
Mr. Cafaro changed the way America shops by pioneering the shopping center industry. He built some of the nation's first strip plazas and enclosed malls. His privately owned company has been recognized by countless organizations for its generosity and philanthropic work in the community. Among numerous other civic activities, Mr. Cafaro was especially involved in his church and in education. He was recently awarded a lifetime achievement award for his commitment to the community. His leadership and generosity are a great loss.

HUMAN RIGHTS SPEECH

HON. LEE H. HAMILTON
OF INDIANA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Thursday, April 23, 1998

Mr. HAMILTON. Mr. Speaker, I submit for the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD the attached excerpt from a speech I gave to the Columbus Human Rights Commission on April 4, 1998.

ADDRESS TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION ANNUAL DINNER, COLUMBUS, INDIANA, APRIL 4, 1998

(By Lee H. Hamilton)

I want to talk with you tonight about the challenges we face in advancing human rights. A deep concern for human rights is a basic and fundamental expression of the values of the American people. It is part of who we are and who we hope to become.

In one sense, the history of this country can be told as the story of the advancement of human rights. Our forefathers fought a War of Independence to secure civil and political liberties, and a Civil War to ensure that all of its people, black and white, should be free to pursue happiness. In more recent times, over the last two centuries, we have sought to remove barriers that deny us a fair chance to succeed. Human rights are about removing those obstacles, and ensuring that all of us are treated fairly, equally, and justly in our individual pursuit of happiness. The Columbus Human Rights Commission is so important because it does precisely that. In fighting discrimination and human rights abuses, this Commission works to ensure that the magnificient ideal of the Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal—becomes reality. It serves to help this community be a place where everyone has an opportunity to become the best they can be.

I. CIVIL RIGHTS AT HOME: CHANGING ATTITUDES, CHANGING ISSUES

Our country is today in the midst of a national debate about civil rights and race relations, perhaps for the first time since Congress passed landmark civil and voting rights laws in the mid-1960s. I have cast over 5,000 votes in my years in Congress, but few, if any, have given me more satisfaction than to support these laws. Much of the current debate has focused on affirmative action (more on that later). The debate, however, also goes to more fundamental questions about race in America: do we continue to believe that black incomes are still only 75% of white incomes, that almost one in five black children live in poverty; black unemployment is more than twice as high; and the life expectancy for black males is more than eight years less than for white men (65 years vs. 73 years). They say whites have lost interest in their plight, cutting federal programs that benefit minorities. Whites really see very little when it comes to barriers for blacks in jobs, education, and housing. Many blacks see racial discrimination as a fact of life.

Blacks have generally become more optimistic that progress toward equality has occurred and that racial discrimination has declined. Blacks, in contrast, are increasingly discouraged about race relations and discrimination.

The debate over affirmative action provides another example of the breakdown in the consensus. Supporters of affirmative action say that while the situation has improved, racism persists in this country, and that affirmative action is needed to remedy the effects of discrimination. Affirmative action programs, they will note, have provided opportunities for millions of minorities, extending the American dream and strengthening our political system and economy. Opponents respond that affirmative action is fundamentally unfair, that people should succeed or fail based on their talent and effort, not race. Either they say that we now live in a colorblind society so race-based policies are unnecessary, or they say that while racism may persist, affirmative action leads to double standards which heighten rather than reduce racial tensions.

b. sense of optimism

Second, during the Civil Rights Era there was a strong sense of public will about tackling problems associated with race. I don't suggest it was a Golden Age. We then lived in a segregated society, where minors in our society were denied political rights and civil liberties as well as economic and educational opportunities.

What has changed, however, is our outlook on the future of race relations. Back then, many of us took to heart Dr. King's vision of an integrated America, where people would be judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. We believed that anti-poverty efforts could wipe out the inner city slums and lift the poor into the middle class. We believed—perhaps naively—that anti-discrimination laws would lead to a society with fully integrated schools, neighborhood and workplaces.

We have made remarkable progress toward racial equality over the last 30 years. seen, I suppose, most conspicuously in the expansion of voting rights and of a black middle class, educated and affluent, that has taken advantage of new opportunities. But, in many other respects, this is not the world we dreamed of 30 years ago. While blacks and whites, believed that anti-poverty efforts could wipe out the inner city slums and lift the poor into the middle class, the belief is now much more realistic. Many blacks feel aggrieved. They observe that black incomes are still only 75% of white incomes; 40% of all black children live in poverty; black unemployment is more than twice as high; and the life expectancy for black males is more than eight years less than for white men (65 years vs. 73 years). They say whites have lost interest in their plight, cutting federal programs that benefit minorities. Whites really see very little when it comes to barriers for blacks in jobs, education, and housing. Many blacks see racial discrimination as a fact of life.

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