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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NAACP
82ND ANNUAL NAACP CONVENTION
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GEORGE R. BROWN CONVENTION CENTER
HOUSTON, TEXAS

Chairman Gibson; President Dukes;
Special Contribution Fund Chairman
Sutton; Crisis President Richardson;
Members of the NAACP National Board
of Directors; Members of the Board
of Trustees of the Special
Contribution Fund; Presidents of
State Conferences; Presidents of
State Youth Conferences; Delegates
to this 82nd Annual Convention;
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Once again, we have the
privilege of assembling in a
Convention of the oldest, the
largest, the most effective, the
most respected, the most feared, the
most loved, the most hated, the most
cussed and discussed civil rights
organization in the world -- the
NAACP, the National Association for
the Advancement of Colored People.

For the next several days, the
eyes of the nation will be upon
Houston, Texas, as we address the issues and concerns of America's citizens of African descent.

Let the word go forth from this place at this time, that the NAACP still is standing firmly grounded on its bedrock principles, fiercely dedicated to the creation of an America that has been cleansed forever of the stain of racism, discrimination and denial.

Many years ago, the founders of the NAACP entered into a covenant with history. The founders promised that the trumpet of the NAACP would be blown loudly and clearly to sound the charge against racism and racist oppression. Through the long years since 1909, we have kept that pledge and honored it. We intend to continue doing so.

Last year, our theme was "The Struggle Continues." That theme was repeated from the year before. During recent history it was the
first time we used the same theme twice. That theme was provocative, fitting, appropriate, challenging.

This year we have chosen as a theme "Preparing a New Generation for the Struggle." Very briefly I would like to speak to that theme. The theme presupposes that the struggle continues and, indeed, I do believe with all my being that the struggle does continue. Frederick Douglass said on one occasion: "If there is no struggle, there is no progress... Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters..."

...Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did, and it never will."

In order to be positive to our
theme, we must look at all of the implications.

There are two classes of people who disturb me greatly: There are those who maintain with great intellectual assertiveness and aplomb that things are no better for Black America than they were forty years ago. When we look back over the past forty years we see the stupendous, miraculous, marvelous progress that we have made. Forty years ago there were only a handful of black elected officials. Today there are 336 black mayors, more than 7,700 elected black officials, a black governor (in Virginia, the cradle of the Confederacy), and a black chairman of the Democratic National Committee. I could go on and on, citing the progress. It is amazing that anyone could make the asinine assertion that significant progress has not been made. Anyone old enough to have been here forty years ago is old enough to know that
these pseudo intellects are lying.

When I see black people sitting in the main dining rooms of some of the classiest southern hotels, where they would have been thrown out and taken directly to jail 25 or 40 years ago, eating with relish filet mignon, I wonder about the sanity of those who say that little has changed in America. Of course, there are those who maintain that for people at the bottom of the ladder things aren't any better. But even that is not true, life for the least of us has improved. They do have the opportunity to aspire for decent jobs, use of public accommodations, to send their children to better schools, to vote for those who will represent them in City Hall, the State House and the White House. The old laws on loitering, disorderly conduct, and vagrancy have been changed. They,
too, can drink from any water fountain, sit anywhere on the bus, attend any movie theater or, if you will, drop by any watering hole of their choice. So, even for those at the lowest rung of the economic ladder fundamental changes have been made.

If we tell our children that nothing has changed, then we cannot prepare them for the struggle, for who wants to struggle if the struggle is in vain? If we tell a new generation that the struggle has produced no victories, then we are saying that the work of James Weldon Johnson, Walter White, Roy Wilkins, Martin Luther King Jr., W.E.B. DuBois, Kelly Alexander, Sr., Ruby Hurley, Clarence Mitchell, Juanita Craft, Lucille Black, Daisy Lampkin, W.J. Durham, George Flemmings, Althea T. L. Simmons, A. Philip Randolph, and Medgar Evers, was all in vain. We are saying that the
struggle of those white friends who
worked with us: Wayne Morse, Hubert
Humphrey, Lyndon Baines Johnson,
Eleanor Roosevelt, Walter Reuther,
was in vain. We say the struggle of
those early friends: Joel and
Arthur Spingarn, Moorfield Storey,
Mary White Ovington, was in vain. We
are saying to the coming generation:
If things are no better, then we
need not have won the Brown v. Board
of Education Decision; we need not have
gained a Voting Rights Act or a
Civil Rights Act; we need not have
had great March on Washington, where
Martin galvanized the attention of
the whole world with his vision of a
changed America. So, we are
obligated to tell the truth to this
new generation. We need to remind
them that we have achieved great
victories; that we have come from
yonder to here; that we have come
from nowhere to somewhere; and that
we have come from the slave shanty
to the condo complex.

On the other hand, I am equally disturbed by those who maintain that, yes, there was a problem, but now all of the problems have been solved. There are some who believe that there are no more rivers to cross, no more mountains to climb, no more battles to fight, no more victories to be won.

If we are to prepare a new generation for the struggle, which is before us, how will we prepare them if we say there is no struggle, there is no battle, there is nothing to be done?

There are many more victories that must be won by the new generation. When we look at the landscape and see a David Duke re-enacting the spectre of Ku Klux Klanism; when we look at North Carolina and see a Jesse Helms resorting to unadultered racism to win his campaign for the U.S.
Senate: when we look at a George Bush pandering to the base instincts of the American public, crying "quota, quota, quota" about the Civil rights Act of 1990 and 1991 when there is no quota; when we look at the high unemployment rate among black youth; when we look at 37 million Americans who have no health insurance; when we note that 625,000 young black men between the ages of 18 and 29 are in prison, more than the number in college, it tells us that there are many more hills to climb. A recent study indicates that when qualified blacks seek employment at entry-level jobs they receive unfavorable treatment 20 percent of the time more than their white counterparts. In the recently-won Persian Gulf War 34% of the troops were black. Less than four months later they are denied their fair share of opportunity in the job market. The series of
reactionary right-wing decisions from the U.S. Supreme Court has eroded, rolled back, damaged and even demolished much that we had thought had been won. I tell you tonight we must prepare a new generation for the struggle.

We must also be honest enough to remind ourselves that there is a fierce struggle for the hearts, minds, and souls of African-Americans today raging in our own ranks. Dope and drugs and the unwise use of alcohol are cutting a path of destruction through our community like an M-1 Tank cut through the defenses of Saddam Hussein.

The hopelessness, the despair that permeate many of our inner city communities have caused some of us to turn on ourselves rather than turning to ourselves. A large number of black children -- 63% -- are born out of wedlock to single,
often uneducated and frequently untrained mothers. The spectre of babies having babies, the decline of the strong black family, are all challenges we must face as we prepare a new generation for the struggle.

We must say to this new generation; there is no advantage in trying to blame somebody else for our condition. As we prepare for the struggle ahead we must deal with reality. As our forebears have said:

"Nobody can save us from us but us."

What, one might ask, are the weapons needed for the struggle? What must we say to this new generation? First of all, we must say if we are to succeed we must prepare ourselves, minds, soul and body. We cannot allow hatred, violence, drunkenness, dope dealing or gang warfare to do to us what
slavery, segregation and discrimination failed to do, make us lose hope in ourselves and in our destiny as a people.

Shakespeare wrote, "To thine ownself be true, and it must follow as the night, the day, thou canst not then be false to say man."

The Bible says, "He that ruleth his own spirit is greater than he that taketh a city." This is our challenge and our opportunity for the days ahead.

Next, we must remind America that God has abundantly and liberally blessed this nation: The ancient admonition still stands: to whom much has been given, of them, much is required.

"America, America, God shed His grace on thee." We are blessed with thousands of square miles of fertile farmland, forests where trees grow in wild profusion, fossil fuels locked in the bowels of the earth,
and mighty rivers flowing to the sea. We have marvelous lakes teeming with fish, we have prodigious mountains, beckoning valleys, and a marvelously trained workforce of every race, creed, and color. America, with all that God has given, why do we allow people to remain homeless? Why do we let million of our children go hungry? Why do we close our factories, export jobs abroad while millions of fathers and mothers are jobless? America, God has blessed you too much to squander, like the prodigal son, our glorious birthright. Much has been given. We have a right to expect much in return.

I challenge the Congress to attend to the needs of those in despair and distress. I challenge the Congress to pass a comprehensive medical care bill now. Provide a decent educational system where all of our people -- black, white,
yellow, red, brown -- can obtain a
decent education before we lose our
competitive edge. Provide for
adequate retirement homes for the
elderly, Head-Start for the young,
care for the aged and for the
hopeless. Demonstrated concern for
the differently abled. America, God
has given us too much to be
mean-spirited, selfish and
indifferent.

My friends, we have come
through the lineage of our ancestors
against our will across uncharted
waters of the unfriendly seas. We
have met the cruel task mastering of
slavery, the awful nightmare of
Reconstruction, the indignity of
second-class citizenship and the
long night of discrimination with
our spirits unbroken and our heads
unhewed. God has poured too much on
us to squander it now. We are 30
million strong. We have PhD’s,
DD’s, more than one million college
graduates, 30,000 lawyers, 16,000 doctors, thousands of dentists, bankers, CPA's, skilled professionals of all kinds, and an annual $300 billion Gross National Product. Let us, like our foreparents before us, move on, using the resources we have. If we do that, we can prepare a new generation for the struggle.

The NAACP has been in the forefront of every battle. We must remain strong and vibrant now!

When we come to Texas, we remember history. When we were here in 1941, persons still living could recall the vicious beating that was administered to John Shillady, our Executive Secretary, in 1919. The attack took place on the steps of a public building in the capital city of Austin. It followed a meeting between the NAACP leader and the state's Acting Attorney General. Mr. Shillady, the last white chief
executive of the Association, never fully recovered from the effects of the beating.

Here in Texas we also remember our hard-fought and ultimately successful battles against the pernicious denial of the vote to black citizens through the "white primary," the effort of the dominant Democratic Party to declare itself a private organization, free to exclude blacks from participating in what was, at the time, the only meaningful political process in this state.

But thanks be to God change did come. You here in Houston have sent to Washington two of the most distinguished Members ever to serve in the House of Representatives, former Representative Barbara Jordan, who continues her public service, and the late Mickey Leland, whose passion and compassion for the suffering of humanity still burns
like a torch amid the tapers.

We have every confidence that Representative Craig Washington, who now sits in Congress, will write a distinguished record; indeed, he is doing so.

A major force in bringing about change was your NAACP, which has been super-active here in Texas. Give yourselves a hand, Texas NAACPers.

Patrick Henry said that "the just God who presided over the destiny of nations would raise up friends to fight the battles of those who love liberty." Here in Texas, I truly believe, God raised up just such a friend.

Our hands should forget their cunning and our tongues should cleave to the roofs of our mouths should we neglect to note, especially here in Texas, the great and significant contribution to freedom for all Americans that was
made by that great son of the Lone Star State of Texas, the 36th President of the United States, Lyndon Baines Johnson.

President Johnson was a great tower of strength as black men and women struggled to achieve a fuller measure of freedom.

I regret to tell you that no other President from Texas can make that statement -- or have it honestly made about him.

We now have another President from Texas -- George Herbert Walker Bush. Would to God that he had the commitment to civil rights that [Blyndon Baines Johnson had. If he did, the Civil Rights Bill of 1990 would be history, and we would be moving onward and upward and not arguing over the false issue of quotas.

Instead, 25 years later, we have moved from a president who said of civil rights, "We shall
overcome!" to a president who vetoes civil rights bills and boasts, "You can’t override!"

Police brutality still is all too prevalent in this country. What we saw in the beating of Rodney King could have been replicated in any village, town or city in America if a television camera could be at the right place at the right time. To deal with this phenomenon, we are initiating immediately after the close of this Convention hearings on police brutality in five cities. Our General Counsel, Dennis Hayes; our Washington Bureau Director, Wade Henderson; our Director of Special Projects, Jack Gravely; our Director and Assistant Director of Branches, William Penn and Janice Washington, will convene these hearings in the cities of Los Angeles, St. Louis, Miami, Boston, and Houston. These cities are not selected because they are better or worse than other
cities, but because they represent a cross-section of America.

America cheered a black general and honored the black soldiers of the Gulf War, but racism remains here on the homefront. The President who brought us together to fight a war, wittingly or unwittingly divides us by loose talk about "quotas" and "racial discord."

Nowhere is the problem facing Black America more acute than the economic sphere. The income gap between blacks and whites continues to grow. Blacks earn approximately 56 cents for every dollar earned by whites in 1991.

Black families possess only a tenth of the wealth held by white families. The medium family wealth for a white family is $41,000.00, for a black family it is only $4,100.00.

We are facing the feminization of poverty.
In most school systems, black males are at the bottom of every negative index of measurement -- failure, drop-out, expulsion, suspension, retention, you name it.

Even so, I am not persuaded that the answer to the learning problems of black males is their separation from female students or from non-black students.

Another dilemma we face is the crime and violence which continue to stalk our communities. Too often, crime and violence lead our young people, particularly our young men, to degradation and to death.

As we survey the panorama unfolding before us, and we look at conditions that particularly afflict our own community, we find that too many of our young people are condemned by the curse of cocaine, consumed by crack, held hostage in the hell of heroin, mired in the morass of marijuana and submerged in
the swamplands of sex. WE must find ways and the will to reverse this trend as we move toward the 21st century.

I am pleased to report that since we last met in Los Angeles, your NAACP has been on the cutting edge of social, political and economic change that has taken place in this nation. We convened a meeting in August of 1990 of more than 100 black organizations and associations for the purpose of forging a harmonious relationship to deal with the systemic problems of the disintegration of the black family, rising unemployment, the problem of teenage pregnancy, drugs, crime. Out of that meeting, called by your NAACP, a National Association of Black Organizations has been established. This group of multifaceted, varied-interest organizations, will continue to work
on the innumerable problems which
plague our communities, which we, as
a people, must address.

Following the insidious and
insensitive remark of the Minister
of Justice of Japan, the NAACP
embarked upon the daily protests at
the Japanese Embassy and embarked
upon negotiations with the Japanese
government. I am pleased to report
that the Minister of Justice is no
longer a part of the administration
of Japan and that we are moving
forward in the process of
negotiating comprehensive Fair Share
Agreements with Japanese companies
who do business in this country.

The most pressing problem
facing us since we last met has been
the fight for the passage of the
1991 Civil Rights Bill. We are
convinced, for a number of reasons,
that passage of the 1991 Civil
Rights Bill is essential for the
continued progress and forward
movement of the forces of civil rights. Your NAACP lobbied the Congress, protested, called upon the President and the members of this Administration to support the Civil Rights Bill.

I declare unto you that no one has been more aggressive or given more leadership in the battle for the Civil Rights Act of 1991 than has your NAACP. Your Executive Director has held numerous meetings with many persons, appeared on many television shows on the networks in the effort to aid public awareness, understanding and support for passage of this vital legislation.

On June 5th, the House of Representatives passed the Civil Rights bill, unfortunately, with a margin short of overriding the promised veto by the President. There is now before the U.S. Senate a bill which will be considered shortly that would restore the gains
which were made prior to the six and infamous decisions of the United State Supreme Court in 1989 and 1990. What this bill will largely do, is restore and extend the constitutional protections which existed prior to the recent Supreme Court decisions for blacks, women and others who are systemically discriminated against in the workplace.

A recent study, by the Urban Institution, reported by both AP and UPI wire services, conducted in Washington, D.C. and Chicago, Illinois in 1971, and other studies sponsored by the government itself at all levels have pointed out that blacks, Hispanics and women are still the victims of discrimination. What we are saying, in a real sense, is that it is in the best interest of the business community, those in government, and America in general
that the barriers erected to exclude blacks and women be torn down. It is estimated that it costs this nation over 200 billion dollars a year in lost productivity to continue the insidious practice of discrimination based upon race, sex and religion. Not only is this an appalling and diabolical prostitution of sources, but it prevents America from being able to compete in the international economy in which we live.

Tonight, I am again appealing to President Bush to rise above petty politics and political chicanery and agree to sign the Civil Rights Bill of 1991. I am calling upon the members of the Congress, both Republican and Democrat, to pass and, if necessary, override the veto of the President and not to allow race baiting to become a political issue in the 1992 election. If our nation could call
upon its young men and women of color to go to the Persian Gulf to defend the vital interests of America against the tyrannical regime of Saddam Hussein, then how can we now say to these same young people that it is all right to serve your nation in the dying place with equality of opportunity, but that it is somehow reverse discrimination to benefit from the fruits of American society in the workplace?

We are not in this country as mendicants; we are Americans. And as DuBois said, "we insist on every right that belongs to an American. We will accept not one jot or tittle less than our full manhood {and womanhood} rights. And until we get those rights, we will never cease to protest and to assail the ears of America."

And so tonight we make, no apology for demanding that which is ours by right.
Yet, while we press the government and the private sector to do its part, we must not leave our own part undone.

Hear and heed! Black Americans must take responsibility for their own lives.

As I did a year ago, I call again for a moratorium on excuses.

We hear about black pride. We hear declarations that we are African-Americans, marchers in a great army of self-esteem. Why is it that colored people and Negroes could build colleges, churches, lodges and businesses, and buy land, and proud black men and black women and African-Americans sell the land and can't keep the doors opened at the colleges and other institutions that colored people and Negroes built?

It's time to stop blaming the whole wide world for our problems. It may be true that white folks
import the drugs, but no one yet has claimed that a white person put a gun to his head and forced him to use the dope, or to sell it.

It may be true that whites make use of black prostitutes, but why do so many black men sell our sisters?

Who tells our men to make babies and leave them for the mothers and the taxpayers to raise?

Who forces our young women and young men to abandon self-discipline and sexual restraint?

Who tells young people who cannot speak or write a single simple grammatically correct sentence, or count the change for a $20 bill, that they should only work at a "meaningful job?"

Finally, as we prepare a new generation for the struggle we must not let the negative voices of those who say that we can't succeed, that we can't prevail, that we can't win, that we can't overcome, become our
guiding counsel.

We stand today at the edge of the wilderness place -- on the one side racism rearing its ugly head; on the other side those who are being overwhelmed by the problem of AIDS, crack, cocaine, dope, unwise, unsafe sex. But the Promised Land is just over the hill. In the life of another people they came finally to the outskirts of the Promised Land. They sent out spies to assess the chances and the possibilities of success. The majority report was made.

The majority report said, yes, the valleys are fertile, the trees are ripe with fruit, the grain flows invitingly, the water springs up abundantly. But there are giants inhabiting the land and we are grasshoppers before them. But thanks be to God that there was a minority report. Caleb and Joshua reported, yes there are giants in
the land, but we are not grasshoppers. We are children of the living God. We can take this land.

To the generation who must now prepare for the struggle, I tell you tonight that the naysayers, the doubters, those who stand on the sidelines and scoff there are giants in the land, we are not grasshoppers. We can and we shall meet the challenges. In slavery they told us we would never own homes, build colleges, establish businesses. When Reconstruction ended they told us that we were condemned to permanent habitation in the wilderness of despair and hopelessness. But every time the naysayers spoke, those who had faith in their ability and in the strength of a just God moved forward.
They told the NAACP: you will never eliminate lynching, but we did.

They told us we would never secure a Voting Rights Act, but we did.

They told us we would never get a Civil Rights Act, but we did.

They told us we would never have a Fair Housing Act, but we did.

They told us we would never eliminate segregation in education legally, but we did.

They told us that we would never make it possible for us to ride the front of the bus, but we did.

The NAACP has overcome every obstacle in our path and we shall overcome.
We must say to a new generation: do not succumb to the prophets of gloom and doom and negativism. We must say to another class of prophets -- those who have benefited from the movement; those who now occupy tenured positions at college and universities; those who have made it into the corporate world; those who have benefited from the NAACP who now want to evaluate and judge our effectiveness, and who say we have had enough affirmative action; we have had enough remediation to ameliorate previous conditions of inequity.

We must not listen to their counsel. Yes, the NAACP has succeeded, and we will continue, and we shall overcome.

I say to you, the new generation, that your parents and their parents have demonstrated that we have got something in us that police dogs can't bite out; police
batons can’t beat out; cattle prods can’t shock out; bullets can’t shoot out; water cannons can’t drown out; mail bombs can’t blow out; lies can’t shut out; evil can’t put out.
We have faith in our future, faith in our children and faith in our God.

- Show me an organization that has faith enough to move mountains and prejudice.
I show you the NAACP.

- Show me an organization that has courage enough to stand at the bastions of racism and cry: “Satan, we are going to tear your kingdom down!”
I show you the NAACP.

- Show me an organization bold enough to tell Congress that
you better rid yourself of your schizophrenic attitude and pass a civil rights bill.

I show you the NAACP.

- Show me an organization that will stand face-to-face with the President and cry, "You better let my people go!"

I show you the NAACP.

- Show me an organization that will challenge America to turn its focus from war to love and from fighting to peace.

I show you the NAACP.

- Show me an organization that is willing to cry from the highest mountain to the lowest ridge in the Grand
Canyon: "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream."
I show you the NAACP.

- Show me an organization which fears no racist Klansman but stands toe-to-toe and proclaims: "Let Freedom Ring."
I show you the NAACP.

- Yes, there is an organization which works to transform hatred into love...

injustice to justice
poverty to prosperity
bondage into liberty
slavery into freedom
bigotry into betterment
- There is an organization which spreads from coast to coast, from sea to shining sea, speaking a message of hope that resounds from every mountain top, reverberates from every valley; that organization which is crying in the bleak darkness of America; make straight your crookedness; make plain your roughness so that all of America can be as one!

THAT ORGANIZATION IS THE
NAACP

YES WE CAN BUILD FOR THE FUTURE:

THE BUILDER