

ADDRESS
BY
SENATOR HUBERT H. HUMPHREY

TO THE
ANNUAL CONVENTION
OF
THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE
OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA
JUNE 29, 1952

Friends and Fellow Citizens --

I am most unhappy that it is not possible for me to be with you personally. I had definitely planned on spending this day in friendly association with the delegates to the Annual Convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Much of my joy in life comes from being with good people -- people of good spirit and good ideals.

My friends Walter White and Roy Wilkins know that when I speak I like to be close to the people so I can see them and share with them the experience of the occasion.

All of this I had planned, but the work of the Congress, my responsibilities in the Senate, have made it necessary for me to remain in Washington. Important legislation such as the Defense Production Act, the military budget, educational benefits for our Korean veterans, and other legislative items, have compelled me to remain here on the job. I am sure you would want me to do this.

I am sure my friend Clarence Mitchell, as a former Minnesotan, would expect his Senator to do his duty and to fulfill his responsibilities. You know, these Legislative Representatives really keep an eye on the Members of the Congress. I am trying to preserve a good record -- one which even Clarence Mitchell cannot criticize!

To all of these fine men, and to all of the delegates to the Convention, I extend my heartiest greetings. I am very proud to be a member of the National Board of the NAACP. So, you see, even though I am not with you in the flesh, I am definitely with you in the spirit -- and, to be sure, in voice.

Within a few weeks I shall be attending the Democratic National Convention. You know my politics. I am a Democrat. I ask you, therefore, to bear with me as I express my views on some of the controversial issues of the day. I know that the NAACP is a non-partisan organization, but I also know you are deeply concerned about the principles, platform and candidates of the two great political parties. The great traditions of both political parties are filled with the faith of liberty, equality, and fraternity. It is to these traditions that the political orators pay their tribute.

But I say that it is to these traditions that the modern political parties and their candidates must give reality, and not just lip service. For far too long we have dreamed of the fulfillment of the democratic ideal that all men are created equal. The time for action is now. We are 176 years late in its full realization.

It is in this spirit that I wish to talk with you. I shall speak in frank and plain language. Some may consider this speech partisan. If so, I apologize. But I can to no less than speak my convictions and to ask that these convictions be translated into positive political action through the political parties and through the Congress of the United States.

Were these other times, we could congratulate ourselves on victories past won. We could be reviewing the changes that have taken place before our very eyes, and in our very lifetime -- in our progress in community action, in legislation and judicial decisions.

We could be proclaiming the fact to the world that religious, fraternal, business, labor and educational organizations, representing more than 65 million American citizens, have gone on record favoring full civil liberties to minorities. We could be explaining that these organizations vary in purpose and in composition, but loaned their name and time and their effort to the promulgation of legislation at all levels of government -- Federal, state and local.

We could proudly point back to the judicial decision making it possible to end segregation and other forms of discrimination in interstate transportation and in higher education.

We could be counting complacently the eleven cities in Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia and Florida which recently have passed anti-mask and anti-cross burning ordinances -- and we could be counting the states which have enacted anti-lynching legislation.

We could be pointing to the 10 states and 19 municipalities with Fair Employment Practices laws as proof of the progress we have made, and using the fact that 50 million Americans are today living in localities governed by those laws as proof that Americans want F.E.P.C.

We could be satisfied with the significant strides made by President Truman in the elimination of segregation in the Armed Forces -- and this is a great achievement!

We could be patting our backs with the victories that were ours in 1948 in persuading the Democratic Party to add effective civil rights planks in its campaign platform.

But we cannot be so satisfied, so complacent, so proud, so secure in the inevitable conquest of decency over evil. We cannot rest on evolution alone, particularly in a period when revolution sweeps vast areas of the world. It is imperative that America understands that this revolution which sweeps through Asia and Africa is a positive demand for equality. If America fails to recognize this apparent political fact, it has then failed to equip itself with the philosophy and the mind for world leadership.

These are not ordinary times. Indeed, they are extra-ordinary, thereby requiring extra-ordinary efforts and measures.

It is true that the story of America is one of an expanding democracy, opening up new opportunities to more and more of our citizens to take their place as full and equal partners in a free society without discrimination.

But, we know that the story of America is not finished. The end of discrimination, bigotry, intolerance and segregation is the unfinished business of American Democracy. We must push on with our work. We must never quit until our victory is won.

We know that America and democracy face an enemy so powerful, so ruthless, so attractive to those who are victims of poverty, unhappiness and insecurity that it calls for us to mobilize not only our material resources to meet that enemy, but the deepest and most sincere spiritual and religious resources that democracy can command.

Important as the deadly weapons of armaments may be, they will disintegrate in the face of ideological Communism unless we match that total ideology with a faith and a practice firmly imbedded in our Judaic-Christian principles of human dignity and human brotherhood. As we stand opposed to the doctrines which enslave and reduce men to mere machines, so must we stand committed as a nation to a doctrine which elevates man to the God-like stature of true equality.

People everywhere respect, honor and accept America's great leadership in the fields of science and technology. Here we are strong. We can and do face the world with pride and assurance.

In the area of self-government, (or representative government), we again set the pace. We lead the field. We have proven our ability to govern and maintain a strong economy. People everywhere respect America for its political organization and processes.

But democracy is more than achievement, more than material progress, more than elections and government. Democracy is essentially a faith of freedom and equality, of human dignity and brotherhood.

It is the "spirit" of democracy that we need to strengthen in order to meet the threat of brutalitarianism. That "spirit" has been the victim of a lingering and stubborn infection that saps our strength -- "the infection of discrimination." This is the skeleton in our closet. This is our Achilles heel.

It would be bad enough if discrimination were only a domestic problem, but again I repeat, it is the number one international problem. We, as the proclaimed and acknowledged leaders of freedom and equality, dare not face our adversaries or those we seek to enlist in our cause, unless we "practise" the freedom and equality which we claim.

America's foreign policy is not weak because of lack of money, troops or armaments. It is weak only in so far as we have failed to do that which is so obvious, namely, to declare by public law and public policy to ourselves and the whole world, not only our desire for equality, but our willingness to practise it here and abroad.

There can be no successful foreign policy in the under-developed and under-privileged areas where Communism stalks the land until we can come to the people of Africa and Asia truly believing in and living by the principles of human brotherhood and human equality. Here is an addition to our foreign policy that will build

our reservoir of good will and cost us nothing except the courage of our convictions.

In newspaper headlines, our politicians fill the air with cries for unity in this time of emergency. Some of the leaders of my political party are now urging "harmony". Their yardstick for harmony is to gloss over, or retreat from, the proclaimed platform outlining our objectives in the field of civil rights legislation. This is not harmony. This is capitulation, surrender.

"Civil rights is controversial", they say. "Let us postpone that issue for the time being, or let us compromise."

To these compromisers, to these fearful souls who run from controversy, let me ask them a question --

"Whose rights are you compromising?"

What is it that makes men believe that they have the right to compromise other people's rights?

The majority of the delegates to the two great political conventions have not suffered from discrimination or segregation. They have been able to live in relative safety and security and full citizenship. How easy it is for those who enjoy those privileges to talk about compromise, when they compromise away none of the rights for themselves but only the rights of others.

I will be no part of such a sell-out of other people's rights and privileges.

Now, what are we talking about when we talk about civil rights? Nothing more or less than equal rights for all American citizens.

I ask the leaders of the political parties, "Are you for this, or against this?" The people here at home and around the world want to know. Yes, the people in America, Asia and Africa, in South and Latin America, and in Europe. Do the two great American political parties, either by omission or commission, dare say to a world threatened by Communist tyranny that here in America we believe in a social structure of caste -- a system of the elite?

Mr. Politician -- Mr. Democrat and Mr. Republican wake up -- it's later than you think, the overwhelming majority of Americans believe in human equality -- and they want the Political Parties and Congress to set the standards by resolution and public law.

As one person in our government, as one delegate to a great political party's convention, I will be no part of any deal to any compromise, or any sell-out on the fundamental principal of democracy, equality and human dignity.

Let's be frank about this issue of civil rights. Where civil rights have been denied, the people have suffered. The land has been exploited. The social and economic development has been retarded. Wherever there is a class or caste system, wherever the principle of equality has been defiled, the people have suffered. Some suffer from guilty conscience, others suffer from low standards of living, lack of opportunity, ill-health and poor education.

There is no room for any aristocracy in America. Our Democratic principle is one of judging men on their merit -- not by their race, their color, or the size of their bank roll.

People, many of them, ask me, "Why, Senator Humphrey, why all this emphasis on civil rights?" They say to me, "Is it the only issue that is important?"

I answer them in all candor -- "It is the basic issue."

This is an issue that involves our foreign policy; in fact, it is at the heart of our foreign policy. It is an issue that symbolizes our domestic policy.

As I have said to you earlier, in our efforts to give leadership to a frustrated, weary and unhappy world, we must come with clean hands. We must practise democracy as well as preach it. If we are to export our ideas of democratic living, we must be toolled up for abundant production of democratic faith and performance.

Likewise, if we are to have a liberal domestic program, an expanding economy, a fuller and better life for our people, more effective and responsible government, then everyone must be included. Everyone must participate.

Everyone must be given the opportunity to do his share and to assume his responsibility.

Wherever citizens are denied the right to vote by some antiquated, undemocratic practice, American government and American politics is corrupted and suffers thereby. This is the corruption that needs exposure and a clean up!

Wherever men and women are denied equality of opportunity, the nation's strength is sapped and the abundant treasure of our human resources is wasted.

Wherever there is discrimination, prejudice or bigotry, fear grows where hope should blossom. Hate festers where friendship should flourish.

We are all partners in this constant battle against the evils of prejudice, segregation, discrimination and bigotry. We are all in it together.

And we have common enemies. Make no mistake about that. It is time that we spelled out their record.

We do not need to mince words here. Let's not fool ourselves. The same Dixiecrats who are against civil rights legislation are against practically everything else that goes into making a liberal program. They are the same people who oppose better public health services, for white and Negroes alike. They are against expanding educational opportunities. They are against public housing and slum clearance. They are against minimum wages. They are not only against fair and decent labor legislation, but many of them would like nothing better than to stamp out the trade union movement.

This Dixiecrat philosophy found its way into the McCarran Immigration Bill, a bill which a great President with great courage vetoed, but a Congress dominated by a Republican-Dixiecrat overrode. It is this same reactionary philosophy which blocks every effort of the Congress to alleviate the suffering of almost better than two million migratory workers -- native American citizens who live in conditions of unbelievable degradation and poverty. This is the price that America pays for compromising with the Dixiecrats and their reactionary allies.

In short, these irreconcilable Dixiecrats -- limited in number but loud of voice and clamor -- they are the same people who have tried to undermine every single piece of social welfare legislation that has ever been presented to the Congress or proposed to the American people.

These political bourbons, who worship at the altar of the divince right of "States' Rights" have used the civil rights issue to disguise their other ulterior purposes.

These people call themselves "states' righters", but I shall tell you what they really are. They are the "states' wrongers". They seem to have forgotten their history and failed to have done their home work in American constitutional government.

The people of these United States are not only citizens of their respective states, but also citizens of the United States of America. The issue is not "states' rights". The issue is "states' responsibilities". The state governments have an obligation to their people, but so does the federal government.

Let me say a few words about states' rights. I have served in local government, as a mayor of a great city. I believe in local government, in local initiative, in local responsibility and action. States' rights should be a positive force, not a negative one. States' rights in a democracy should have a constructive meaning.

For example, the rights of states to pioneer in the field of social welfare and human betterment. The rights of states to offer ever increasing opportunity to its people, to adjust inequities.

The true meaning of states' rights is when a state like New York passes an FEPC law and proves that it works. Or when Georgia -- yes, I mean Georgia -- lowers the voting age to 18. Or when Wisconsin pioneers in the field of social security and workmen's compensation. Or when California develops a great program of public education.

This is the states' rights program that America needs, but it is the very program that the Dixiecrats seek to stop.

Our federal government and our state governments must work as a team, because the people of these United States are the sovereign power. It is the people who are to be served -- not the institutions of government. It is the cause of the people that is to be advanced -- not the welfare of the politician. It is the progress and the security of the nation that is our first and sacred trust.

Political parties can justify their existence only insofar as they serve the people, serve the needs of the nation and fulfill the requirements of our democratic creed.

Naturally, I would like to have the Democratic Party one of harmony, one of unity. This is my objective. But harmony and unity cannot be achieved by going back to the yesterdays, retreating from principle, ignoring the legitimate aspirations of the people. Those of us who advocate a broad program of civil rights seek the only harmony which is true and meaningful -- a harmony based upon equal treatment, fair play and equal opportunity.

There can be no harmony or unity where there is discrimination. The harmony and unity we seek is that of the religious teachings we profess, of the political principles we proclaim.

Now, my friends, let me say a few parting words to you. No political party, no organization, and surely no nation ever moved ahead in the path of progress by turning its eyes back to the yesterdays. People of democratic faith and belief should be optimists. They should have their eyes on the future. They should dream great dreams and make noble plans.

It is with this thought in mind that I call upon the Democratic Party to incorporate in its platform not only the civil rights principles as outlined in 1948, but to add real meaning to these principles by calling for an end of that iniquitous, anti-democratic, and miserable practice of the filibuster. The filibuster makes a mockery out of parliamentary debate. The filibuster is a political weapon of those who wish to retard progress of those who seek to block the will of the majority. I shall join with some of my colleagues in the Senate and with many organizations throughout this country in calling upon the Democratic Party and its Platform Committee to include in the Platform of that Party, a plank placing our Party, its leadership, and its followers in opposition to the continued use of the filibuster. We shall call for a new cloture rule that permits free and open debate, full and adequate discussion of every issue, but at the same time, enables the Senate of the United States to legislate and not to be the victim of a willful minority who are determined through trickery and sheer physical stamina to block the enactment of public policy that the nation needs and that the people desire.

Yes, these are indeed trying and difficult days -- all the more reason why our Congress must be equipped to act in behalf of our security and welfare. Every obstacle to effective legislation and fair and honorable legislative machinery must be removed. We can no longer permit undemocratic practices to obstruct the flow of democracy. The forces of democracy are literally fighting for survival. We must be strong materially and spiritually. We must not lose faith. To be sure, we have suffered many defeats and disappointments. I can speak of these defeats and disappointments with personal feeling because I have suffered them on the floor of the Senate. But, just as the power of tyranny and evil is so apparent, so there is a re-awakening of the spirit of freedom, of goodness, of compassion and justice. All over America people are protesting and rising up against bigotry and intolerance. The people are tired of timid politicians and political compromisers. There is a rebirth of faith.

The American people want political parties and candidates of those parties to give them leadership, inspiration, and guidance. The American people call upon their political leaders to act in and live by the great ringing declaration of our way of life -- the declaration that embraces the philosophy of human equality and a people living by, and dedicated to, the worthy principles of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This is our faith. This is our strength.



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