts, the desegregation of our schools became the first and most important battleground of the second reconstruction. Let us recognize the towering genius of the NAACP's chief counsel during those years, Thurgood Marshall. And let me acknowledge his son, Thurgood Marshall, Jr., who works with President Clinton and me every day in the White House as Secretary of Cabinet Affairs.

We have more to do. Today, more than four decades after Brown v. Board of Education, two-thirds of minority students still attend schools that are predominantly minority. On average, in these schools, class sizes are larger, curricula and teaching materials are lower in quality, and teachers have less training in the fields they teach. And they are 16 times more likely to be overwhelmingly poor.

I believe we must hold ourselves and our children to a higher standard. I believe that if we give them the opportunity, all children can learn. And I believe it's time to stop pointing fingers and start joining hands to fix our schools. We don't have a child to waste.

I see an America where there are well-trained teachers in every classroom -- and every school has the resources to reach high standards of excellence. I see an America with tough standards for safety, discipline, and character in our schools. We can turn these dreams into reality.

Today, I challenge every state and school district to work to cut in half the achievement gap between rich and poor, and between racial and ethnic groups, in the next decade. We must close these gaps if we are to have One America.

At a time when our nation is becoming more diverse, I challenge every state and school district to recommit to the goal of integration -- to use voluntary tools such as charter schools, magnet schools, and public school choice to seek more diversity, not less, in our schools. Schools are our best hope to break the chains of racial isolation in our nation.

And there is a lot we can do right now, in this Congress. Let's pass President Clinton's plan to hire 100,000 highly trained teachers to reduce class size in the early grades from an average of 22 to 18.

We're working with Senator Carol Moseley-Braun to pass our \$22 billion plan to rebuild and modernize our schools -- because we can't lift our children up in schools that are falling down.

We're working with Congressman Chaka Fattah to pass our High Hopes program -- to tell children as early as elementary school: if you work hard and stay in school, we'll give you mentoring and tutoring, and we'll guarantee you the help you need to pay for college.

And in this new economy and Information Age, let us close the digital divide that throws up new barriers to opportunity, and to the high-paying jobs of the future. Think about it: if we put computers and the Internet in every classroom and school library in America, along with teachers who are trained to use them, all of our children, from the poorest inner-city schools to the most remote rural school districts, will have access to the same vast store of knowledge.

Now we need the E-Rate -- a special rate to make Internet connections greatly discounted for 30,000 schools, and almost free for the poorest schools. Some in Congress are now trying to block the E-Rate. I believe it is wrong to unplug our children's education.

We are fighting for economic opportunity. Just yesterday, I hosted our fourth annual White House Conference on Community Empowerment, to show how we are lighting up our central cities with the spark of private investment.

Our goal is to make our communities not just better off, but better. Better places to raise a family, with community gardens and green spaces instead of contaminated waste dumps. Better places to live and work, with thriving businesses and community police making the streets safe again. Through community empowerment, we're helping communities recapture that sense of Main Street community that has been lost for too long.

Today, I am pleased to make a brand new announcement, pending the approval of the NAACP Board of Directors, that will provide greater access to capital in our communities. Today, we are signing a letter of intent between the NAACP and our Small Business Administration that will enable us to significantly increase lending to African American businesses. The NAACP, in partnership with us, will now be able to provide crucial technical assistance, and also direct loans through your eight Community Development Resource Centers. Starting here, starting now -- for minority businesses

across America -- let us open the doors to this new economy wider than ever before.

Let us open untapped markets abroad as well as at home. I am proud of President Clinton's historic trip to Africa, to help integrate Africa into the global economy. I am proud that my own binational commission with South Africa's Deputy President Mbeki has helped to strengthen the ties between our nations. We will meet again for the fifth time just next month. Now it is high time for us to take action to deepen trade and partnership between Africa and America -- because a stable, prosperous Africa is good for the United States of America, and good for the whole world. I say to Congress: pass the African Growth and Opportunity Act.

In this global economy, we also have an obligation to lead the world. I believe that God's hand has touched the United States of America -- on purpose, not by accident. He has given us not just a chance, but a mission to prove to men and women throughout this world that people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, of all faiths and creeds, can not only work and live together, but can enrich and ennoble both themselves and our common purpose.

We learned in school about the "lowest common denominator;" America is about the highest common denominator.

That is why, every time the Republicans tried to roll back affirmative action -- three times so far this year -- we fought back. And hear me well: if they try again, we'll fight them again. And if they try again, we'll fight them again. And if they try again, we'll fight them again, and again, and again.

That is not the only fight we face in this Congress. We are fighting for \$1.5 billion to turn around failing schools, expand public school choice, and reform our poorest schools. The Congressional majority has refused to fund this initiative. They said no to opportunity. But we are fighting back. Our eyes are on the future.

We are fighting for quality after-school care -- to engage our children during those crucial hours after the school bell rings, but before the work whistle blows. The Congressional majority passed a budget that would squeeze down on after-school care. They said no to opportunity. But we are fighting back. Our eyes are on the future.

We are fighting for summer jobs for America's children. The Congressional majority voted to shut down the entire summer jobs program. They said no to opportunity. But we are fighting back. Our eyes are on the future.

We are fighting to clear the backlog of civil rights cases before the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and do more to prevent and punish crimes of bias. The Congressional majority voted to cut the historic increase in civil rights enforcement we requested. I thought there was bipartisan agreement to fight at least the most basic forms of discrimination. Amazingly, they said no to opportunity. But we are fighting back. Our eyes are on the future.

The Republicans know theirs is the wrong agenda for African Americans. They don't even want to count you in the Census! They'd probably look out at this crowd, and tell us there were about 300 people here.

We believe America needs a full and accurate Census -- and we need each and every one of you to help us achieve it. This nation cannot work for all Americans if we cannot even count all Americans.

And by the way, there is one more place you must stand up and be counted -- and that is the ballot box this November!

I believe in my heart that we can close the opportunity gap in America, that we can finish the unfinished work of the first and second reconstructions -- if we are willing to see and understand the past, to understand the influence of the past on the present, and to use the present to move boldly into the future.

But we will also need all of you. You are the grassroots activists of today, and the leaders of tomorrow. My friend and fellow Tennessean Ben Hooks has said, "there will always be a need for the NAACP." And so, today -- and for all time -- I ask you to work with me, to reform our schools and lift up all our children. Stand with me, for the economic empowerment that is the next great civil rights frontier. Lead with me, toward an America that fulfills its God-given mission and destiny, and proves to the world that our diversity is a great strength.

And as it is written in the scripture: "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep; be of the same mind one toward another." And "the crooked places shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together." Thank you.