

REMARKS OF GOVERNOR JIM FLORIO  
RUTGERS UNIVERSITY COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS  
NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY  
THURSDAY, MAY 24, 1990

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THIS IS A VERY HAPPY DAY FOR EVERYONE HERE, BUT OF COURSE IT'S MADE A LITTLE LESS HAPPY BECAUSE, AS WAS ALREADY STATED, OF SOMEONE WHO IS NOT HERE -- ED BLOUSTEIN.

AS WE PLAN FOR THE FUTURE, WE MUST NOT LEAVE BEHIND THE SPIRIT OF DR. BLOUSTEIN -- THE VISION HE HAD OF A STATE UNIVERSITY WORKING HARD THROUGH RESEARCH AND PUBLIC SERVICE TO HELP SOLVE TODAY'S PROBLEMS. HE HAD AN IDEA OF MAKING COMMUNITY SERVICE A REQUIREMENT FOR STUDENTS; IN HIS ABSENCE WE SHOULD STILL MOVE AHEAD WITH THAT VERY GOOD IDEA.

ED BLOUSTEIN WAS SOMEONE WHO HAD AN ABIDING COMMITMENT TO HIGHER EDUCATION. THAT IS A COMMITMENT THAT ALL OF US MUST KEEP IT ALIVE EVEN THOUGH WE HAVE DIFFICULT TIMES, A DIFFICULT YEAR WE ARE IN. A YEAR WHEN ALL OF US WILL BE CALLED UPON TO MAKE SACRIFICES SO THAT WE CAN PUT OUR STATE BACK ON A FIRM FINANCIAL FOOTING -- SO OUR STATE CAN CONTINUE TO BE A PLACE OF OPPORTUNITY. I APPRECIATE THE SUPPORT SO MANY HAVE BEEN GIVING IN THIS ENDEAVOR AS WE TRY TO MAKE SURE NEW JERSEY STAYS A PLACE OF OPPORTUNITY.

I'D LIKE TO START OUT TODAY BY CONGRATULATING THE GRADUATES. YOU'VE EARNED IT.

AND CONGRATULATIONS, TOO, TO THE PARENTS WHO ARE HERE. I KNOW THE PRIDE YOU FEEL. IN A COUPLE OF WEEKS I'LL BE SITTING IN AN AUDIENCE VERY MUCH LIKE THIS ONE. MY DAUGHTER IS GRADUATING FROM MEDICAL SCHOOL. SO I'M GOING TO BE ENJOYING THE SAME SENSE OF PRIDE THAT YOU HAVE. AND JUST LIKE YOU, I'LL BE THINKING OF HOW FAST THE TIME WENT; HOW IT SEEMS JUST LIKE YESTERDAY THAT SHE WAS JUST MY LITTLE GIRL.

AS PARENTS YOU CAN DERIVE SATISFACTION OUT OF THE FACT THAT YOU KNOW THAT YOU'VE MADE A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF YOUR SONS AND DAUGHTERS. SOME OF YOU, I'M SURE, WERE BETTER EQUIPPED THAN OTHERS, TO PROVIDE THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND THE MATERIAL COMFORTS. BUT THAT'S NOT WHAT REALLY COUNTS.

THE REALLY IMPORTANT THING THAT YOU PROVIDED TO YOUR CHILDREN IS VALUES. VALUES LIKE HARD WORK; RESPECT FOR THEMSELVES AND OTHERS; DISCIPLINE. AND NOW, BECAUSE YOU'RE PARENTS AND IT'S YOUR DUTY TO WORRY, YOU SIT HERE AND YOU WONDER WHETHER THOSE VALUES WILL CONTINUE TO GUIDE THEM AS THEY LEAVE COLLEGE BEHIND AND GROW FARTHER AND FARTHER AWAY FROM CHILDHOOD.

IT'S A FAIR QUESTION.

AND YOU THE GRADUATES, YOU'LL LEAVE HERE WITH A PIECE OF PAPER. AND THAT PIECE OF PAPER SAYS THAT YOU'VE LEARNED HOW TO

LEARN. BUT THAT'S ALL THAT IT SAYS. WHETHER YOU'VE REALLY GOTTEN AN EDUCATION IS A QUESTION THAT'S GOING TO TAKE A LIFETIME TO ANSWER. BECAUSE IF YOU'VE REALLY EDUCATED, YOU WILL SPEND THAT LIFETIME LEARNING. YOU WILL SPEND IT QUESTIONING.

QUESTIONING ASSUMPTIONS.

QUESTIONING POLICIES.

QUESTIONING PEOPLE.

QUESTIONING YOUR OWN LIVES AND WHETHER YOU ARE USING THE POWERS YOU HAVE AS BEST YOU CAN. A QUESTIONING, INQUIRING MIND IS AN OPEN MIND.

WHEN I WAS ASKED A COUPLE OF WEEKS AGO WHAT THE TITLE OF MY SPEECH WOULD BE, I SAID, "THE POWER OF THE INQUIRING MIND." IF I HAD A SECOND CHANCE TO PICK THE TITLE, I MIGHT JUST HAVE QUOTED SPIKE LEE: "DO THE RIGHT THING."

BECAUSE WHAT I'M REALLY TALKING ABOUT TODAY ARE VALUES.

BECAUSE AS YOU GO THROUGH THE YEARS INQUIRING -- QUESTIONING -- YOUR VALUES WILL HELP DETERMINE THE ANSWERS THAT YOU FIND.

VALUES MAKE US HUMAN. THEY KNIT US TOGETHER AS A SOCIETY. WHEN WE LOSE SIGHT OF VALUES, WE LOSE SIGHT OF WHO WE ARE.

TOO OFTEN TODAY, WE ARE LOSING SIGHT.

FOR EXAMPLE, IF I WERE TO STAND HERE TODAY AND TELL YOU THERE IS SOMETHING IN THE AIR THAT WE NEED TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT, YOU MIGHT THINK -- GIVEN MY ENVIRONMENTAL BACKGROUND -- THAT I WAS TALKING ABOUT AIR POLLUTION. BUT I'M NOT, I'M TALKING ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE IN THE AIR THAT, WHILE IT MIGHT NOT BE TOXIC, IS JUST AS DANGEROUS.

A FEW MONTHS AGO, I WAS ON THIS CAMPUS TO VISIT THE HILLEL CENTER THAT HAD BEEN THE VICTIM OF AN ANTI-SEMITIC GRAFFITI ATTACK. DESPITE ITS LACK OF VIOLENCE, IT WAS AN ATTACK THAT WAS REPULSIVE TO PEOPLE OF ALL FAITHS WHO CARE ABOUT TOLERANCE. A VALUE THAT IS ESSENTIAL.

THE SAME COULD BE SAID OF WHAT HAPPENED RECENTLY IN FRONT OF THE PAUL ROBESON CENTER. THIS TIME THE TARGET WAS AFRICAN-AMERICANS.

IN BOTH CASES, THE UGLY WORDS AND THE SYMBOLS ARE GONE NOW. BUT THE HURT REMAINS. IT WOULD BE NICE TO SAY THAT THESE WERE ISOLATED INCIDENTS -- ABERRATIONS IN AN OTHERWISE HAPPY WORLD. BUT IT'S JUST NOT THE CASE.

NO, INCIDENTS LIKE THIS ARE PART OF AN UNFORTUNATE, LARGER TREND WHERE PEOPLE ARE BECOMING VICTIMS OF BIAS MORE FREQUENTLY

BECAUSE OF THEIR ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS OR THEIR RELIGION -- OR BECAUSE OF THEIR GENDER OR THEIR SEXUAL PREFERENCE. CLEARLY, THIS CAMPUS IS A MICROCOSM OF WHAT IS HAPPENING TO PEOPLE FAR BEYOND ITS GATES.

BLACK PEOPLE IN BENSONHURST. ASIAN-AMERICANS IN JERSEY CITY. KOREANS IN WASHINGTON D.C. VIETNAMESE IN CALIFORNIA.

YOU SEE THESE THINGS IN NEWSPAPERS, YOU SEE THEM ON TELEVISION AND YOU HAVE TO ASK, "WHAT IN THE WORLD IS GOING ON? WHAT KIND OF A PEOPLE ARE WE BECOMING?"

IT'S PERPLEXING. AND IT'S SCARY. MORE THAN 200 YEARS AFTER OUR NATION WAS FOUNDED ON TOLERANCE, INTOLERANCE SEEMS TO BE ON THE RISE. SOME OF IT SUBTLE. SOME OF IT OBVIOUS. ALL OF IT UNACCEPTABLE.

WE ARE A NATION OF IMMIGRANTS, AND YET NEW IMMIGRANTS FIND THEMSELVES THE TARGETS OF HATEFUL SLURS, AND WORSE. THERE WAS NO EXCUSE FOR IT IN MY GRANDFATHER'S TIME, WHEN GIUSEPPE FLORIO CAME TO THIS COUNTRY. AND THERE IS NO EXCUSE FOR IT TODAY.

I HAVE AN IDEA ABOUT WHY IT'S HAPPENING.

I BELIEVE THAT THERE IS SOMETHING FUNDAMENTAL THAT IS MISSING FROM LIFE IN AMERICA TODAY.

IN THIS LAST DECADE OF OUR CENTURY, IN OUR HIGH-TECH MARCH TOWARDS THE YEAR 2000, WE'VE LEFT SOMETHING BEHIND. OUR SENSE OF COMMUNITY.

LIKE TOLERANCE, COMMUNITY IS A VALUE. ONE THAT HAS MEANT A LOT TO WHO WE ARE. WE CAN DEFINE THE WORD "COMMUNITY" IN A LOT OF DIFFERENT WAYS. BUT CERTAINLY, COMMUNITY HAS TO MEAN MORE THAN JUST A GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO HAPPEN TO LIVE NEAR EACH OTHER.

I'M SURE THAT MANY OF YOU HAD EXPERIENCES LIKE MINE, WHEN I WAS GROWING UP IN BROOKLYN, NEW YORK. PEOPLE PAID ATTENTION TO ONE ANOTHER'S LIVES. IF A DOOR WAS LEFT SLIGHTLY AJAR, OR IF YOU LEFT YOUR LIGHT STAYED ON ALL NIGHT, SOMEONE COULD INEVITABLY BE COUNTED ON TO CHECK AND SEE IF THERE WAS SOMETHING WRONG. WE WERE NEIGHBORS, NOT STRANGERS WHO HAPPENED TO LIVE ON THE SAME BLOCK.

THAT WAS A COMMUNITY. THE WORD "COMMUNITY" HAS AS ITS ROOT WORD "COMMON." AND THAT WORD ALSO HELPS TO FORM THE WORD "COMMONWEALTH." THAT'S A WORD WE DON'T USE TOO MUCH THESE DAYS. BUT TO OUR ANCESTORS COMMONWEALTH HAD A LOT OF MEANING.

THEY USED IT TO SPEAK OF SOMETHING GREATER THAN ANY ONE PERSON; A WHOLE THAT DOESN'T MEAN MUCH UNLESS ALL OF THE PARTS CONTRIBUTE.

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN WE SEEMED TO BE ON THE VERGE OF BEING TRULY A NATIONAL COMMUNITY. WHEN RELIGION AND SKIN COLOR AND

ETHNIC BACKGROUND -- THOSE THINGS WEREN'T GOING TO STAND BETWEEN US AND OUR IDEAL OF AMERICA AS A PLACE WHERE ALL COULD PULL TOGETHER.

ONE PERSON'S SUCCESS WOULDN'T HAVE TO COME AT THE EXPENSE OF ANOTHER'S FAILURE.

ONE GROUP'S JOY WOULDN'T DEPEND ON ANOTHER'S SORROW.

I GUESS I'M SPEAKING MORE TO THE PARENTS THAN THE GRADUATES NOW, BUT DON'T YOU THINK WE WOULD HAVE BEEN THERE BY NOW?

BUT I DON'T THINK IT'S TOO LATE TO GET THERE. I THINK THAT, MAYBE MORE THAN EVER BEFORE THAT I CAN REMEMBER, PEOPLE WANT TO FEEL THAT THEY ARE A PART OF SOMETHING LARGER THAN THEMSELVES. WHEN THAT YEARNING IS STIFLED IT CAN BE AN OUTLET FOR HATRED. BUT WHEN THE YEARNING IS ENCOURAGED AND REDEEMED, IT CAN BE TRULY LIBERATING.

I BELIEVE THAT THERE ARE THINGS WE CAN DO TO RESTORE TOLERANCE, BRING BACK COMMUNITY -- UNITE US WITH OUR VALUES.

FOR ONE THING, WE CAN NO LONGER TAKE FOR GRANTED THE VICTORIES OF THE PAST AGAINST INTOLERANCE. WE MUST LIVE OUR LIVES WITH THE COLD REALIZATION THAT THOSE BATTLES ARE STILL BEING FOUGHT TODAY. NONE OF US CAN BE CONTENT SIMPLY TO FEEL THAT IN OUR OWN HEARTS WE HAVE NO PREJUDICE.

SOMETIMES, THAT'S GOOD ENOUGH. THESE DAYS, IT'S NOT.

IN THESE TIMES, INTOLERANCE HAS TO BE FOUGHT WITH A WEAPON MORE POTENT, AND LESS PASSIVE, THAN MERE TOLERANCE. ALL OF US MUST SPEAK OUT WHEN WE SEE ONE GROUP GOING AFTER ANOTHER. WE CANNOT BE SPECTATORS. IF WE JUST SIT AND WATCH, THEN WHO WILL STAND UP FOR US, WHEN IT'S OUR TURN TO BE THE VICTIM?

AND OUR TURN SURELY WILL COME, IF THE SEEMINGLY ISOLATED BRUSHFIRES OF HATRED ARE ALLOWED TO BURN, UNCHECKED.

WE ARE NOT A PERFECT SOCIETY. FAR FROM IT. BUT WE ARE PERFECTABLE. AND, EVERY SO OFTEN WE ARE CALLED UPON TO BE A LITTLE MORE ALERT, A LITTLE MORE ACTIVE -- TO MAKE SURE THAT WE DON'T BACKSLIDE ALONG THE CLIMB TO BE THE BEST THAT WE CAN.

THIS IS ONE OF THOSE TIMES.

AND, WHILE I'M TELLING YOU WHAT I THINK YOU, AS ADULTS, AND AS CITIZENS, OUGHT TO DO, I FULLY RECOGNIZE THAT ALL OF US IN POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY HAVE AN EVEN BIGGER ROLE TO PLAY.

BECAUSE ANOTHER VALUE THAT IS ALL TOO OFTEN FORGOTTEN TODAY IS THAT OF LEADERSHIP.

WHETHER A LEADER IS AN ELECTED HEAD OF GOVERNMENT, OR SOMEONE IN BUSINESS, OR THE SPIRITUAL HEAD OF A RELIGIOUS GROUP,

HE OR SHE HAS THE OBLIGATION TO USE THE FULL MORAL AUTHORITY OF THEIR POSITION.

TOO OFTEN TODAY LEADERS ARE PARALYZED. THEY FIND REASONS NOT TO CHALLENGE; NOT TO PUSH; NOT TO LEAD; NOT TO QUESTION.

THEY FORGET THAT THE QUESTIONING MIND I SPOKE OF EARLIER IS JUST AS IMPORTANT FOR LEADERS AS IT IS FOR YOUNG COLLEGE GRADUATES.

IT IS TOO EASY TODAY FOR THOSE WHO ARE SUPPOSED TO LEAD TO COMPLAIN ABOUT THE LACK OF TRUST, RESPECT, AND CONFIDENCE THAT SO MANY PEOPLE FEEL TOWARD GOVERNMENT. INSTEAD, A LEADER HAS TO SEE THIS CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE FOR WHAT IT REALLY IS: A TWO-WAY STREET. FOR IF PEOPLE DON'T TRUST LEADERS, I SUGGEST IT'S BECAUSE LEADERS HAVE STOPPED TRUSTING PEOPLE.

A TRUE LEADER HAS CONFIDENCE IN THE DESIRE OF PEOPLE NOT TO BE PANDERED TO. CONFIDENCE THAT IF PEOPLE ARE PRESENTED WITH AN HONEST ASSESSMENT OF FACTS AND A FAIR PICTURE OF ALTERNATIVES, THEY WILL LISTEN. THEY WILL JUDGE. THEY WILL RESPOND. THEY WILL ACCEPT TOUGH CHOICES. THEY WILL THINK LESS OF SHORT-TERM SELF-INTEREST AND MORE OF LONG-TERM COMMUNITY INTEREST.

I THINK IT'S TIME WE GOT PAST THE POLITICS OF PITTING PEOPLE AND GROUPS AGAINST EACH OTHER. I REJECT THE IDEA OF GAINING SUPPORT BY GOING TO SOME GROUPS AND PLAYING THEM OFF AGAINST OTHERS.

THE 1990S SHOULD BE ABOUT REMINDING PEOPLE THAT, DEEP DOWN, WE DO ALL SHARE THE SAME VALUES. WE ARE A COMMUNITY. WE SHOULD BE EMPHASIZING WHAT WE HAVE IN COMMON; NOT WHAT SEPARATES US.

I WAS GRADUATED FROM COLLEGE 28 YEARS AGO -- IN 1962.

THE FADS AND THE FASHIONS WERE VERY DIFFERENT. WE LISTENED ON THE RADIO TO SONGS LIKE "THE PEPPERMINT TWIST" AND "BIG GIRLS DON'T CRY."

BUT BACK THEN, JUST AS TODAY, PEOPLE OF GOOD FAITH WERE STRUGGLING TO ASSERT THE BEST IN HUMAN VALUES. SOME WERE FIGHTING -- EVEN DYING -- FOR RESPECT AND FOR DIGNITY -- FOR TOLERANCE. THAT WAS A TIME WHEN IN PARTS OF OUR OWN NATION, PEOPLE COULD BE DENIED A PLACE TO EAT, OR DRINK, OR SLEEP, BECAUSE OF THE COLOR OF THEIR SKIN. AND STRANGE AS IT MIGHT SOUND TO SOME IN THE AUDIENCE, THAT DISCRIMINATION WAS ENTIRELY LEGAL.

IN 1962 OUR PRESIDENT WAS A YOUNG MAN OF VISION -- A MAN WHO PERSONALLY INSPIRED ME -- A LEADER WHO RECOGNIZED THAT HIS JOB WAS TO CHALLENGE AND INSPIRE ALL OF US.

PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY SAID, "WHAT WE ARE SEEKING, AFTER ALL, IS REALLY VERY SIMPLE. IT'S REALLY A RECOGNITION THAT THIS IS ONE NATION, AND WE ARE ALL ONE GREAT PEOPLE. OUR ORIGINS MAY

BE DIFFERENT, BUT OUR DESTINY IS THE SAME. OUR ASPIRATIONS ARE IDENTICAL. THERE CAN BE NO ARTIFICIAL DISTINCTIONS, NO ARBITRARY BARRIERS IN SECURING THESE RIGHTS."

JOHN KENNEDY WAS SPEAKING DIRECTLY TO THE OPEN, INQUIRING, QUESTIONING MINDS OF HIS DAY. HE WAS SPEAKING ABOUT TOLERANCE. ABOUT COMMUNITY. AND YES, ABOUT LEADERSHIP.

FOLKS, YOU CAN'T REACH INTO YOUR POCKET AND PULL OUT A ROAD MAP FOR THE FUTURE. RAND MCNALLY DOESN'T MAKE THEM. BUT SUCH A MAP DOES EXIST. IT EXISTS IN OUR HEARTS. IN THE COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE OF OUR ANCESTORS. IN OUR VALUES.

SO, TO THE GRADUATES: QUESTION THE WORLD YOU LIVE IN. CHANGE IT. MAKE IT BETTER. TAKE THE OLD IDEALS -- THE VALUES -- THAT BROUGHT US TO THIS PLACE, AND GIVE US THE NEW IDEAS THAT WILL TAKE US TO THE NEXT PLACE. A BETTER PLACE.

THANK YOU, AND GOOD LUCK.