

REMARKS OF FRANCES HUMPHREY HOWARD

NAACP ANNUAL DINNER MEETING
WALTER WHITE AWARD

New York City, New York
January 8, 1978

Chairperson Wilson, Executive Director Hooks, my good friend Clarence Mitchell and all of you here tonight to participate in the Annual Dinner Meeting of the NAACP:

It is with a deep sense of gratitude that I accept the first Walter White Award on behalf of my brother, Senator Hubert H. Humphrey.

Hubert asked me to express his sincere regret at not being able to be with you this evening. You are his friends -- constant, caring, working together over four decades for the fulfillment of the rights and the human potential of all of our people. I know he misses this chance to be with all of you once again to recall the progress made and the journey that remains.

My brother has prepared a brief message which I would like to share with you now:

"I deeply appreciate the honor which my friends, my allies, in the cause of an equal chance in life for all Americans have bestowed upon me tonight. This NAACP award is named after a great American who was my friend and a gallant champion of human rights. So this honor is doubly meaningful to me."

"I knew Walter White, admired him, and learned a great deal from him when I first began my political career. Of all the great contributions which he made to the civil rights movement, the most lasting was his conviction that legislative action must be a continuous high priority. History has clearly shown just how right he was."

"I am so sorry I can't be with you tonight. Our friendship goes all the way back to Minneapolis in the early 1940's. Four decades of work, of tears, of great successes -- and some failures, too -- bind us together. We have shared so much for so long. The NAACP is truly a part of my family."

"Your commitment to equal rights, to an equal chance in life for all our people, has made great progress possible. Because of your efforts we have rewritten the nation's laws to clearly recognize equal rights for all Americans. And, don't let anyone sell this achievement short -- it is monumental. Without it, equality of opportunity is not possible in education, in employment, in your neighborhood, in any important aspect of American life."

"Today, conditions are better for most black Americans than they were for their parents or grandparents. That is progress, real progress, from which we can all draw strength. Yes, strength, because that is what is needed now to launch a new attack on the discrimination and unequal treatment that remain so manifest in our society. The gap that exists between the standard of living of white and black Americans is a valley of shame that must, by our efforts, be bridged."

"True, black family income has risen greatly in the last thirty years. But, tragically, it is still only 62 percent of the average white family's income."

"True, more young black children are graduating from high school today than ever before. But, still, fewer than half of all blacks over eighteen years of age have a high school diploma. Even more astounding, in 1975 white men with high school diplomas had an average income only \$100 less than black men who had earned college degrees. This injustice is intolerable."

"True, many more black people hold professional jobs, managerial jobs, skilled jobs than ever before. But, unemployment among blacks is still more than double the white unemployment rate, even using the conservative official figures. And, among black youth in our cities, unemployment has become normal and to be expected."

"True, there are more middle income and upper income black families in America now than ever before in history. But, incredibly, 27 percent of our black families still struggle to survive on incomes that are below the "official" poverty line."

"Yes, we need to draw upon the strength of our successes, to tackle the serious problems of injustice that remain to rob our people of their dignity and our democracy of its true promise. We cannot lead the world in a moral quest for human rights unless we fully recognize our human rights failures here at home first."

"As I see it, our first priority must be jobs for all. We must have a new Full Employment Policy to assure vigorous economic growth that reaches all our people, particularly those whom the system has missed for so long. There will be no movement toward economic equality in an economy that zigs and zags from recession to slow growth and back to recession once again. And, when America suffers a recession, black America is plunged into depression."

"The so-called Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment Bill is the indispensable first step toward economic justice. Don't listen to those who say it is watered down and not worth fighting for. Most of these people have no idea how national economic decisions are made. Many have never even read the bill."

"I will never deceive you, and I believe you know it. This legislation is a must. I have worked on it for four years. It will change the nature of the economic decision making process in America. It will give full employment the priority it has not had for many years. And, with your strong support, we can get this vital legislation enacted."

"But, we need much more. Humphrey-Hawkins is no miracle cure. We will need the specific training, job and economic development programs that implement Humphrey-Hawkins policy objectives if we are going to meet the job and income needs of all our citizens."

"Second, we must have a new urban development policy to make our cities the thriving, safe and healthy places to live and work that they must be."

"Our cities have become the shame of a great nation. We must work together toward establishing a policy that will bring jobs back to our cities, improve the quality of services available to those who live in our cities, reduce the crushing welfare burden and restore hope in our great urban centers."

"We must also do a better job of preparing our children to contribute to and share in the great abundance of our nation. There is no possibility of equal employment or equal income opportunity unless quality education is universally available. It cannot remain dependent on the wealth of the neighborhood in which a child grows up. That is gross economic discrimination, and it must be put to an end."

"For years we worked together on anti-lynching laws, on poll tax legislation, on voting rights and basic civil rights law. We succeeded, and the outrages of the past in statutory laws reflecting the doctrine of "separate and unequal" are, by and large, behind us."

"Today, we need to commit ourselves with the same vigor, enthusiasm and determination to fulfilling the promise of the rights that have been won. It is no longer good enough that black children do better than their parents or grandparents. We can only be satisfied when black Americans and white Americans can go as far as their ability and energy take them -- when differences in income, in education, in housing, in health care, can no longer be related to race."

"Millions of Americans dream this same dream and thirst for justice. Our challenge is to build on the basic values which Americans share and translate this source of power for right into progress toward greater justice for all Americans in the years ahead."

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