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ALABAMA STATE COMMENCEMENT
MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA
JUNE 3, 1973

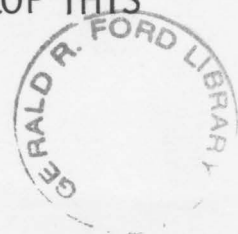
BY:
STANLEY S. SCOTT
SPECIAL ASSISTANT
TO THE PRESIDENT
THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON, D. C.



PRESIDENT WATKINS, DISTINGUISHED PLATFORM GUESTS,
STUDENTS, FACULTY MEMBERS OF ALABAMA STATE AND FRIENDS.
I APPRECIATE THE HONOR THAT HAS BEEN EXTENDED TO ME TO
VISIT THIS ^(Historic) CAMPUS AND TO SHARE WITH YOU SOME OF MY
THOUGHTS ON THE RELEVANCE OF RESPONSIBILITY.

NOW THAT THE COMMENCEMENT SEASON ON OUR COLLEGE
CAMPUSES HAS BEGUN, ~~AND~~ THERE IS A VERITABLE DELUGE OF
WORDS OF ADVICE AND COUNSEL OFFERED BY COMMENCEMENT
SPEAKERS ALL OVER THE COUNTRY, IT IS MY PRIVILEGE TO
CONTRIBUTE TO SUCH DIALOGUE BY ADDRESSING YOU, THE
530 GRADUATES.

AS THIS INSTITUTION LOOKS TO A NEW CENTURY SO DOES
OUR NATION. NOTHING MATTERS MORE TO THE FUTURE OF THIS
NATION THAN ENSURING THAT OUR YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN LEARN
TO BELIEVE IN THEMSELVES AND BELIEVE IN THEIR DREAMS, AND
THAT THEY DEVELOP THIS CAPACITY -- THAT YOU DEVELOP THIS

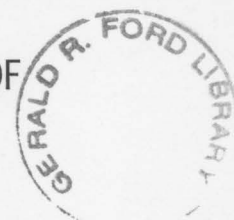


CAPACITY, SO THAT YOU KEEP IT WITH YOU ALL OF YOUR LIFE.

EDUCATION IS OUR MOST POWERFUL INSTRUMENT. IF WE ARE TO HAVE AN AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT, WE MUST HAVE AN AGE OF RATIONAL INQUIRY. EVERY CITIZEN SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO REJECT SLOGANS, LABELS AND CLOUDY OVER-SIMPLIFICATIONS FROM THE PAST, AND APPLY AN UNCLUTTERED MIND TO THE DETAILS OF THE PROBLEM. THIS MEANS THAT WHERE THERE ARE CIVIL RIGHTS, SO ARE THERE CIVIL RESPONSIBILITIES.

THIS RESPONSIBILITY IS NOT JUST IN BEING RESPONSIVE, IT IS ALSO IN TAKING THE LEADERSHIP ROLE. THIS SOMETIMES REQUIRES TAKING A RESPONSIBLE BUT, FOR THE MOMENT, UNPOPULAR POSITION, AND STANDING BY IT.

AS I STAND HERE IN THE PRESENCE OF THIS VERY DISTINGUISHED COMPANY, I CANNOT HELP BUT THINK ABOUT THE TWISTS OF FATE -- AND HOW WE LEARN FROM THEM.



I KNOW THERE ARE THOSE OF YOU TOO YOUNG TOO REMEMBER, BUT THERE ARE OTHERS AMONG YOU WHO LIVED THROUGH THAT GREAT

AND HISTORY THAT TOOK PLACE RIGHT HERE IN MONTGOMERY.

MOMENT IN HISTORY THAT TOOK PLACE RIGHT HERE IN MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA.

IN 1965, A BLACK LADY NAMED ROSA PARKS REFUSED TO GIVE UP HER SEAT ON A PUBLIC BUS SO THAT A WHITE PERSON COULD BE SEATED. AS HER STORY HAS BEEN RETOLD, THIS WAS NOT AN ACT THAT MRS. PARKS HAD PLANNED.

INDEED, IF ANYTHING, WHEN SHE LEFT WORK THAT DAY, SHE PROBABLY INTENDED TO FOLLOW THE USUAL ROUTINE AND DO WHAT SHE AND ALL THE OTHER BLACKS IN MONTGOMERY, AND OTHER CITIES THROUGHOUT THE SOUTH HAD BEEN DOING FOR YEARS -- RIDING IN THE BACK OF THE BUS AND STANDING WHENEVER A WHITE PERSON WAS IN NEED OF A SEAT.

I HAVE NO DOUBTS THAT THOUGHTS OF NOT GIVING UP THAT SEAT OR NOT MOVING TO THE REAR OF THE BUS CROSSED THE MINDS OF PRACTICALLY EVERY BLACK PERSON IN THIS COMMUNITY, INCLUDING ROSA PARKS, PROBABLY EACH AND



EVERY DAY. AND I AM AWARE OF OTHERS, WHO, BEFORE
MRS. PARKS, HAD ATTEMPTED UNSUCCESSFULLY AND WITHOUT
THE WORLD KNOWING OF IT TO DEFY THE SAME SYSTEM.

TO REALLY HAVE A SENSE OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WHAT
OCCURRED THAT DAY IN 1956, YOU HAVE TO KNOW SOMETHING
ABOUT THE CLIMATE OF THE TIMES. THE PENALTIES AND
CONSEQUENCES FOR BREAKING THE LAWS AND CUSTOMS OF
THE SOUTH WERE SEVERE. BUT IN 1956, WHEN THE DRAMA
IN MONTGOMERY UNFOLDED, BLACK FOLKS HAD JUST RECEIVED
A VICTORY IN THE COURTS, IN 1954, ON SCHOOL DESEGREGATION.

THERE WERE RUMBLINGS THROUGHOUT THE SOUTH ABOUT
THE "SYSTEM". HERE, IN MONTGOMERY, A YOUNG MINISTER
NAMED MARTIN LUTHER KING WAS STIRRING UP THE CONSCIOUSNESS
OF THE FOLKS WITH TALK ABOUT HUMAN DIGNITY -- THE HUMAN
DIGNITY OF BLACK FOLKS IN ALABAMA WHO, NO LONGER, SHOULD
WALK WITH THEIR HEADS JUST A LITTLE BOWED -- INDEED, WHO
NO LONGER SHOULD ACCEPT RIDING IN THE BACK OF THE BUS



THE CLIMATE FOR CHALLENGING THE SYSTEM WAS RIPE.

WHAT WAS MISSING WAS A MOTIVATION STRONG ENOUGH FOR UNITING THE PEOPLE IN ACTION AGAINST AN INJUSTICE THAT MADE A MOCKERY OF THE SLOGAN, "AMERICA, THE LAND OF THE FREE".

ON THAT DAY, ROSA PARKS DID NOT ENVISION HERSELF AS ANY MODERN ^{DAY} JOAN OF ARC. NOR DID SHE REASON THAT "TODAY, I AM GOING TO DEFY THIS SYSTEM". SHE GOT ON THAT BUS TIRED -- PORBABLY TIRED IN MIND JUST AS MUCH AS TIRED IN BODY. WHEN THAT DRIVER ASKED ROSA PARKS TO MOVE, HE HAD NO WAY OF KNOWING THAT FATE HAD CHOSEN HIM TO PLAY THE PART OF THE HEAVY IN A DRAMA SO FAR REACHING THAT ITS EFFECTS ARE YET FELT TODAY.

ROSA PARKS REFUSED TO MOVE. WITH THAT SIMPLE UNPREMEDIATED ACT, SOMETHING HAPPENED. TRADITION CAME

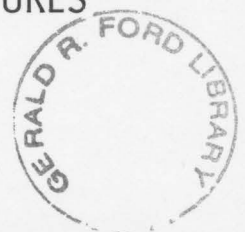
TO A SCREECHING HALT.... And millions of black people were freed mentally & physically --- from a system that had threatened our very existence.



I CAN IMAGINE THAT WHEN SHE REFUSED TO MOVE, A TENSION OF FEAR CAUGHT HOLD OF HER. BUT FOR THOSE MOMENTS, SHE CONTROLLED THAT FEAR AND TURNED IT INTO A COURAGE WHICH LOOKED FEAR IN THE EYE AND CHALLENGED IT! IN THAT MOMENT, SHE WAS PREPARED TO ACCEPT THE CONSEQUENCES -- WHATEVER THEY WERE. LITTLE DID SHE KNOW THAT HER COURAGEOUS ACTION WOULD INSPIRE OTHERS IN THE WAY THAT IT DID.

THE PEOPLE OF MONTGOMERY GAVE HER THEIR FULL SUPPORT, SPURRING ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL BUS BOYCOTTS IN THE UNITED STATES, AND GIVING BIRTH TO THE DRAMATIC CIVIL RIGHTS EFFORTS OF THE 60'S AND TO ONE OF ITS MOST CHERISHED LEADERS, DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING.

WITH THE INITIAL THRUST MADE BY MRS. PARKS, BLACKS BEGAN TO CHALLENGE EVERY ASPECT OF THE SYSTEM. ON BLACK COLLEGE CAMPUSES, STUDENTS BEGAN TO QUESTION THE RELEVANCE OF THE ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES



THAT SEEMED TO BE AN EXTENSION OF A WHITE CULTURE RATHER THAN AN EXTENSION OF THE BLACK LIFE STYLE.

THIS THIRST FOR RELEVANCE WAS VIEWED SUSPICIOUSLY BY THOSE WHO DID NOT UNDERSTAND THE CHANGING NEEDS OF THE YOUNG.

THEY DID NOT UNDERSTAND THAT YOU WANTED TO BE PROUD OF YOUR BLACKNESS.

THEY DID NOT HEAR YOU WHEN YOU CRIED, I WANT TO BE A MAN! ... *I want to be free.*

GRADUALLY ONE DAY, THE WORLD BEGAN TO LISTEN AND THE NOTION OF BLACK PRIDE TOOK HOLD. AND ON THIS YOUR GRADUATION DAY, THE WORLD IS WATCHING AND WAITING TO SEE HOW YOU WILL HANDLE YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS YOU ENTER THE MAINSTREAM OF SOCIETY. BEING RESPONSIBLE IS RELEVANT TO THE WORLD TODAY.



THE YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN HERE THIS MORNING, HAVE A DECIDED ADVANTAGE OVER THOSE OF US WHO BELONG TO AN EARLIER GENERATION. YOU HAVE THE CHANCE TO CHANGE THINGS THROUGH THE ELECTORAL PROCESS. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO VOTE. YOU NO LONGER HAVE TO RIOT IN THE STREETS OR LIE DOWN IN FRONT OF AUTOMOBILES OR FACE POLICE DOGS, YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE AT THE BALLOT BOX.

THIS IS WHERE POWER TO THE PEOPLE REALLY COMES INTO ITS OWN. POLITICAL POWER AND ECONOMIC POWER ARE WHERE THE SALVATION OF BLACKS IN SOCIETY TRULY LIES. THERE ARE MORE BLACK ELECTED OFFICIALS IN THIS COUNTRY TODAY THAN EVER BEFORE IN OUR HISTORY. I BELIEVE THAT ONE OF YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS YOU MOVE INTO THE MAINSTREAM, SHOULD BE TO SWELL THE ROLLS WITH VOTES SUPPORTING LEADERS ~~WHO~~ ~~ARE~~ BLACK OR WHITE WHO HAVE YOUR INTERESTS AT HEART.

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE BY SEEING TO IT THAT BLACKS



FULLY PARTICIPATE IN GOVERNMENT AT ALL LEVELS. MORE BLACKS
NEED TO BE ELECTED TO ^{Help} RUN THE GOVERNMENT AT ALL LEVELS.

THE PUBLISHER OF JET AND EBONY MAGAZINES MADE
SOME REMARKS RECENTLY WHICH DRIVE HOME THE POINT I WISH
TO MAKE. JOHN H. JOHNSON SAID: "THE ECONOMIC LIFE OF
THIS NATION IS NO LONGER A SPECTATOR SPORT FOR BLACK
AMERICANS. WE MUST ABANDON FOREVER THE POLITICS OF
POVERTY AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF DESPAIR."

IF BLACK AMERICANS ARE TO WIN THIS MYTHICAL WAR
WE'VE BEEN FIGHTING THEN WE'VE GOT TO FIGHT IT ON THE REAL
BATTLEFIELD, AND THAT IS THROUGH ECONOMICS.

WE HAVE ALL LIVED THROUGH THE NEW FRONTIER, THE GREAT
SOCIETY, AND EVEN THE NEW DEAL. NOW IT'S TIME WE AS A
PEOPLE STARTED PUTTING OUR EFFORTS INTO A COMBINED EFFORT
THAT IS DETERMINED AND CALCULATED TO BRING ABOUT GREATER
PARTICIPATION IN THE ECONOMIC ABUNDANCE OF THIS NATION.



AS MEMBERS OF THE GRADUATING CLASS OF 1973 YOU ALREADY KNOW THAT BLACK AMERICANS SPEND MORE THAN 51 BILLION DOLLARS ANNUALLY. WE EXERCISE NO CONTROL OVER THE 51 BILLION THAT WE SPEND. NONE OF IT IS CHANNELED BACK INTO THE BLACK COMMUNITY AND VERY LITTLE OF IT BENEFITS THESE COMMUNITIES.

BLACKS ARE STILL IN A VERY REAL SENSE BIG CONSUMERS. WE SUPPLY LITTLE, WE MANUFACTURE LITTLE, BUT WE CONSUME A GREAT DEAL.

BLACKS MUST START TO THINK OF BLACK ADVANCEMENT IN TERMS OF ECONOMICS. BLACK OWNED BUSINESSES, BLACK OPERATED FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS, POLITICAL COALITIONS AND BUSINESS COALITIONS MUST BE OUR MAJOR CONCERNS. WE MUST RECOGNIZE OUR LACK OF EXPERTISE IN CERTAIN BUSINESS AREAS AND SEEK WAYS OF SATISFYING THIS DEFICIENCY.

BLACKS MUST EXERCISE THEIR VOTE AND MUST CONCENTRATE ON PUTTING MORE BLACKS INTO THE STATE HOUSE, THE CITY HALL



- II -

AND THE COUNTY GOVERNMENT. MUCH OF THE ACTION HAS
SHIFTED TO THE LOCAL AND STATE SCENE.

THE CLIMATE OF PROGRESS HAS CHANGED SINCE THE NEW
DEAL, THE NEW FRONTIER AND THE GREAT SOCIETY. NONE OF
THEM WORKED LIKE THEY PROMISED BECAUSE WE STILL DO NOT
FULLY PARTICIPATE IN THE ECONOMICS AND THE POLITICS OF
THIS NATION. THE TIME FOR MARCHING IS OVER. THE TIME
FOR UNITY IS HERE. THE TIME FOR CONCENTRATION ON ECONOMICS
IS AT HAND.

I KNOW THAT YOU, THE GRADUATING CLASS WILL **ATTEMPT**
TO SHOW THE WAY TO ALL BLACK AMERICANS AS WE CONTINUE
OUR STRUGGLE, TOGETHER.

INSTEAD OF PLOTTING MARCHES, LET'S PLOT STRATEGIES
TO CONTROL SOME OF THE 51 BILLION DOLLARS THAT PASS
THROUGH BLACK HANDS EACH YEAR. INSTEAD OF PLOTTING

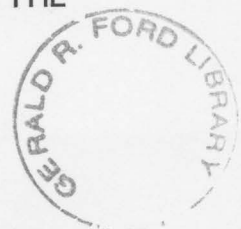


DEMONSTRATIONS, LET'S AWAKE A CONCERN IN ALL BLACK PEOPLE TO ABANDON FOREVER THE POLITICS OF POVERTY AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF DESPAIR.

I KNOW THAT YOU WILL WANT TO ENCOURAGE BLACK AMERICANS TO UNDERSTAND AND PARTICIPATE IN THE ECONOMICS OF CAPITALISM WHICH HAVE MADE THIS NATION GREAT.

WHEN I ATTENDED COLLEGE BACK IN THE 50'S, CAREER OPPORTUNITIES WERE LIMITED FOR BLACKS EXCEPT IN THE TRADITIONAL JOBS. BUT THE AGE OF TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT HAS OPENED UP CHALLENGING CAREERS IN EVERY IMAGINABLE AREA OF INTEREST.

BUT THE QUESTION I WANT TO PUT TO YOU IS THIS -- ARE YOU GOING TO BE A DROPOUT AND REFUSE THESE OPPORTUNITIES BECAUSE YOU HAVE DOUBT WITHIN YOURSELF ABOUT MAKING IT IN NON-TRADITIONAL BLACK JOBS? AFTER ALL THESE YEARS OF STUDY AND PERSONAL SACRIFICES ARE YOU NOW THINKING ABOUT COPPING OUT? OR, ARE YOU GOING TO SEIZE THE



HOUR AND MAKE THE BEST OF WHATEVER LIFE HAS TO OFFER.

WHAT I AM TALKING ABOUT IS WHETHER OR NOT YOU HAVE
WHAT IT TAKES TO ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY. LIKE THEY SAY
IN THE AIRLINES COMMERCIAL, IF YOU HAVE IT, FLAUNT IT!

ONE OF THE THINGS I HEAR, AS I MOVE ABOUT THE
COUNTRY SPEAKING BEFORE GROUPS SUCH AS YOURS, IS
THAT STUDENTS TODAY ARE MORE INTERESTED IN LEARNING THAN
BURNING. PEOPLE ARE SAYING THAT A CHANGE HAS COME OVER
THE CAMPUS IN RECENT MONTHS, AND STUDENTS ARE ONCE AGAIN
SERIOUS ABOUT THEIR STUDIES. I AM TOLD THAT YOU INTEND
TO MAKE A CONTRIBUTION WHEN YOU MOVE OUT INTO YOUR VARIOUS
FIELDS OF ENDEAVOR. THIS IS GOOD NEWS, BUT LET ME BE THE
FIRST TO WARN YOU. ACCEPTANCE IS ONLY HALF OF THE GAME --
YOUR PERFORMANCE ON THE JOB IS WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE --
BETWEEN WINNING OR LOSING.

FOR MANY OF YOU, IT WILL BE YOUR FIRST TIME OF SHOULDERING
RESPONSIBILITY. YOU WILL BE TAKING ON ALL THE RESPONSIBILITIES
OF ADULTHOOD -- JOBS, MARRIAGE AND FAMILY --



CIVIC AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES. IT WILL NO LONGER SUFFICE TO CRITICIZE THE SYSTEM FOR WHAT "THEY" ARE DOING. THE SHAPE OF THE WORLD WILL DEPEND TO A LARGE EXTENT ON HOW YOU MOLD IT.

RESPONSIBILITY IS IN YOUR HANDS NOW. TO THOSE WHO HAVE BELIEVED THE SYSTEM WOULD NOT BE MOVED, I SAY TRY IT -- YOU MIGHT LIKE IT. TO THOSE WHO HAVE THOUGHT THAT THE SYSTEM ~~WAS~~ SHUT TIGHT TO KEEP YOU OUT, I SAY THAT THE DOOR IS OPEN, BUT IT'S UP TO YOU TO WALK IN.

THERE WILL BE UPS AND DOWNS AND OCCASIONAL DEFEATS, BUT THESE ARE CHARACTER BUILDING, IF YOU FALL AND GET UP AND PROFIT BY YOUR MISTAKE THE NEXT TIME AROUND. THE ANSWER IS NOT TO BLAME THE SYSTEM, BUT TO LOOK WITHIN OURSELVES TO SEE HOW WE CAN STRENGTHEN OUR RESOLVE AND INTENSIFY OUR EFFORT.

DEFEAT CAN BE TURNED INTO POSITIVE EXPERIENCE. IT CAN BE AN OCCASION FOR LEARNING, FOR WEIGHING THE WISDOM OF



OUR OWN PURPOSES, AND FOR EXAMINING THE STRENGTH OF
OUR OWN RESOURCES.

AS I LOOK INTO THE FACES OF THOSE OF YOU GRADUATING
TODAY I KNOW THAT MANY OF YOU CAN HARDLY WAIT TO GO
OUT INTO THE WORLD TO TRY YOUR WINGS. I KNOW YOU ARE
FILLED WITH MIXED EMOTIONS ABOUT THE CHALLENGE AND
YOUR CAPABILITY TO MEET THESE CHALLENGES.

PERHAPS YOU CAN FIND ASSURANCE IN THESE WORDS BY
THE JOURNALIST, HORACE GREELEY WHO ONCE EXCLAIMED:
"FAME IS A VAPOR, POPULARITY AN ACCIDENT, RICHES TAKE
WINGS, THOSE WHO CHEER TODAY WILL CURSE TOMORROW, ONLY
ONE THING ENDURES -- CHARACTER!" THESE WEIGHTY WORDS
BID ALL REMEMBER THAT LIFE'S ONE TASK IS THE MAKING OF
MANHOOD. OUR WORLD IS A COLLEGE, EVENTS ARE TEACHERS,
HAPPINESS IS THE GRADUATING POINT, CHARACTER IS THE
DIPLOMA GOD GIVES MAN.

Thank you.



9:29

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