

**2004 NAACP Convention Speech  
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**Vice-Chair Roslyn Brock, members of the NAACP Board of Directors and SCF Trustees, CEO Mfume, delegates and friends – welcome to the 95<sup>th</sup> NAACP convention.**

**We are here to announce, “The race is on! The gloves are off! We are in a fight for our lives, and we are here to commit to winning it!”**

**It is fitting that we commit ourselves to this fight for democracy in the city where our democracy was born.**

**This is also the place where, more than a hundred years ago, one of our founders, Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, conducted his landmark study that became The Philadelphia Negro, published in 1899.**

**Invited by the University of Pennsylvania to research “the Negro problem,” DuBois wrote candidly of black behavioral problems and of “a spirit of self-help,”<sup>i</sup> exhorting,**

**“Against prejudice, injustice and wrong the Negro ought to protest energetically and continuously, but he must never forget that he protests because those things hinder his**

own efforts, and that those efforts are the key to his future.”<sup>ii</sup>

In the spirit of DuBois, the NAACP is today one of the largest self-help groups in the country. It is no accident that, for 95 years, we’ve led the way in taking personal responsibility for making right America’s wrongs.

DuBois understood, as do we, that poverty’s symptoms must not be confused with poverty’s causes. He said:

“[M]en have a right to object to a race so poor and ignorant and inefficient as the mass of Negroes; but if their policy in the past is parent of much of this condition, and if today by shutting black boys and girls out of most avenues of decent employment they are increasing pauperism and vice, then they must hold themselves largely responsible for the deplorable results.”<sup>iii</sup>

DuBois arrived here in Philadelphia in 1896, the same year the United States Supreme Court ratified separate and unequal lives for black and white Americans in Plessy v. Ferguson.

We meet 50 years after the Court overruled Plessy and unanimously declared, in Brown v. Board of Education, that segregated schools violate the Constitution’s promise of equal protection.

There can be no mistake – those fifty years since Brown have seen the fortunes of black America advance and retreat, but the decision is always cause for sober celebration, not impotent dismay.

We celebrate the brilliant legal minds who were the architects of Brown v. Board; we celebrate the brave families who were its plaintiffs; and we celebrate the legal principle that remains its enduring legacy - that, in the words of Chief Justice Earl Warren, "the doctrine of

separate but equal has no place.”<sup>iv</sup>

That the quest for meaningful equality – political and economic equity – remains unfulfilled today is no indictment of past efforts. It is testament to the challenge before us.

As we commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that landmark decision, it is easy to cast a cynical eye on the status of school desegregation in America today – or the sorry state of race relations – and minimize the significance of Brown. That is a grave mistake, for Brown, by destroying segregation’s legality, gave a nonviolent army the power to destroy segregation’s morality as well.

Thus it is no coincidence that this year we also celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act – the most sweeping civil rights legislation before or since, and our democracy’s finest hour.

When he sent what would become the 1964 Civil Rights Act to Congress, President John F. Kennedy said:

“When Americans are sent to Viet Nam or West Berlin, we do not ask for whites only.”

Today, when Americans are being sent to Afghanistan and Iraq, we do not ask for whites only.

So this convention, as we commemorate these anniversaries, is a time to examine our present in relation to our past. And as we prepare for national elections this fall, this convention will be a time for an examination of our present in relation to our future.

We look back on the years between Brown and the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act with some pride.

In those years, Brown's anniversary became a celebratory signpost, as major events focused on commemorating the date.

The year after Brown, Rosa Parks sat down to stand up for her rights, and the Montgomery bus boycott began.

Martin Luther King's first national address was at a 1957 Prayer Pilgrimage on the third anniversary of Brown at the Lincoln Memorial.

Later that same year the Little Rock Nine successfully integrated Little Rock's Central High School.

Sit-ins at segregated lunch counters burst out across the South in 1960, followed by the Freedom Rides of 1961 and the forcible integration of Ole Miss in 1962.

In 1963 alone, the year that King – fresh from the battlefields of Birmingham – told the nation of his dream at the March on Washington, there were more than 10,000 anti-racist demonstrations.

King was the most famous and well known of the modern movement's personalities, but it was a people's movement. It produced leaders of its own; but it relied not on the noted but the nameless, not on the famous but the faceless. It didn't wait for commands from afar to begin a campaign against injustice. It saw wrong and acted against it.

Those were the days when women and men of all races and creeds worked together in the cause of civil rights.

Those were the days when good music was popular and popular music was good.

Those were the days when the President picked the Supreme Court and not the other way around.

Those were the days when we had a war on poverty, not a war on the poor. Those were the days when patriotism was a reason for open-eyed disobedience, not an excuse for blind allegiance.

Those were the days when the news media really was “fair and balanced” and not just cheerleaders for the powerful.

But those were not “the good old days.”

Then, the American social order was rigidly stratified and racially codified.

In those days, “[t]he law, the courts, the schools, and almost every institution ... favored whites. This was white supremacy.”<sup>v</sup>

This was a massive system of racial preferences, enforced by law and terror. It began with slave-catching in Africa, and it continues on to the present day.

Only when we acknowledge the name, nature and scope of the problem can we measure the magnitude of our successes – and the costs of our failures.

The day Brown was decided, the NAACP held a news conference to announce an ambitious new agenda. To Thurgood Marshall, Brown was the Magna Carta of black America, a declaration of our rights. School segregation would be eliminated, he thought, within five years. He was right about the former; he was obviously wrong about the latter.

Within a year, in Brown II, the Supreme Court allowed desegregation to proceed “with all deliberate speed.” For the first time, the Court had declared a right and delayed its implementation.

Three months after Brown II, Emmett Till, who was nearly my age, was murdered in Money, Mississippi, for whistling at a white woman. His death and the black newspapers that came into my

**Pennsylvania home created a great vulnerability and fear of all things southern in my teenaged mind. When my parents announced in 1957 that we were relocating to Atlanta, I was filled with dread.**

**Emmett Till's death had frightened me. But in the fall of 1957 a group of black teenagers encouraged me to put that fear aside. These young people – the nine young women and men who integrated Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas – set a high standard of grace and courage under fire as they dared the mobs who surrounded their school.**

**Here, I thought, is what I hope I can be, if ever the chance comes my way.**

**The chance to test and prove myself did come my way in 1960, as it came to thousands of other black high school and college students across the South. First through the sit-ins, then in Freedom Rides, and then in the voter registration and political organizing drives in the rural South, we joined an old movement against white supremacy that had deep, strong roots; for many of us, however, it was the recent Brown decision that had created the opportunity for young people to play active roles, to seize and share leadership in the movement for social justice.**

**Brown was the movement's greatest legal victory. It changed the legal status of black Americans, and ironically made challenges to the established movement's narrow reliance on legal action possible.**

**As Richard Kluger has written:**

**“Not until the Supreme Court acted in 1954 did the nation acknowledge it had been blaming the black man for what it had done to him. His sentence to second class citizenship had been commuted; the quest for meaningful equality – equality in fact as well as in law – had begun.”<sup>vi</sup>**

**I believe in an integrated America – integrated jobs, homes and schools. I believe in it enough to have spent most of my life in its elusive pursuit. I think it is a legal, moral and political imperative for America – a matter of elemental justice, simple right waged against historical wrong.**

**Brown was about black inequality, what Lyndon Johnson called “the one huge wrong of the American nation.”<sup>vii</sup>**

**“The Supreme Court said nothing about Latinos until nineteen years after Brown and there never was any significant enforcement of desegregation for Latinos.”<sup>viii</sup>**

**Today, “U. S. schools are becoming more segregated in all regions for both African-American and Latino students.”<sup>ix</sup>**

**By contrast, Asian students are the most integrated.<sup>x</sup>**

**I not only have spent most of my life in the cause of integration, in 1947 – when I was seven years old – I was a plaintiff in a lawsuit in rural Pennsylvania against segregated schools.**

**It never came to trial. The school board had segregated schools by giving students achievement tests which all blacks failed and all whites passed, but when the two dumb sons of the local white political boss failed the test, they closed the black school, and all of Lincoln University Village’s children went to a one-room school together.**

**This year I visited Berea College in Kentucky, opened by abolitionists as an integrated school in 1855. It was closed by the Civil War, but opened again in 1866 with 187 students – 96 blacks and 91 whites. It dared to provide a rare commodity in the former slave states: an education open to all - blacks and whites, women and men.**

**One of those early students was my grandfather.**

**Like many others, I am the grandson of a slave. My grandfather was born in 1863, in Kentucky; freedom didn't come for him until the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment was ratified in 1865.**

**He and his mother were property, like a horse or a chair. As a young girl, she had been given away as a wedding present to a new bride, and when that bride became pregnant, her husband – that's my great-grandmother's owner and master – exercised his right to take his wife's slave as his mistress.**

**That union produced two children, one of them my grandfather.**

**At age 15, barely able to read and write, he hitched his tuition – a steer – to a rope and walked across Kentucky to Berea College and the college took him in.**

**Today, some call us pessimists. How dare they? We are the ones who believed in the American dream even while we lived a nightmare. We not only believed in it, we fought for it. Many died for it. They ought to call us patriots.**

**When my grandfather graduated from Berea, he was asked to deliver the commencement address. He said then:**

**"The pessimist from his corner looks out upon the world of wickedness and sin, and blinded to all that is good or hopeful in the condition and progress of the human race, bewails the present state of affairs and predicts woeful things for the future."**

**"In every cloud he beholds a destructive storm, in every flash of lightning an omen of evil and in every shadow that falls across his path a lurking foe."**

**"He forgets that the clouds also bring life and hope, that the lightning purifies the atmosphere, that shadow and darkness prepare for sunshine and growth, and that**



**hardships and adversity nerve the race, as the individual, for greater efforts and grander victories.<sup>xi</sup>**

**Greater efforts and grander victories – that is the promise we expect to fulfill at the ballot box this fall.**

**My grandfather belonged to a transcendent generation of black Americans, a generation born into slavery, a generation freed from servitude by the Civil War, a generation determined to make their way as free women and men. From Berea, he studied for the ministry, married, and had six children – one of them my father, Horace Mann Bond.**

**My father graduated from Pennsylvania's Lincoln University and earned a doctorate in education from the University of Chicago. For him, too, education was a means to a larger end - the uplift of his people and the salvation of his race.**

**How fitting, then, that he would be asked to help the NAACP in its legal campaign against school segregation - the campaign that culminated in Brown v. Board of Education.**

**Perhaps, having done the right thing by denouncing "separate but equal", the Court then felt free to delay the implementation of what it had announced. Whatever the reason, the phrase "with all deliberate speed" was added to the lexicon of ignominious judicial pronouncements less than a year after one of the most shameful judicial doctrines had been discarded.**

**For the first ten years after Brown, the emphasis was more on "deliberate" than on "speed." The focus was on dismantling the dual school systems in the South, the products of de jure segregation, and in**

southern accents, all deliberate speed meant any conceivable delay. President Dwight Eisenhower had lobbied Chief Justice Warren to rule for the Southern states and segregated schools; he never endorsed the Brown decision, and the resistant white South, emboldened by his rectitude, reacted with evasion and delay. Their tactics included violence, expansion of private schools, state support for fleeing white students, proposals to abolish public education, repeal of compulsory attendance laws, and the long discarded theories of interposition and nullification. Prince Edward County, Virginia, simply closed its public schools for five years, believing that uneducated children were preferable to integrated ones. Where massive resistance failed, aggressive resistance succeeded.

By the end of 1964, ten years after Brown, more than 97% of all Southern black children still attended segregated schools. There was far too much deliberation and far too little speed.

When Congress was debating the 1964 Civil Rights Act, in all of Alabama, only 29 black students attended formerly white schools, only 9 in South Carolina, and none in Mississippi.

The four years following the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 represent the only period in the 50-year-history of Brown when there was active support for desegregation from both the executive branch and the courts.

For the first time, under a southern President, Lyndon Johnson, the Federal government began to take an active role. This period saw the percentage of black children in school with white ones more than quadruple, rising from 3 to 13%.

But still there were costs. Surrendering to caution, the integration

process became a one-way street as a few black students and fewer black teachers and even fewer administrators were admitted to formerly all-white schools. Thousands of black schoolteachers lost their jobs as black and white schools merged. Lost too was history – revered school names, mottoes, mascots, traditions. Plaques, trophy cases, school colors – all the artifacts that honored black achievement disappeared. Black students found themselves in formerly all-white school buildings that retained the character and identity acquired in the segregated past – Booker T. Washington High School vanished; Robert E. Lee High School persevered.

In President Lyndon Johnson's last year in office, the federal government reviewed 28 communities for compliance with desegregation guidelines; by President Richard Nixon's second term the number had dropped to none.

The years 1968-73, however, represent the most active period of Supreme Court intervention on behalf of school desegregation. The Court that 13 years earlier had been content to see desegregation proceed “with all deliberate speed” ordered segregation removed “root and branch” in 1968.<sup>xii</sup>

To that end, it allowed busing in 1971.<sup>xiii</sup>

Johnson's commitment to civil rights had sustained enforcement efforts in the South in the face of widespread white opposition. When Republicans captured the White House, the process was politicized, and the principle sanction available to enforce desegregation, cutting off federal funds, was renounced.

The Carter Administration attempted to revive fund cutoff enforcement. Cut-off action was begun in Kansas City. But the only

limiting amendment adopted by Congress to the '64 Civil Rights Act was pushed by liberal Democrats Thomas Eagleton of Missouri and Joseph Biden of Delaware, when schools in their home states faced desegregation efforts.

The Reagan Administration launched an attack on school desegregation. They invited school districts to reverse existing desegregation orders and intervened in court cases even where school boards had not requested it. They asked the Supreme Court to authorize tax exemptions for private segregated schools. They settled cases with remedies that had failed elsewhere. They eliminated the major desegregation aid program.

What distinguished the Administrations of Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush was their attacks on virtually all components affecting segregation and discrimination in American education.

After passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the first President Bush, then a House member, told his fellow Texans, “The new Civil Rights Act was passed to protect 14% of the people. I’m worried about the other 86%.”<sup>xiv</sup>

The percentage of black students at majority white schools in the South went from zero in 1954 to a peak of 43.5 percent in 1988, proving there is nothing wrong with Brown’s premise. It is Brown’s promise that has been broken – betrayed by a failure of Presidential leadership, by a lack of Congressional oversight and action, by a retreat by the federal bureaucracy charged with enforcement, and by a series of unfavorable court rulings.

When William Rehnquist joined the Supreme Court, courtesy of Richard Nixon, all major desegregation cases since Brown had been

unanimous. Rehnquist, as a clerk to Justice Jackson during the Brown case, had written a memo arguing that the Court should uphold Plessy v. Ferguson. Then he lied about it at his confirmation hearing. As a Justice himself, Rehnquist cast the first dissenting vote in a post-Brown desegregation case in 1973, setting the stage for what would become a new anti-desegregation majority in the 1990s after he became Chief Justice.

So today we have a Chief Justice who has consistently opposed school desegregation and an Attorney General who built his political career on lambasting the efforts of the federal courts to desegregate St. Louis and Kansas City schools. As Missouri's Attorney General and then Governor, John Ashcroft continually attacked the federal courts managing school integration in his state and, when the courts found the state to be "the primary constitutional violator," he fought to limit the state's contribution to the remedy the court imposed.<sup>xv</sup>

It is hardly a surprise, then, that when the current state of school integration is examined, discouraging results abound.

If the years since Brown have not succeeded in dismantling segregated schools, those years have seen American support for segregated education shrink.<sup>xvi</sup>

That is modest achievement for black Americans. For us and other minorities, separate has never been equal, not then, not now.

America's history tells us that has always been true.

There are few matters on which experts in any given field agree. Educational experts, however, agree that no school district in America has managed to create equal education on a large scale in segregated schools, be they black or Hispanic. This is not to say that one-race

**schools are never successful. A few are - particularly on the elementary level. But the bottom line is that students who attend schools that are segregated by race and income consistently rank lower in educational achievement, especially at the secondary school level.<sup>xvii</sup> In short, the United States can't afford separate schools.**

**The educational damage done by racial segregation does not grow from the relationship between blacks and whites alone; it grows from the relationship between blacks and whites and green. In America, the education dollar follows the white child. The students who are most likely to find themselves in schools of concentrated poverty today are not white; they are black and Latino.<sup>xviii</sup>**

**Compared with poor whites, poor blacks are more likely to live in neighborhoods where a high percentage of the residents are poor. They interact mainly with others who are poor, who share their disadvantage.**

**They live, squeezed together, in less than standard housing, in neighborhoods denuded of essential services. Their neighborhoods are economically and racially segregated, bereft of opportunity, out of sight and out of mind.**

**Their children attend schools only with other poor, minority children. As the New Jersey Supreme Court said, "They face, through no fault of their own, a life of poverty and isolation that most of us cannot begin to understand and appreciate."<sup>xix</sup>**

**Fewer dollars in the parents' pockets mean fewer dollars in the school board's treasury. Children in high poverty schools read less, get lower grades, and miss more days of school.<sup>xx</sup>**

**Economic and racial integration are preconditions for equal opportunity. Once achieved, they permanently alter the pattern of**

minority-majority relationships.

In cities where school integration exists, it is not only the most visible form of desegregation, but the only one that impacts personally on the lives of millions of whites.<sup>xxi</sup> This is why many whites have so strongly resisted it; it is also why blacks and other minorities must continue to insist upon it.

I recently heard Minnie Jean Brown reflect on her experiences as one of the heroic Little Rock Nine who integrated Central High School in 1957. Someone asked why she kept coming back to school day after day, despite daily harassment and intimidation that would have driven most people away.

From the ferocity of her enemies, she said, “I knew there was something precious inside that school,” and she was even more determined to get it than they were to keep it from her grasp.

There are those who scoff at Brown as if the advantages to black children were to be gained simply by sitting next to white ones in a classroom, as if a skin-to-skin transfer of knowledge and education could occur. These critics miss the point of integrated schools.

Integrated schools are, as one expert said, “truly radical.”<sup>xxii</sup> A public educational system that is fully integrated and treats minorities and whites equally, is the antithesis of the larger society, which is profoundly segregated and unequal. The goal of putting minorities and whites in the same classrooms is not only to equalize education, but also to change the formative racial experiences of the next generation.

Today minority children face inequalities in school spending, and more – they face what Jonathan Kozol calls “punitive testing and accountability agendas” imposed by the No Child Left Behind Act.

Schools have adopted a “grill and drill curriculum” that substitutes learning by rote and teaching to the test for the transmission of critical thinking from teacher to pupil.<sup>xxiii</sup>

On our present course, we are formalizing two school systems: one filled with middle class children, most of them white, and one filled with low-income minorities. For too many, the latter schools have become conveyor belts to prison.

There were an estimated 98,000 blacks imprisoned on the day Brown was decided in 1954. Today there are 884,500. More than half of black men in their early 30s who are high school dropouts also have a prison record.

Here in Pennsylvania, 2 in 3 black fifth graders do not read on grade level, compared to 1 in 3 whites. Four in 5 black eighth graders do not do math on grade level, compared to 2 in 5 of their white counterparts.

Not surprisingly, there is a graduation rate gap, too. Three in 10 blacks from Pennsylvania’s high school class of 2002 did not graduate, compared to only 1 in 10 whites.

Pennsylvania spends more than \$27,000 annually per prison inmate. That’s more than twice the cost of a year’s tuition at Pennsylvania State University.

Our future as a nation depends on our willingness to continue to reach into the racial cleavage that defines American society and change the racial contours of our world. In 1954, the Federal government’s brief in Brown argued that school desegregation was a cold war imperative, a necessary weapon to win America’s battles overseas. Current events give us the same imperative – to prove to enemy and ally



**alike that our commitment to justice is sincere.**

**We meet while an unwise war of occupation continues in Iraq, a war without reason or necessity. It was not about weapons of mass destruction, but rather the crass obstruction of the truth.**

**Now the war has created the very terrorist training camp in Iraq its sponsors said was its cause.**

**The war's defenders have tried to stifle political debate – if you oppose the war, they say, you don't support our troops.**

**That's nonsense. If it was up to us, every man and woman stationed in Iraq would be safely at home right now.**

**When Martin Luther King spoke out against the war in Vietnam in 1965, he was revolted at the hypocrisy of America's claims for freedom overseas when blacks enjoyed few freedoms here. War abroad, King said, stole from Americans at home.**

**“The pursuit of widened war,” he said in 1966, “has narrowed domestic welfare programs, making the poor, white and Negro, bear the heaviest burdens at the front and at home.”**

**How sadly true those words ring today.**

**The NAACP has always been non-partisan, but that doesn't mean we're non-critical. For as long as we've existed, whether Democrats or Republicans have occupied the White House, we've spoken truth to power.**

**When his friends asked Harry Truman, “Mr. President, why do you give the other side so much hell?” Truman said, “I just tell the truth and they think it's hell!” When any political party places politics over principle, we're going to give them non-partisan hell!**

When we were founded in 1909, Theodore Roosevelt was ending his second term. He shared traits with many of today's Negrophobes – he liked individual African-Americans but believed the mass were less than human.

His successor, William Howard Taft, said his “little brown brothers” – that's us – would need “fifty to 100 years” to become equal with whites.

Woodrow Wilson, who institutionalized segregation in the federal bureaucracy, succeeded Taft. The NAACP's James Weldon Johnson said of him, “My distrust and dislike ... came nearer to constituting keen hatred for an individual than anything I have ever felt.”

Warren Harding, who followed, joked with Johnson about the rumor Harding had African-American blood; where have we heard that before? Whatever kind of blood he had, Harding had neither the heart nor courage to right the wrongs that afflicted people of color.

NAACP Executive Secretary Walter White was prescient in the Calvin Coolidge years when he said, “The Republicans will absorb the anti-Negro south and become ... the relatively anti-Negro party, while the Negro will find refuge in the Democratic Party.”

White said the next President, Herbert Hoover, showed nothing “to indicate he regarded Negroes as citizens and human beings.”

Franklin Roosevelt served almost four terms. By the time he died in 1945 his economic policies and the personality and politics of first lady Eleanor Roosevelt had hastened black conversion to the Democratic Party.

Harry Truman became the first President to speak to an NAACP audience.

The next President, Dwight Eisenhower, told “nigger jokes” in the White House. But he made some black appointments, and his reward was 60% of the black vote against Adlai Stevenson in 1956, temporarily reversing the black slide to the Democrats that Franklin Roosevelt had begun.

John F. Kennedy’s 1960 campaign reversed the Eisenhower shift toward Republicans when he pledged to eliminate housing segregation “with the stroke of a pen” and when he made a famous telephone call – ignored in the mainstream press – to the wife of jailed Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

An assassin’s bullet brought Lyndon Johnson to office – and he pursued civil rights as had no president before him and no president since. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 are part of his legacy.

But the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 marked the beginning of the dependence of the Republican Party on the politics of racial division to win elections and gain power. By playing the race card in election after election, they’ve appealed to the dark underside of American culture, to the minority of Americans who reject democracy and equality.

They preach racial neutrality and practice racial division. Apparently they really do think we all look alike – to hear them, Martin Luther King and Clarence Thomas are the same man.

They’ve tried to patch the leaky economy – and every other domestic problem - with duct tape and plastic sheets.

They write a new Constitution for Iraq and ignore the Constitution here at home.

**They say giving health care to all Iraqis is sound policy; they say giving health care to all Americans is socialism.**

**If a president lies about having an affair, they say “Impeach him!” If a president lies about going to war, they say “Re-elect him!”**

**If you’re a drug addict on the street, they say it’s a crime, but if you’re a right wing radio talk show host, they say it’s an illness.**

**They use our troops for photo ops while cutting veterans’ benefits and combat pay.**

**They operate a perpetual motion attack machine and squeal like stuck pigs if you answer back.**

**Overdosed on testosterone, they’ve descended into the very vulgarity they say they want to keep off the airwaves.**

**They believe in the politics of fear; we believe in the politics of hope.**

**Now they want to write bigotry back into the Constitution; they want to make one group of Americans outsiders to our common heritage. They want to do what has never been done before – to amend the Constitution to create a group of second-class citizens. Our Constitution is the last hope of freedom; it cannot become a carrier of prejudice and intolerance.**

**And what about the opposition party? Too often they’re not an opposition; they’re an amen corner.**

**With some notable exceptions, they have been absent without leave from this battle for America’s soul.**

**When one party is shameless, the other party cannot afford to be spineless.**

**Our economic imbalances not only mean difficult times for many, they also undermine democratic values. The danger is that plutocracy will prevail over democracy, and the free market will rule over the free citizen.**

**The reason for the current deficit and the vanished surplus can be placed squarely on the tax giveaways to the rich.**

**To make up for just the initial tax cuts, we would have to cut spending by \$5 billion dollars 5 days a week for over a year. That was the whole point – to further enrich the already wealthy and to starve the government, making it unable to meet human needs, signing a death warrant for social programs for decades to come.**

**War and fear often cause hasty mistakes, costly both in economic and human terms. We need to remember what we are fighting for.**

**As Justice Sandra Day O’Connor wrote just two weeks ago in the case of “enemy combatant” Yaser El Hamdi:**

**“It is during our most challenging and uncertain moments that our Nation’s commitment to due process is most severely tested; and it is in those times that we must preserve our commitment at home to the principles for which we fight abroad.”**

**We ought to remember the words of President Theodore Roosevelt, who said in 1918,**

**“To announce there must be no criticism of the President, or to stand by the President, right or wrong, is not only unpatriotic and servile, but is morally treasonous to the American public.”**

**And the words of Ohio Senator Robert Taft, who said two weeks after Pearl Harbor had been attacked:**

**“I believe there can be no doubt that criticism in time of war is essential to the maintenance of any kind of democratic government.”**

**And the words of the United States Supreme Court two weeks ago: “A state of war is not a blank check for the President.”**

**President Bush chose Martin Luther King’s birthday last year to announce that, even though he admitted society continues to do something special against racial minorities,<sup>xxiv</sup> his administration would not do anything special for them; he opposed the University of Michigan’s efforts to promote diversity among its student body.**

**Bush chose Martin Luther King’s birthday this year to unilaterally elevate Charles Pickering to the federal bench – in the face of Pickering’s hostility to civil rights and leniency to cross burners.**

**I was afraid to listen to Bush’s speech at the Brown commemoration in Topeka two months ago – afraid he’d announce he was going to repeal the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment.**

**The election this fall is a contest between two widely disparate views of who we are and what we believe. One view wants to march us backward through history – surrendering control of government to special interests, weakening democracy, giving religion veto power over science, curtailing civil liberties, despoiling the environment.**

**The other view promises expanded democracy and giving the people, not plutocrats, control over their government.**

**John Kerry accepted our invitation to speak at this convention; President Bush did not. Two days ago, President Bush made his 30<sup>th</sup> visit to Pennsylvania, his most visited state outside his home territory of Texas, Virginia, and Maryland. Yet he couldn’t come to Pennsylvania to**

speak to us. No doubt he thinks he'll take care of colored people by speaking only to our sister organization, the National Urban League.

Of course, Vice President Cheney is having trouble speaking at all – they're still washing his mouth out with soap. He is now known as “the Veep of bleep!”

The differences between the candidates this year are neither incremental nor inconsequential.

Yes – the stakes are high, higher than ever in recent memory, and the consequences of loss almost too dire to bear. Fortunately, the race is on!

African-Americans are our nation's largest racial minority, and will remain so for years to come. Their centrality to victory in 2004 cannot be overlooked or left to last-minute afterthoughts or early November drive-by politics.

We must insure every citizen registers and votes. So far, the NAACP and the NAACP National Voter Fund together have registered 100,000 voters in 11 key states.

Let me give some examples of what Reverend Nelson Rivers might call “the big dogs” among NAACP Branches.

These will be just the thousandaires. These figures may not be up-to-date, but they set an example for us all.

2,494 registered by the Las Vegas Branch. 1,947 in Reno. 6,333 in Detroit. 1,000 by the College Chapter at Alabama A & M. 5,400 in Tallahassee. 4,393 at Volusia County/Daytona Beach. 1,079 in Cincinnati.

2,398 in Columbus, Georgia. 3,083 in Savannah. 2,977 in Atlanta. 1,444 in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. 4,765 in Wendell-Wake.

**4,323 in Spartanburg. 1,200 in Jackson, Mississippi. 1,514 in Grambling, Louisiana. 3,429 in Houston. 2,834 in Dallas. 1,500 in San Antonio. 1,200 in Huntsville.**

**4,405 in Albuquerque.**

**18,046 in Memphis, Tennessee.**

**Any NAACP Branch that isn't registering voters ought to turn in its charter.**

**All history is worth remembering; not all history is worth repeating. We must guarantee the irregularities, suppression, nullification, and outright theft of black votes that happened on Election Day 2000 never, ever happen again.**

**There's a poignant scene in Michael Moore's extraordinary movie, "Fahrenheit 9/11." It takes place on the January day in 2001 when the combined House and Senate have met to certify the winner of the Electoral College vote. Vice President Al Gore is presiding. One by one, members of the Congressional Black Caucus come to the well of the House to ask for an investigation of the stolen and suppressed votes in Florida, and to each, Vice President Gore asks a question, "Has a member of the Senate signed?"**

**And one by one the Black Caucus members say, "No."**

**No member of the United States Senate would sign a petition to investigate the larceny that took place in Florida.**

**Election 2000 confirmed our deep national divisions. Not only did Al Gore receive 90% of the black vote and George W. Bush a majority of the white vote, whites made up 95 percent of Bush's total votes.**

**Although 57 percent of voters with incomes under \$15,000 voted for Gore, even poor whites cast a majority of their votes for Bush.**



Similarly, 54 percent of women voted for Gore, but white women slightly favored Bush. In politics, as in life, race trumps class and race trumps gender.

The election revealed a cultural, as well as a racial divide. Gore won every major city and almost all suburbs, while Bush took every small town on a straight line from Redding, California to Springfield, Illinois – giving new meaning to Woody Guthrie's old song – “This Land Is Your Land, This Land Is My Land.”

The only demographic groups that cast a unified vote were blacks, Latinos, Jews, union members, and residents of large cities – all of whom voted 60 percent or more for Gore, and white males, who voted 60 percent for Bush.

Having voted along racial lines, not surprisingly blacks and whites were also divided in the post-election fight, with blacks far more alienated from the process and the results.

The NAACP's unprecedented voter registration and education drive four years ago was an unparalleled success. Two million more black voters cast ballots in 2000 than in 1996.

The African-American share of the total vote increased 25 percent or more in four states, but we know that the black share of the vote could have been higher – and the consequences could not have been greater.

I'll say it again – any Branch in the Association that is not registering voters ought to turn in its charter.

The sorry story of voter suppression and nullification in Florida was told by witness after witness at NAACP hearings after the 2000 election. They described police stops near polling places, racially

**motivated voter purges, demands for multiple forms of identification from persons who had voted for decades, long-time voters' names missing from the rolls, and other examples of black votes not being cast and not being counted.**

**What isn't as well known is these tactics were not limited to Florida, and weren't restricted to black precincts. Other minority voters elsewhere in the country suffered as well. We can expect more of the same this year.**

**Florida already is at it again. We've had to ask the Attorney General of the United States to stop Florida from using another soiled list on Election Day. And that may be like asking the fox to guard the chicken coop.**

**Our response to these tactics must not be cynicism and despair. If you don't vote because you fear your vote won't count, you're absolutely right – if you don't vote, you won't count! You'll be letting the bad guys win. Our response must be determination – to flood the polls and cast our votes in such large numbers that there will be no doubt. That's letting the good guys win.**

**Any long-suffering Red Sox fan ought to know – your team won't win if you don't touch the base – or if you run too far outside the base path.**

**The race is on!**

**You cannot win this race by ignoring race.**

**We know that if whites and non-whites vote in the same percentages as they did in 2000, Bush will be re-defeated by 3 million votes.**

**And we know that blacks are increasingly angry about the economy and the war. The nation has lost more than 2.5 million jobs in the last three years. The black unemployment rate is double that for whites. A recent poll in six key states – here and in Ohio, Missouri, Florida, Michigan, and Nevada – found that 73 percent of blacks believe Iraq was not worth fighting for and a whopping 77 percent believe that Bush intentionally mislead the nation about the war.**

**These are voters ready to turn anger into action, to work for regime change here at home. But they have to be asked. They have to be registered, organized, and mobilized. That job must be done by our existing grassroots organizations. We have a track record and we have earned our community's trust.**

**I told you about my grandfather a few minutes ago. Let me tell you about my father-in-law, Ernie Horowitz, as I close. These two men were very different – and so much alike.**

**Their families came here from foreign lands, one seeking freedom, the other in slavery's chains.**

**Both faced irrational prejudice; one because of his religion, the other because of his race.**

**My father-in-law grew up as poor as poor can be. When World War II began, he was the first man in Minnesota called for the draft. He landed on Utah Beach in Normandy two days after D-Day, and several days after that, was shot by a German sniper. That ended his war, but it didn't end his life. He became a successful restaurateur, and we buried him with military honors on June 9<sup>th</sup>.**

**What unites these two men the most is that, like most of us, they worshiped at the altar of the American ideal, believing deeply in**

participatory democracy. They were determined, in the words of the poet Langston Hughes, as are we, to:

**“Let America be America again.  
Let it be the dream it used to be.  
Let it be the pioneer on the plain,  
Seeking a home where he himself is free.**

**O, let my land be a land where liberty  
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,  
But opportunity is real, and life is free,  
Equality is in the air we breathe.**

**O, yes,  
I say it plain,  
American never was America to me,  
And yet I swear this oath –  
America will be!”**

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<sup>i</sup> The Philadelphia Negro, *id.* at 389.

<sup>ii</sup> *Id.* at 390.

<sup>iii</sup> *Id.* at 394.

<sup>iv</sup> Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U. S. at 495.

<sup>v</sup> Franklin, John Hope & Alfred Moss, Jr., From Slavery to Freedom (12<sup>th</sup> Ed.).

<sup>vi</sup> Kluger, Richard, Simple Justice, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1976, p. 748. *emphasis added*.

<sup>vii</sup> Commencement Address, Howard University (June 4, 1965)

<sup>viii</sup> Orfield, Gary & Chungmei Lee, “Brown at 50: King’s Dream or Plessy’s Nightmare?” at 3, Harvard Civil Rights Project, Harvard University (January 2004).

<sup>ix</sup> *Id.* at 1.

<sup>x</sup> *Id.* at 5.

<sup>xi</sup> James Bond, “Commencement Address”, Berea College Reporter, June 1892.

<sup>xii</sup> Green v New Kent County School Board, 391 U.S. 430 (1968).

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<sup>xiv</sup> n. The Dallas Morning News, October 28, 1964; Bush Bulletin, October 30, 1964.

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<sup>xv</sup> Adams v. U.S., 620 F.2<sup>nd</sup> 1227 (1980), Liddell v. Board of Education, 667 F.2<sup>nd</sup> 643 (8<sup>th</sup> Cir.).

<sup>xvi</sup> The most recent Gallup Poll found in 1999 that 60% of Americans believe that more should be done for desegregation. Gallup Poll, Q. 23 (July 1999).

<sup>xvii</sup> See Gary Orfield & David Thronson, “Dismantling Desegregation: Uncertain Gains, Unexpected Costs”, 42 Emory Law Journal, 759, 780 (1993)

<sup>xviii</sup> Gary Orfield, “The Growth of Segregation in American Schools: Changing Patterns of Separation and Poverty since 1968”, Harvard Project on School Desegregation at 1 (December 1993); Orfield Report at 38.

<sup>xix</sup> “Excerpts of Court Ruling Requiring Parity in New Jersey’s School Spending,” by Chief Justice Wilenzt, others, New Jersey Supreme Court, the New York Times, July 13, 1994,

<sup>xx</sup> Id.

<sup>xxi</sup> See Orfield, “School Desegregation after Two Generations”: Race, Schools, and Opportunity in Urban Society”, Race in America: The struggle for Equality at 237, the University of Wisconsin Press (1993).

<sup>xxii</sup> Id. at 238.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Jonathan Kozol, The Nation, May 3, 2004.

<sup>xxiv</sup> “Racial prejudice is a reality.” George W. Bush (January 15, 2003).