



Department of Justice

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REMARKS

BY

ACTING ATTORNEY GENERAL NICHOLAS deB. KATZENBACH

THE GREATER BALTIMORE CONFERENCE ON

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IN HOUSING

Hotel Sheraton-Belvedere Baltimore, Maryland

1:15 P.M. Tuesday, November 24, 1964

Governor Lawrence, Governor Tawes, Mayor McKeldin, Mr. Rouse,
ladies and gentlemen:

It is a great pleasure for me to join with you at this conference on equal housing opportunities. We at the Department of Justice believe, as you do, that racial discrimination in America can be ended in the foreseeable future and we believe that this result will, largely, be achieved because of the local initiative, cooperation, and foresight inherent in conferences such as this. I congratulate you.

The battle for equal rights is being fought on many fronts. We give them different names -- housing, employment, education, voting -- but they are all interrelated, all part of a whole. We have learned that it is insufficient to provide job opportunities without also providing the education to qualify young people to take those jobs. We have learned that it is insufficient to improve slum schools unless we also improve the outside-school environment of the children. We have learned that it is not enough to be concerned with urban renewal; we must be concerned with human renewal.

In short, we are dealing with a social spiral with many turns, all leading downward. There is little point in trying to find one single starting place or gap in that spiral. To break it requires action on all fronts.

You meet here out of concern for what is unquestionably one of the most important and most difficult of these fronts. There has been less progress in housing than in some other fields. But despite difficulty and delay, I have no doubt that you will succeed.

I believe this because we have seen substantial progress on other equally difficult fronts. Indeed, in the past four years, our country

has made monumental progress in the field of civil rights. We have, after decades of struggle, put the full force and will of the federal government behind our pledges of equal opportunity and equal justice. As a result, America has turned a very sharp corner in its civil rights history: official, systematic discrimination has now been outlawed, in all parts of the country. Difficulties still lie ahead, but the principle has been established.

Now we have come to a point when the phrase "civil rights" no longer need apply only to "Negro rights", but can regain its full meaning and apply to human rights, to human problems of deprived citizens, whether Negro or white. It is not hard to measure the significance of this advance. We need only look back four years to see how wide was the impact of official discrimination.

For example, there is no more basic civil right than the right to vote. Yet in January, 1961, there was widespread denial of this right in most Southern states, and the Department of Justice had brought only 10 law suits against discrimination -- none of them in Mississippi. Today the total is 67 law suits -- 24 of them in Mississippi.

In Macon County, Alabama, it was almost impossible in 1960 for a Negro to vote. Yet in the last election, following federal action, Negroes not only voted, but two Negroes were elected to the county council. They are the first of their race to hold such office in Alabama since Reconstruction.

In all, according to NAACP figures, Negro voters in 11 Southern states increased from 1.3 million in the 1960 election to more than two million in the 1964 election -- an increase of one third.

A second right, equally basic, is the right to travel anywhere in the nation without interference. The Freedom Rides of May, 1961 demonstrated dramatically that segregation in bus, rail, and air terminals still persisted in the South. By the end of 1962, as the result both of court action and informal efforts by the Department of Justice, all segregation in interstate transportation had been successfully ended. For the first time, it was possible to travel from Baltimore to Baton Rouge without encountering one restroom labeled "white only."

In the field of education, schools in five states were still entirely segregated at the end of 1960. Robert Kennedy made it clear, when he became Attorney General, that the federal government would tolerate no interference with court desegregation orders. That pledge was upheld at the University of Mississippi, the University of Alabama, and elsewhere. Today there is at least some school desegregation in every state, following the admission -- the orderly, peaceful admission -- of Negro students to schools in three districts in Mississippi this fall.

Fourth, in the area of employment, the President's committee on Equal Employment Opportunity has made great progress under the leadership of

Lyndon B. Johnson, both as Vice-President and as President. The Committee now handles many times the number of complaints handled during the entire period of 1953 to 1960. It has launched equal hiring opportunity programs involving more than 270 of the nation's major employers, as well as a number of unions.

Fifth, unquestionably the greatest advance has been the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Until its enactment five months ago, the only federal civil rights laws passed since 1875 dealt with voting. Now, for the first time, segregation as an official system has been outlawed, whether involving lunch counters or libraries, schools or night clubs.

Already, the first cases brought under this act are in court. What is far more significant are the substantial advances being made without the need for legal action. And it is this aspect of the Civil Rights Act which provides the greatest source of encouragement for efforts like yours in the field of housing.

In May of 1963, 14 months before passage of the act and two months before it even was introduced, President Kennedy, Vice-President Johnson, and Attorney General Kennedy undertook a concerted, informal effort to achieve voluntary desegregation of public accommodations throughout the South. They held 21 meetings with public officials, businessmen, attorneys, and leaders of religious, church, women's labor, and education organizations, from North and South. More than 1,700 persons participated.

The purpose of the meetings was to appraise what these people and their organizations could do, on their own, to help ease racial tension and help erase racial discrimination from all aspects of our national life. These meetings and the voluntary efforts which they inspired have brought about dramatic results. Even before the new Civil Rights Act was passed, there had been at least some voluntary desegregation of hotels, restaurants, theaters, and other places of public accommodation in 70 percent of the 566 cities of the South.

A 70 percent figure sounds encouraging--and it is. But to understand the depth of the problem, the figure needs to be turned around. The voluntary effort had no success whatever in the other 30 percent. And it is in those areas, areas of unreasoning, hard-core resistance, that the new act has its greatest importance.

But in the other 70 percent, it was not the new act which provided the major impetus. I do not say that this progress came from the demands of conscience alone. I am sure that in at least some cases, the primary impulse was economic self-interest. But whatever the motive--whether money, or morality, or both--the communities involved had the courage and the foresight to recognize and meet their problems, voluntarily.

This lesson was demonstrated anew last week. In McComb, Mississippi, which has come to be regarded as one of the bastions of terrorist bigotry, 650 leading citizens risked venom and violence by sponsoring a full-page

newspaper ad calling for an end to violence and for equal treatment under law for all citizens. They recognize, as men and women throughout the country have come to recognize, that the national interest in social justice does not exceed, but equates with self-interest in prosperity and order.

It seems to me that there is a substantial parallel between these attitudes and the job that lies ahead of you--and all of us--in the housing field. Law and official action can provide a focus and a foundation for social action. President Kennedy's Executive Order on Housing has done just that; its greatest importance is that it sets equal housing for all as a clear public policy. The Executive Order has neither solved all our problems, as some hoped, nor brought chaos upon the land, as some feared. But it has provided a foundation upon which we can build in the future.

Similarly, the important work of the Housing and Home Finance Agency has provided additional governmental impetus and support, notably in helping provide more housing which more people can afford. And general economic and social measures, such as the tax cut and the anti-poverty bill, also will assist both Negroes and whites to obtain better housing.

But once more, as in the area of voluntary desegregation of public accommodations, legal and governmental action alone are not enough. A man with a dime and determination can desegregate a lunch counter, but advances in the field of housing are far more difficult--and far more central. There is little need for me to tell you that much work lies ahead. But conferences like this can accomplish a great deal.

They can help provide communication and understanding between groups of different, but not necessarily conflicting interests. They can help bury specific myths and unfounded fears--like the fear that open housing means declining property values. Most of all, they can help generate the understanding that in the North as well as in the South, in Baltimore as well as in McComb, national interest is self-interest.

If our central city areas increasingly become empty cores in fat doughnuts of suburban prosperity, we do damage not only to our democratic vision, but also to the prosperity of downtown businessmen. If welfare costs mount ever higher, the price is paid by all citizens. If crime continues to increase in slum areas, its effects reverberate through all levels of society.

I began by saying that I think the nation has passed the point where we are dealing solely with "Negro rights" and that "civil rights" has regained broader meaning, and I want to return to that point now. We have made it unlawful to deny a man his civil rights on the basis of race, and we will enforce that law. In the years ahead, we must combat--as this Administration is combatting--the other forces that deny Americans the full measure of citizenship: inadequate housing, ill health, unemployment, ignorance, and poverty.

These are the challenges that lie ahead in the field of civil rights. They are not challenges solely on behalf of the Negro. They are not challenges solely on behalf of the poor, Negro and white. They are challenges for our entire society. In the words of an adage President Kennedy was fond of quoting, "A rising tide lifts all the boats."

There is a rising tide in this nation and you here at this conference are a part of it. The work you are doing can bring great good to your city and, by example, to other cities. You are taking the indispensable first step of communication and cooperation.

President Johnson spoke to another group not long ago in words that apply to your work here today:

"Your imagination, your initiative and your indignation will determine whether we build a society where progress is the servant of our needs, or a society where old values and new visions are buried under unbridled growth . . . a place where the city of man serves not only the needs of the body and the demands of commerce, but the desire for beauty and the hunger for community."

You face great challenges and great opportunities, and I wish you well.