

AFRICAN AMERICAN INSTITUTE

DINNER-DANCE

February 22, 1968

SPEECH OF HUBERT H. HUMPHREY, VICE
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF
AMERICA, AT THE HOME OF ARTHUR AND
MATILDA KRIM, FEBRUARY 22, 1968.

Mr. Krim

My wife and I are delighted to welcome you to our home tonight. We are particularly proud and happy to have the honor of having our old and dear friend the Vice President with us, and he's going to say a few words. And to introduce him to you I want to present the President of the African American Institute

Mr. Wally Nielsen. Wally... (Applause)

Mr. Nielsen

Mr. Vice President and friends of Africa, and the United States...

I've been doing a little library work recently and have turned up some African proverbs that I think are rather nice and perhaps express a couple of the things I'd like to say tonight.

I'd first like to say, on behalf of the African American Institute and all of you, to Matilda and Arthur Krim, our thanks for this wonderful tradition of hospitality here in New York for Africans and Americans that now enters it's tenth year, I believe. And to say that there is this African proverb, "Our love and gratitude is like the misty rain...that comes softly, but floods the river."

I suppose all of us here tonight have in common this one feeling, at least, namely that what has happened in Africa in the last twenty years is one of the great events, not only of our lifetime, but of all human history; and the independence that has come to Africa now means, for a whole branch of the human family, a chance to stand in dignity - and if nothing else - to make their own mistakes the way that some of us have had the chance to make ours over all the centuries.

So, it's a wonderful and inspiring and hopeful change, but it's also a time of difficulty in Africa, and I think the Africans

themselves with their wonderful qualities of patience, have seen the reality - the length of their task - and this recalls to my mind another African proverb. "Be patient, in time even an egg will walk." But I think the rest of us shouldn't be too patient for the Africans. That is, we should not deprive them of the help and the understanding that they can use in the great tasks that they now face. I think that Africans must sometimes feel like another proverb that I found about a stepchild - which is, "Pity the stepchild, if he doesn't wash his hands he is dirty; if he does, he is wasting water!" And I think that perhaps those of us that live our lives here in the setting and the context of the United States perhaps don't fully understand the problems, the needs that exist in these inspiring new countries in Africa. Which calls to mind another proverb, which I think has great wisdom in it, and it is; "He who has carried doesn't realize how far the town is", but because of these needs, because of the hope in Africa for expression of understanding and concern from here, I think the recent trip of our guest of honor tonight assumes a very special importance in the relations between these two great continents. In the years that I have been associated with African Affairs, I think I have never known an occasion like the Vice President's trip that has evoked as much warmth, as much friendly response from Africans; and has displayed to Africans this marvelous warmth and quality of friendship and idealism that we Americans think is perhaps the finest quality of our own society. And it's to honor him on the occasion of his return from this great, and I might even say historic, visit to Africa that we have gathered here tonight. And it is with the greatest pleasure and pride....the Vice President of the United States.

The Vice President

I thank very much Mr. Nielson and our dear and generous and kind and gracious friends Matilda and Arthur Krim, and my good friend this very distinguished African Robert Gardner that's with us tonight, and Your Excellencies and ladies and gentlemen...

You know it's very difficult on an occasion like this to know just what to say. Now, I have it all written out here. I want you to know I have a whole series of cards. In fact, I was looking them over earlier this evening and on the sixth next to the last card it said "and finally"...and I decided if it took six cards to say "and finally" that I really shouldn't look at them, because I can do better than that. I can do at least ten cards after saying "and finally."

This is a very very special occasion. It's really not an occasion for a speech or for an address or even hardly for remarks, It's an occasion for friendship and fellowship, or as we say, just for fun. I've been in this lovely home before and I've been privileged to enjoy the hospitality and the kindness of our host and hostess and I must say that to make a speech on an evening like this is almost beyond the call of duty. But one of the reasons you have a Vice President of the United States is that somebody has to do something beyond the call of duty, I wouldn't say that if I didn't know the President was in Texas.

This evening I've had the privilege of visiting with some of you very briefly and saying hello. A little later I hope that I'll have the opportunity to see many of you in much more of, well, of conversation and dance.

Now, I met somebody here a while ago that somebody told me was the best dancer in the diplomatic corps, and I see him right here. Now, I don't exactly know just which twist or turn that you sort of put your standards upon, but may I say that in the White House corps I'm the second best dancer. I say that because I don't want any competition tonight; our best dancer is busy tonight. We've had a wonderful, wonderful experience in our visit to Africa. I always feel that the best way to talk to people is in truth and candor. When we were planning this journey I wasn't at all sure just what it would be; in fact I had people tell me just prior to my taking the trip, "Do you know that you ought to stay home? There's lots of work to do here." And I reminded one of my associates that said that - I said, well, you just don't seem to understand that I have a tour to make. He said, "Mr. Vice President, you are going to Africa," And the man that said that has something to say about what I'm going to do. I hope he has a great deal to say about what I'm going to do. We'd had a meeting of some of our friends from the African nations who came to the White House for a luncheon. And when the President came into that luncheon he said to the gentlemen assembled, "Your Excellencies, what is it you'd like to have? What is it you'd like us to do?" And I will always remember when one of our dear friends said, "We'd like to have the Vice President come to Africa." What a wonderful man, I tell you...and I didn't even put him up to it. Well, as a result of that suggestion, we planned our visit, and our real problem was when to go. And I think you'll understand our visit was planned for the latter part of December.

The Congress convened or reconvened on January 15th. I do have a family and I had some obligation to not only family, but to other friends and neighbors and we had to decide when we were going to go. I want those representatives of the African Nations here of the countries I did not visit to know...that it was Joe Palmer that cut you out - or should I say that spared you my visit. But in all truth, we only had a few days and we had to decide just where could we go. I made a deal with the State Department, and it's hard to make a deal with the State Department, but I made one. I said, "I'll go to the nine countries that you have listed here, provided you let me come back to the other thirty later." I think I have a deal, but I'm not sure that the State Department always keeps all it's commitments. But I hope it will. In fact, I know they shall.

I said about our visit to Africa, it was a journey of discoverage. And really it was. How few of our fellow Americans really know much about the African continent. And might I say with equal candor, how few of your fellow citizens of your respective countries in Africa know about our great country. What we generally know is square miles and populations, and a few of the generalities; but we don't know too much about each other. Yet, we live in the age of communication where we ought to know much more, I know that the continent of Africa is at least almost four times as large in square miles as the United States. I know that it's population is at least 50% more; over 300 million. We're about 200 million. I know that we have 50 states, and I know that you have almost as many countries on the African continent. But I also know something else - that our fifty states are as different

in many ways as the countries of Africa. What we need to understand is while there are Americans and Africans; there are people. People are very different. Thank goodness. They all have their own individualities, their own personalities and our regions and our areas have our own individualities and personalities. We traveled into some nine countries in some of the French speaking Africa. Some of what we like to think of over here as the English speaking Africa, but in the Africa with their own native tongues too...and everyplace we went we found people that were very different. Not that they were different in the sense of antagonism, but different in their habits, their attitudes, their personalities, their mores; and how good it was to know that. Because you just have to appreciate my friends from Africa, how little sometimes some of us know. I know that we ought to know much more about you, but I want to urge that you also know more about us. You know this great city of New York. You know this Eastern Seaboard; at least you know some of it. I want you to know my part of the country too; the midwest, the far west, the southwest - I want you to know all the people in our country. Those of you that are here as the representatives of your respective countries, travel as much as you can. And then get hold of those friends of yours that are Americans and tell them when they go to Africa to travel much more than the Vice President did. Don't let the Vice President's standard be yours. I had to go primarily to capital cities, important as they are.

Now one or two observations. When I returned or I should say first when I left to go on this journey, and when you got many of us together from industry, from labor and education; from

our private sector and our public services, from journalism and the media...When we left I said, "We're going to go to learn, to listen, to look, to learn," and we did. We learned a great deal. People said, well, you were only gone about 13 days, how could you learn much? Well, if you work six hours a day for 13 days, you don't learn as much as if you work 18. But, what if you work about twenty hours a day for 13 days. That gives you about 26 days, doesn't it? Well, we worked for about 20 hours a day, an average, I think, of better than 18 hours a day. In every place that we went we tried to pour ourselves into the learning process. Now what did I observe above all? I observed a great passion on the part of the peoples that we met and the leaders. Passion! National identification of Independence. I found peoples everywhere who, while they wanted economic assistance and desperately needed an inflow of capital; not one did I find who was willing to trade off their independence or their essential national integrity for economic assistance. And what a wonderful standard that was. I found the most uncomplaining people that I met in any of my visits and I have traveled a great deal. I found a people that were to be remembered by me at least for their good manners, for their friendship, for their openness. Very open - not subtle, not conniving, not in any way deceiving - but very open. Open in their frankness and candor where they thought we were wrong. And very open and candid where they thought we were right. And when I returned I said just that. That we had learned a great deal and that we had met a charming group of people. That we had met people that had a great sense of nationalism and yet with a respect for international respon-

sibilities. That we'd met people with good manners and good humor that could laugh at themselves; and not only at their mistakes, but even at their achievements. May I say that there are many achievements to be observed. I met people that were filled with an unquenchable desire for education, which I think is the first sign of maturity. As our great Thomas Jefferson said, "We cannot be both ignorant and free, We have to make a choice." And they want an education. I met people that realized that they could not dictate, so to speak, the course of this world. That they could make their contribution to a better world by taking care of their own countries. I had people ask me, our own friends from the media and the press, when I returned, "What did they say about Vietnam? What did they say about Berlin? What did they say about Latin America?" I said, "Very little." They talked to me about their countries. Not that they were disinterested in the other parts of the world, but like our own first President, George Washington, reminded us in our early days, "Concentrate your attention upon the development of this society and of this republic." And in country after country, I found people who were really understanding of the responsibilities of independence. People that knew that independence did not bring with it a solution to all the problems that Colonialism had left. That independence brought with it the burdens of responsibility and leadership.

I found something else. Young people. Oh, so many young people. And only recently I have been visiting with the leaders in our

government about these young people. Because the young people are not only the present, they are the future. And we must orient everything that we say and do to the needs and the aspirations of these young people.

Now, my friends, I speak to you as members of the human family. We have a great deal of work to do together. Nielsen tonight gave you some African proverbs. I am not just up to date on African proverbs I am sorry to say. I'm trying to keep up on American proverbs and I am running short of them to cover up all the troubles that we have today in Vietnam. If you think you have troubles in Africa, come see me. We will match your problem for problem and we will give you a little compound interest. But I think there is an old proverb, or should I say quotation from a great American that still stands good for all of us. Those of us all that aspire to at least a life of peace, and a life of hope. At the time that we were trying to create this republic, in a city not too far from here, in Philadelphia, our philosopher of that day was Benjamin Franklin. And when it looked like all was lost and everything was going to break apart, and there was no hope for anyone, Benjamin Franklin got up and said, "Gentlemen, we will either hang together or we'll hang separately." And I believe that this is a might good lesson for all nations today. We have come to learn how to work out our problems together; in dialogue and not diatribe. In discussion and debate rather than in destruction and violence - or we're going to hang separately.

I really urge upon each and every one of us to have a great tolerance for one another. To be forgiving of our limitations

and our mistakes. And might I add, at times with a pat on the back, a word of acclamation and of good wishes for our achievements. I can assure my friends from Africa tonight, and there are many here, that if I have done nothing else in my public life it is to bring back to the people of this country a message of assurance, good will; of confidence from Africa. I was much impressed with what I saw. Greatly moved by the depth of understanding of the leaders that I met. Deeply concerned about the problems that are yet to be solved; and I am one of the few optimists left in this country. They have been withering away with every storm year after year; but I happen to believe that mankind has a desire to survive beyond the desire to destroy himself. And I am convinced that if we will work together, having faith in each other, that there is no problem that cannot be solved or overcome. And that's why I came here tonight to tell you I joined the hospitality of the evening; to tell you that there is a bond among people that ties us together that is greater than any force that pulls us apart, if we will but let it.

Thank you very much.

(Applause)

REMARKS

VICE PRESIDENT HUBERT HUMPHREY
AFRICAN-AMERICAN INSTITUTE DINNER DANCE
FEBRUARY 22, 1968
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Mrs. Humphrey and I are delighted that Arthur and Mathilde Krim and our friends at the African-American Institute would invite us to share this evening with them.

Most of you here this evening know far more about Africa than we do. In our two-week visit, we were, however, able to get a good feeling of the diversity and energy of the African continent. And we came back with several clear and strong impressions.

Needless to say, we were gratified at the warmth and genuine enthusiasm of our welcome everywhere. Without exception we found good will for our country.

We were struck, too, by the healthy nationalism and self-confidence we found. We talked with many leaders -- both in government and outside of government -- and we found them not at all preoccupied with abstract dialectic, but primarily interested in the hard, day-to-day work of building their countries.

We also saw at first-hand that youth is the prevailing fact of Africa. We knew this before we left. But we were hardly prepared for the reality of a continent where 40 percent of the population is under 16. This fact surely must color our decisions and plans in the future.

What does Africa mean to us as Americans?

I doubt that any American could visit nine nations of the African continent, as we did, without returning home excited and concerned about the futures of young nations working hard to lift themselves out of the colonial period and into a new period of both independence and regional cooperation.

I know that we in this country sometimes wish that the outside world -- and particularly those far away places about which we know little -- would go away and stop bothering us.

But I believe that we as a nation, and as individual citizens, have little choice in Africa, as elsewhere, but to play an active and well-conceived role. Some 320 million African people in 39 nations cannot be left solely to the care of the former colonial powers. Nor should they be -- especially when they desperately want our friendship, support and help.

By this, I don't simply mean that Africa needs more foreign aid -- although it does. I mean that all sectors of our society -- and perhaps most of all private business -- must be willing to expand their efforts and their presence.

On our return from Africa, I made a number of concrete proposals to the President and to our government for improvement of African-American relations. I won't go into detail here this evening.

I will say, though, that I am not one of those who believes the Africa continent can be written off as being in "somebody else's sphere of influence," or of such low-priority that it should be all but ignored.

If my mission accomplished nothing else, it did result in the Vice President of the United States -- and other key members of our government and private community -- gaining a first-hand knowledge and feeling about the people, places, and tides of opinion in Africa. For us the Dark Continent is now a little less dark.

I will conclude with one final word: I think we sometimes under-rate the importance of our ideals -- rather than our money or material power -- in the world around us.

Africa is very much a place where self-determination, majority rule, national independence and the rights of man are clear and present issues.

That is all the more reason I believe we Americans must be unequivocally committed to those ideals -- not only abroad, but right here at home.

For if we do not practice what we preach ... if we cannot make those things a reality in our own rich society ... who else in the world can have faith either in us or in their own chances of achieving them?

We are still a young country. And the vitality of our youth ... the clarity of our purpose are very much needed in Africa as elsewhere.

So I guess my message pretty much adds up to asking you to continue what you have already begun -- that is, the building of our healthy and constructive relationship with peoples who want very much the same things we do.

To those African friends who are with us, may I add this: Although we may not have all the answers . . . although we may make our share of mistakes, we do share your aspirations and your hopes. Working together, I hope we may one day achieve them.

#

I am delighted that Arthur and Mathilde Krim and our friends at the African-American Institute would invite us to share this evening with them.

Needless to say, we were gratified at the warmth and genuine enthusiasm of our welcome everywhere. Without exception we found good will for our country.

Most of you here this evening know far more about Africa than we do. In our two-week visit, we were, however, able to get a good feeling of the diversity and energy of the African continent. And we came back with several clear and strong impressions.

We were struck, too, by the healthy nationalism and self-confidence we found. We talked with many leaders -- both in government and outside of government -- and we found them not at all preoccupied with abstract dialectic, but primarily interested in the hard, day-to-day work of building their countries.

5

We also saw at first-hand that youth is the prevailing fact of Africa. We knew this before we left. But we were hardly prepared for the reality of a continent where 40 percent of the population is under 16. This fact surely must color our decisions and plans in the future.

6

What does Africa mean to us as Americans?

I doubt that any American could visit nine nations of the African continent, as we did, without returning home excited and concerned about the futures of young nations working hard to lift themselves out of the colonial period and into a new period of both independence and regional cooperation.

7

I know that we in this country sometimes wish that the outside world -- and particularly those far away places about which we know little -- would go away and stop bothering us.

But I believe that we as a nation, and as individual citizens, have little choice in Africa, as elsewhere, but to play an active and well-conceived role.

8

Some 320 million African people in 39 nations cannot be left solely to the care of the former colonial powers. Nor should they be -- especially when they desperately want our friendship, support and help.

By this, I don't simply mean that Africa needs more foreign aid -- although it does.

9

I mean that all sectors of our society -- and perhaps most of all private business -- must be willing to expand their efforts and their presence.

On our return from Africa, I made a number of concrete proposals to the President and to our government for improvement

10

of African-American relations. I won't go into detail here this evening.

I will say, though, that I am not one of those who believes the Africa continent can be written off as being in "somebody else's sphere of influence," or of such low-priority that it should be all but ignored.

11

If my mission accomplished nothing else, it did result in the Vice President of the United States -- and other key members of our government and private community -- gaining a first-hand knowledge and feeling about the people, places, and tides of opinion in Africa.

12

For us the Dark Continent is now a little less dark.

I will conclude with one final word: I think we sometimes under-rate the importance of our ideals -- rather than our money or material power -- in the world around us.

13

Africa is very much a place where self-determination, majority rule, national independence and the rights of man are clear and present issues.

That is all the more reason I believe we Americans must be unequivocally committed to those ideals -- not only abroad, but right here at home.

14

For if we do not practice what we preach ... if we cannot make those things a reality in our own rich society ... who else in the world can have faith either in us or in their own chances of achieving them?

15

We are still a young country. And the vitality of our youth ... the clarity of our purpose are very much needed in Africa as elsewhere.

16

So I guess my message pretty much adds up to asking you to continue what you have already begun -- that is, the building of our healthy and constructive relationship with peoples who want very much the same things we do.

To those African friends who are with us, may I add
this: Although we may not have all the answers ... although we
may make our share of mistakes, we do share your aspirations
and your hopes. Working together, I hope we may one day
achieve them.

#



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