

From the Office of:
SENATOR HUBERT H. HUMPHREY
1313 New Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C.
Capitol 4-3121, Ext. 2424

FOR RELEASE: MONDAY P.M.'s
JUNE 1, 1964

The following is the text of an address by Senator Hubert H. Humphrey (D-Minn.) prepared for commencement exercises at Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee, Monday morning, June 1, 1964:

President Wright, members of the Board of Trustees, members of the 1964 graduating class of Fisk University, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a high honor to come to Fisk University, which has played so eminent a role in the intellectual and moral life of the South and of our Nation--and to share this platform with your distinguished president, Dr. Stephen J. Wright, only recently honored once again by his academic colleagues with a Doctorate of Law from the University of Notre Dame.

President Wright's predecessor, the late Charles S. Johnson, said in his inaugural address: "The most important asset that a society can have is men who can apply the knowledge of the time to the needs of the time." I doubt that any Fisk graduating class has looked out on a nation and a world so bristling with challenges. What calibre of intellectual toughness, of flexibility, of poise and creativity, of moral courage and perseverance is required for the Breakthrough Generation--for you and your contemporaries who will be moving into the American mainstream in numbers and at a rate beyond the imagining of any other generation of American Negroes.

This is a time of troubles and turmoil, a time of change and ferment. Yet it is also a glorious time to be alive. For out of the pain and difficulty of these years there is being forged in America a great consensus--that there will be liberty and equal opportunity in fact for every American.

The vision of that great Southerner who drafted the Declaration of Independence is coming to reality nine generations later. America is late, oh so late, in growing to its full maturity. But in these years of the Sixties, we are, indeed, becoming a mature nation.

Yes, we shall soon pass the Civil Rights Bill of 1964.

The consensus of the American people--and I feel in my soul that in the hearts of the white South there is this same moral conviction--is that this nation must strike down the legal barriers barring the full participation of our Negro fellow-citizens in our democracy.

Yes, there will be a day soon on which most Americans will be justified in walking a little more proudly and finding it a little easier to recite the Pledge of Allegiance--especially the portion which runs "One Nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

A great barrier will begin to swing aside on that day when the Civil Rights bill has passed--a barrier that for generations has been damming back tremendous intellectual resources, incalculable energy and vitality lost to the American nation.

I say "begin." For if the door is being unlocked, if the door is swinging open, it is only just ajar. There will be no miracle wrought overnight. Rather, then will come the real test of the maturity of our people. The bill itself will be but the expression of the determination of the American people to destroy discrimination. The test will be whether the two great races in America can together work not only to dissolve the barriers between them, but to develop a healthier and more active sense of community. That task will test the wisdom, the patience the judgment and the courage of leaders in both the Negro and the white communities.

(MORE)

In both the Negro and the white communities.

I cannot tell you how greatly I respect and admire the self-discipline and perseverance of the leadership of the Negro community. What terrible provocations they have withstood! What bitter tea they have tasted! It would have been all too easy to have taken the path of demagoguery and violence and destruction--and to have lost everything.

There is a time for sowing and a time for reaping. Your leaders have sowed well. They have worked. They have persisted. They have won respect. And now, as we approach the time of the harvest of civil rights, the leadership of both great races in America will be able to work together to translate the law of Civil Rights into the practice of non-discrimination and equal opportunity.

Soon will be the time of the harvest. It will be hard work and it will take long years before it is finished. It will require a continuing spirit of conciliation and a willingness to work together, a steadiness and a steadfastness.

There will be much yet to do when President Johnson has fixed his signature to the Bill for which he and our late President, John F. Kennedy fought so courageously.

Free access to a table at a restaurant will be scant comfort to a man who cannot afford even a modest price for a meal. And FEPC will be scant comfort for a worker who discovers the hard truth that there is nothing he can do that will pay him enough to support his family.

Education and training. Training and education. These are the watchwords. We must invest and invest again in bringing not the worst but the finest of education to those who need it most, to those whose early lives have been blighted by a heritage of indifference and discrimination and poverty. Whatever the cost, it will be less than the cost of not making such an investment. And whatever the cost, it must be paid.

We must begin in the pre-school ages, and we must continue up through the grades, striving for excellence, striving for incentive to study and to learn, striving to light in those young minds the fire of hope and ambition, to make them feel that there is regard for their hard work, that there is an outlet for their training.

As the artificial barriers to advancement fall--and they are falling--we must be certain that there are trained and educated young people ready to step in to compete on an equal basis.

Oh, yes, we are far yet from finding those barriers fully down. The civilian economy has yet to train and upgrade and employ without regard to race or creed, as our defense establishment has done with increasing success. Companies and unions, North and South, must yet scrap their unwritten dogmas of precedence and place--of who must give orders and who must take them, of "sensitive" positions traditionally off-limits to Negroes. But we are already beginning to develop a healthier tradition in this country. Dr. John Hope Franklin, Judge Wade McCree, my good friend L. Howard Bennett of the Department of Defense, and other distinguished alumni of this college, are among the thousands of able men and women who are relegating the myths of racism to the ash heap of history.

Such men are pathfinders, pioneers. They are examples and challenges to the younger men and women who are coming up out of the colleges, and to those children who are coming into the world of education for the first time.

I am pleased and proud, as a man in politics and government, to see so many of your generation taking an interest in politics. I believe strongly in the value of politics as a means of bringing about useful change. I am encouraged when I see young men like State Senator Leroy Johnson of Georgia run for political office and win. It is a good thing for the legislature of that State to have him there. It is a good thing for the Negro and white school children of that state to come into the now desegregated galleries and see him there. It is a good thing for all Georgians to have him sponsor

(MORE)

and secure passage of legislation useful to his own constituents and all the other people of Georgia. Indeed, where Negro Southerners have won the vote in recent years they have lined up firmly on the side of good government.

As the barriers to voting in the South continue to come down, I am certain that other more subtle barriers will fall faster. The ballot is a powerful force. It must be used with intelligence, with judgment, with responsibility--but above all it must be used.

Use the tools of education and the ballot. This is the way upward into that sunlight you have yearned for. This is the path that you young leaders must show to those who follow after you.

Yes, it is a hard and stony path ahead. The way is not easy for you.

Neither will it be easy for others of your fellow Americans. Deeply-rooted habits of thinking and behavior cannot be changed overnight. Change in social patterns is hard-won and slowly accomplished. And the problems will be as severe in the Northern cities as in the South--different, but as difficult. But in a spirit of conciliation and mutual respect, above all in a spirit of fellowship under God, the great remaining task of forging a new and vital and enduring relationship between Negro and white in America can be accomplished. The crucial role that has been played by the Churches in the struggle to pass the Civil Rights bill must be continued. It is imperative. North and South, that the moral leadership of the great religious bodies of America continue to make itself powerfully felt. Men and women must be persuaded, ultimately, to do what is right and just. There must be a consensus developed--in the North and the South -- to accept and to live by the principles which the Congress will reaffirm in the Civil Rights bill.

As we pass the Civil Rights Bill of 1964, then, let us be exalted, but not exultant. Let us mark the occasion with sober rejoicing, and not with shouts of victory. The larger task remains before us--a duty in which every American shares, and the fruits of which task, successfully accomplished, every American will also share.

The danger is that we shall too soon become weary, that we shall not have the staying power, the confidence and the forbearance. The danger is that we may settle for too little, that we may accept token advances, that we may not persevere to the end.

I know that you young men and women will persevere, that you will be equal to the task. And I know that young men and women throughout both the North and the South who are graduating this month will not fail the task. You, and they, will see it through together.

Dr. Mordecai Johnson, seventeen years ago spoke some prophetic and moving words at Fisk. He told us what we would see before us, in this summer of 1964:

"Then we shall see...not a defeat for the South, but the first emergence of the untrammelled and hitherto suppressed and crippled soul of the South's noblest people. Then we shall be on our way - South and North, black and white - to that city which Thomas Jefferson saw when he wrote the Declaration of Independence and which we Negroes have seen and loved in the hearts and lives of those who have taught us here at Fisk University and her kindred institutions."

To which I say.....Amen.

###

Cong Fulton

Senator Hubert H. Humphrey

Commencement Address

Fisk University

June 1, 1964

Nashville, Tenn

L President Wright, members of the Board of
Trustees, members of the 1964 graduating class of Fisk
University, ladies and gentlemen.

L It is a high honor to come to Fisk University,
which has played so eminent a role in the intellectual
and moral life of the South and of our Nation—and it is a rare

privilege to share the platform with your distinguished president,

L Dr. Stephen J. Wright, only recently honored once
again by his academic colleagues with a Doctorate of
Law from the University of Notre Dame.

- Howard Bennett
- Raymond S. Cropps
- Mr. John Hope Franklin.

President Thomas E. Jones
Pres. Charles S. Johnson

President Wright's predecessor, the late
Charles S. Johnson, ^{SAID} ~~said~~ in his inaugural address:

"The most important asset that a society can have is

men who can apply the knowledge of the time to the

needs of the time." I doubt that any Fisk graduating

class has looked out on a nation and a world so

bristling with challenges. ^{A high} ~~best~~ calibre of intellectual

toughness, ~~of~~ flexibility, ~~of~~ poise and creativity,

~~of~~ moral courage and perseverance is required for ~~the~~ ^{this} the

"Breakthrough Generation" -- for you and your contemporaries

~~who~~ will be moving into the American mainstream in

numbers and at a rate beyond the ^{imagination} ~~imagination~~ of any other

generation of American Negroes.

The New
America
before me

This is a time of troubles and turmoil, a time
of change and ferment. Yet it is also a glorious time
to be alive. For out of the pain and difficulty of
these years there is being forged in America a great
consensus - that there will be liberty ^{Justice} and equal
opportunity in fact for every American.

The vision of that great Southerner who drafted
the Declaration of Independence is coming to reality
nine generations later. America is late, oh so late,
in growing to its full maturity. But in these years
of the Sixties, we are, indeed, becoming a mature nation.

Yes, we shall soon pass the Civil Rights Bill
of 1964.

A United
America
Equality

and moral conviction

The consensus of the American people ~~and I~~
~~the moral conviction~~
~~feel in my soul that in the hearts of the white South~~
~~there is this same moral conviction~~ is that this

nation must strike down the ~~legal~~ barriers barring the

full participation of our negro fellow-citizens in our

democracy. ~~The city gates are closed.~~

the day is fast approaching
Yes, ~~there will be a day soon on which most~~

when

Americans will be justified in walking a little more

proudly and finding it a little easier to recite the

Pledge of Allegiance--especially the portion which runs

"One Nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and

justice for all."

A great barrier will begin to ^{Crumble} ~~swing aside~~ on

that day when the Civil Rights bill has passed - ^{now before the Senate} ~~this ugly~~

^{Wall of Discrimination + Segregation} ~~barrier that~~ for generations has been ^{holding back} ~~damping back~~

^{and denying the American nation} ~~vast~~

¹ ~~tremendous~~ intellectual resources, incalculable energy

and vitality ~~lost to the American nation.~~

Civil Rights - Moral issue

" "

Morally Right

" "

even Right

" "

Politically Right

Intern. Impulse

The civil Rights bill is but a beginning

- 6 -

I say "beginning" ^{opportunity} For if the door is being unlocked,

~~if the door is swinging open~~, it is only just ajar.

There will be no miracle wrought overnight. Rather, then

will come the real test of the maturity of our people.

The bill itself will be ~~the~~ the expression of the

determination of the American people to destroy

Statement
of National
Policy.

discrimination. The test will be whether the two

great races in America can work together not only

to dissolve the barriers between them, but to develop

a healthier and more active sense of community. That

task will test the wisdom, the patience, the judgment

and the courage of leaders in both Negro and the

white communities.

In both the Negro and the white communities.

I cannot tell you how greatly I respect and
admire the self-discipline and perseverance of the

leadership of the Negro community. What terrible
provocations ^{the negro has endured,} ~~they have withstood!~~ What bitter tea
^{he has} ~~they have~~ tasted! It would have been all too easy

to have taken the path of demagoguery and violence
and destruction - ^{thus} and to have lost everything.

But loyal, Patriotic, sacrificing
Patient - but now, the
Time has come to close
the Citizenship Gaps

There is a time for sowing and a time for reaping. ~~your leaders have sowed well. They have~~

~~worked. They have persisted. They have won respect.~~

And now, as we approach the time of the harvest of civil rights, the leadership of both great races in

America will be able to work together to translate the law of Civil Rights into the practice of non-

discrimination and equal opportunity. *America will be all the better - all the richer - and stronger.*

Soon will be the time of the harvest. It
will be hard work and it will take long years before
it is finished. It will require a ~~continuing~~ ^{CONTINUING}
spirit of ^{Dedication,} conciliation and a willingness to work
together, a steadiness and a steadfastness.

There will be much yet to do when President
Johnson has fixed his signature to the Bill for which
he and our late President, John F. Kennedy fought
so courageously.

Free access to a table at a restaurant will be scant comfort to a man who cannot afford even a modest price for a meal. And FEPC will be scant comfort to a worker who discovers the hard truth that there is nothing he can do that will pay him enough to support his family.

So Fisk has strengthened
the nation.

L Education and training. Training and education.

These are the watchwords. We must invest and invest

again in bringing ~~not the worst but~~ the finest of

education to those who need it most, to those whose

early lives have been blighted by a heritage of

indifference and discrimination and poverty. Whatever

the cost, it will be less than the cost of not making

such an investment. And whatever the cost, it

must be paid.

Poverty + Civil Rts

We must ¹begin in the pre-school ages, and we must continue up through the grades, striving for excellence, striving for incentive to study and to learn, striving to light in those young minds the fire of hope and ambition, to make them feel that there is reward for their hard work, that there is an outlet for their training.

< As the artificial barriers to advancement fall - and they are falling - we must be certain that there are trained and educated young people ready to step in to compete on an equal basis.

*a great opportunity is now
at hand. America needs
trained people*

I realize that
~~Oh, yes~~, we are far ~~yet~~ from finding those
of discrimination removed
barriers ~~fully down~~. The civilian economy has yet
to train and upgrade and employ without regard to
race or creed, as our defense establishment has done
with increasing success. Companies and unions,
North and South, must yet scrap their unwritten
dogmas of precedence and place - of who must give
orders and who must take them, of "sensitive" positions
traditionally off-limits to Negroes. But we are already
beginning to develop a healthier tradition in this
country. Dr. John Hope Franklin, Judge Wade McCree,
my good friend L. Howard Bennett of the Department of
Defense, and other distinguished alumni of this college,
are among the thousands of able men and women who are
relegating the myths of racism to the ash heap of history.

Such men are pathfinders, pioneers. They
are examples and challenges to the younger men and
women who are coming ~~up~~ out of the colleges, and
to those children who are coming into the world of
education for the first time.

↙ I am pleased and proud, as a man in politics
and government, to see so many of your generation
taking an interest in politics.

I believe strongly in the value of politics
as a means of bringing about useful change. I am
encouraged when I see young men ~~like~~ ^{LIKE} State Senator
Leroy Johnson of Georgia run for political office
and win. It is a good thing for the legislature of
that State to have him there. It is a good thing for
the Negro and white school children of that state
to come into the now desegregated galleries and see
him there. It is a good thing for all Georgians to
have him sponsor and secure passage of legislation
useful to his own constituents and all the other
people of Georgia.

5 citizenship
in Nashville

L Indeed, where Negro Southerners have won the vote in recent years they have lined up firmly on the side of good government.

As the barriers to voting in the South continue to come down, I am certain that other more subtle barriers will fall faster. The ballot is a powerful force. It must be used with intelligence, with judgment, with responsibility - but above all it must be used.

Use the tools of education and the ballot.

This is the way upward into that sunlight you have yearned for. This is the path that ~~you~~ young leaders must show to those who follow after you.

I realize that ~~it~~ it is a hard and stony path ahead. The way is not easy for you.

Neither will it be easy for others of your fellow Americans. Deeply-rooted habits of thinking and behavior cannot be changed overnight. Change in social patterns is hard-won and slowly accomplished. And the problems will be as severe in the Northern cities as in the South - different, but as difficult.

But in a spirit of conciliation and mutual respect, above all in a spirit of fellowship under God, the great remaining task of forging a new, ~~and~~ vital and enduring relationship between Negro and white in America can be accomplished.

The crucial role that has been played by the Churches in the struggle to pass the Civil Rights bill must be continued. It is imperative ⁱⁿ North and South, that the moral leadership of the great religious bodies of America continue to make itself ~~prevalent~~ ^{powerfully felt}. Men and women must be persuaded, ultimately, to do what is right and just. There must be a consensus developed - in the North and the South - to accept and to live by the principles which the Congress will reaffirm in the Civil Rights bill.

As we pass the Civil Rights Bill of 1964,
then, let us be exalted, but not exultant. Let us
mark the occasion with sober rejoicing, and not with
shouts of victory. The larger task remains before
us - a duty in which every American shares, and the
fruits of which task, successfully accomplished,
every American will also share.

The danger is that we shall too soon become
weary, that we shall not have the staying power, the
confidence and the forbearance. The danger is that
we may settle for too little, that we may accept
token advances, that we may not persevere to the end.

I know that you young men and women will persevere, that you will be equal to the task. And I know that young men and women throughout both the North and the South who are graduating this month will not fail the task. You, and they, will see it through together.

Dr. Mordecai Johnson, seventeen years ago spoke some prophetic and moving words at Fisk. He told us what we would see before us, in this summer of 1964:

"Then we shall see....not a defeat for the South, but the first emergence of the untrammelled and hitherto suppressed and crippled soul of the South's noblest people. Then we shall be on our way - South and North, black and white - to that city which Thomas Jefferson saw when he wrote the Declaration of Independence and which we Negroes have seen and loved in the hearts and lives of those who have taught us here at Fisk University and her kindred institutions."

To which I say..... Amen.

###



Minnesota Historical Society

Copyright in this digital version belongs to the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, link to, or email content, however, for individual use.

To request permission for commercial or educational use, please contact the Minnesota Historical Society.



www.mnhs.org