

Remarks to African-American Religious and Community Leaders in
New York City
October 31, 2000

Thank you. I knew I was going to have a good time here when I walked in the backdoor and they were singing “Oh, Happy Day.” [Laughter] So they finished before I got here, and I had to have another song, and you were magnificent. Thank you very much. I’m proud of you all for changing your lives and for being hooked on something good. Thank you. I’m proud of you all. Bless you. Bless you.

Thank you, Bishop Gaylord, for making us feel welcome. Thank you, Bishop White, for praying over us—[laughter]—making us feel holier. Thank you, Reverend Williams, for getting us here to remind us of what we’re supposed to do as citizens in this life. I would also like to say a special word of thanks to Reverend Herb Daughtry, whose daughter works for Alexis Herman, the Secretary of Labor. I know he was here before me, but I thank him. Yes, sir.

I thank your borough president, Virginia Fields, for being here and for supporting Hillary and Al. And I know Senator Schumer was here earlier, and our public advocate, Mark Green, is in the back. And we’ve been friends, Mark and I have, for 20 years, and he shook his hand out—I came in before—he said, “Reverend Green to you.” [Laughter] So, you know, after all these years you’ve been working—he’s got to get in the mood, you know, that’s good. He’s coming right along.

I cannot say enough about my admiration for Carl McCall, the job he’s done for you and the—Hillary and I like him and his wonderful wife, Joyce, so much, and we’re proud of him, and I’m very grateful for the support he’s given to Hillary. I said—I want to express my support, too, for Senator Schumer. I know he was here earlier. And let me say one thing about Charlie Rangel. If we win six more seats, he’ll be the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee. He’s been very good to me. Harlem has been very good to me.

I can’t speak in this pulpit in Harlem without also noting that one of the most important people in my becoming President was my first Secretary of Commerce, Ron Brown, who grew up in Harlem. I miss him every day, and I want

to—[applause]—he’d be glad to know I’m finishing up my career as President in a church in Harlem. [Laughter] Mayor Dinkins, I’m glad to see you. You’ll always be mayor to me, and I love you. Thank you. Glad to see you.

Now, I love to come, especially, to the Church of God in Christ. Bishop White talked about the presiding bishop, Bishop Owens. His predecessor, Bishop Ford from Chicago, was a great friend of mine, and he has been a magnificent friend of mine. He brought the bishops to their annual meeting in Washington just so I could say thanks and goodbye to them.

We were all having a good time. We’re all old friends. So I got up and thought I was being funny. I said to Bishop Owens in front of all of the bishops, I said, “You know, I wanted to come here because I wanted to see a group of leaders who aren’t term-limited.” [Laughter] And you know, I thought that was pretty cute. And Bishop Owens looked at me and said, “Mr. President, we are all term-limited.” [Laughter] And so we are. But while we’re here, we’re supposed to do the best we can. Is that right?

Now, we all know why we’re here, and we can shout amen and have a great time, and we’re all preaching to the saved; we’re talking to one another. But I want to talk to you about the people that aren’t in this church tonight, the people who have never come to an event like this and never heard a President speak or even a mayor or a comptroller or a Senator or anybody. But they could vote. And they need to vote, and they need to know why they’re voting. And that’s really why you’re here, because of all the people who aren’t here. Isn’t that right? There wouldn’t be a need in us having a meeting if everybody who is not here planned to show up, understood what the stakes were, what the choice was, and what the consequences were. Is that right?

So what you have to think about tonight is, what is it you intend to do between now and Tuesday, and on Tuesday, to get as many people there as possible and to make sure when they get to the polls, they know why they’re there, what the stakes are, and what the consequences

are. And from my point of view, which is one most of all just filled with gratitude for the people of the United States, to the people of New York, and to the people of Harlem for the support you have given to me and Hillary and Al and Tipper Gore these last 8 years, I'm not running for anything; my party has got a new leader; my home has a new candidate. [Laughter] And I like that. I like getting out here and speaking for other people. That's what I did when I was a kid, you know, and now I'm getting to learn it all over again, and I like it. But I want to tell you tonight in public what I would tell you if I were sitting alone in a room with any of you, and you asked me, what's this election about, anyway?

I think there are three great questions that I want you to tell everybody you can reach—everybody in Harlem, everybody in New York State. If you've got any friends across the river in New Jersey or anyplace else, I want you to reach them between now and Tuesday, because this is a razor-thin election. I believe because people are not quite sure—"What's it about, anyway? And is it a big deal, or can we relax because things are going so well?"

One thing I can say in a church is that anybody that's lived more than 30 years has made at least one big mistake in his or her life not when things were so bad but when things were so good, you thought, "Well, this is all right; I don't have to concentrate anymore." Isn't that right? If you live long enough, you make a big mistake when things are going well, not when things are going bad. When things are going bad and your whole survival is at stake, it kind of concentrates your mind; you make better decisions. If things are going good, you think, ah, what's the difference?

Now, this is a happy election, I think, for America because the country is in good shape, and I like it that these candidates aren't really badmouthing each other. I like it that we can just say, let's assume we're dealing with good people here who love their families and love their country and will do their best to do a good job based on what they believe.

And once you say that, then you've got to figure out, what is it they believe? What are they going to do if they get these jobs, and how will it affect me, my family, my community, and my country? That's all that matters. And I'm hopeful that the work we've done in the last 8 years has taken some of the poison out

of America's political life so we could actually have an election about what it's really supposed to be about, which is, how is this going to affect you?

After all, the race for President, the race for Vice President, the race for United States Senator, those are hiring decisions. You're hiring people to do a job for you. John Kennedy once said that the Presidency was preeminently a place of decisionmaking. You're hiring people to make decisions, because they can't be made by all 280-some-odd million of us. So we hire somebody to make these decisions. What decisions will they make—will they be good or bad; will they move us forward or back; will they bring us together or divide us—that's what this is about.

And the same thing is true in the Senate. And I can tell you, after 8 years, one of the things I have learned is, every single one of these Senate seats is profoundly important. So, you know how biased I am in this election. I mean, the most important person in the world to me is running for Senator, and my partner for 8 years is running for President, and so I'm biased.

But what I want to do is tell you the three questions I think you ought ask to answer to anybody. And you don't have to say anything bad about their opponent. And you sure don't have to get down and do what some of them have been doing around here lately—those kinds of phone calls and stuff I read about in the paper. You don't have to do any of that. Just say—look, say these three things.

Number one, look where we were 8 years ago, and look where we are today. We have the longest economic expansion in history, nearly 22 million new jobs; African-American unemployment the lowest ever recorded, nearly half, almost cut in half what it was 8 years ago; and record numbers of new businesses, record numbers of new minority businesses, record numbers of new homeowners, record numbers of new minority homeowners. The female unemployment rate is the lowest in 40 years; poverty rate at a 20-year low; the child poverty rate has dropped about a third. This is amazing—seniors living in poverty below 10 percent for the first time in the entire history of America—ever.

So, question number one, do you want to build on this prosperity and keep it going and extend it to people who aren't part of it yet,

or do you want to abandon the path we're on and go back to a different economic policy that let us down before? It's a big question.

Now, Hillary and Al Gore and Joe Lieberman, they say, "Hey, let's keep paying down the debt." Remember, we had the biggest deficits in history; we quadrupled the debt when I became President. Interest rates were high, and the economy was weak. So we got rid of the deficits; we're now paying down the debt that had accumulated in those years before, and if you pay the debt off, you will have lower interest rates.

So they say—our side says, "Look, let's figure out what we've got to do to pay the debt down over the next 12 years, and take the rest of it and spend on our kids and our seniors, in health care and education and the environment, and spend what we have to spend on the national security, and give the rest of it to people in a tax cut for child care, for long-term care, for college education, for retirement savings. But first, keep the economy going."

Now, if you want to do that, instead of have a tax cut 3 times as big and a trillion dollar program to privatize Social Security and spend another several hundred billion dollars and put the country back in debt, which will give you higher interest rates, you have to vote for Hillary and Al Gore and Joe Lieberman. You've got to talk to people. It's a simple thing. You want to keep the prosperity going, keep the debt coming down, invest in our kids and our future, and have a tax cut we can afford—you just have one set of choices here. This is a big question. And there's an honest difference here about what the best economic policy is.

People ask me all the time, you know, "What did you do to help turn the economy around? What was the Federal Government's role? What great new idea did you bring back?" I always tell them, "I brought this great idea all the way from Arkansas: arithmetic." [Laughter] "A big new idea. We made the numbers add up." And see, if you have—if you're supposed to have a \$2 trillion surplus—it won't be that big now, by the way, but it's supposed to be 2—forget about the trillion; forget all those zeros. The surplus is supposed to be 2, and the tax cut and the interest costs with it are 1.6, and it costs you 1 to privatize Social Security—never mind whether you think it's a good idea or not, it costs \$1 trillion—and you spend another \$½ trillion, or .5, on something else; well, 1.6 plus

1 plus .5 is 3.1. That's more than 2. And that means deficits, and that means higher interest rates.

Now, if you keep interest rates one percent lower, let me tell you what it means for America. One percent lower a year—that's about what I think it will be under the Gore/Lieberman plan that Hillary will vote for in the Senate—that's worth \$390 billion in lower home mortgages to the American people. That's a pretty big tax cut. Thirty billion dollars in lower car payments, \$15 billion in lower college loan payments.

So, question number one, do you want to build on the prosperity and keep it going and give it to people that have been left behind with things like the empowerment zone program that Charlie Rangel and Al Gore put here in Harlem to do more of that sort of thing, or do you want as much of this money as you can get right now, even if it puts us back in deficit?

Now, that's a decision the American people have to make. But we've tried it our way for 8 years, and we tried it the other way for 12 years, and I think you will admit that based on the evidence, our way works better. So that's the first thing I want to say.

Now, question number two, remember where we were 8 years ago on the society? We had an economy in trouble and a society that was divided. Now, compared to 8 years ago, crime has dropped in every year; it's at a 26-year low. It's going in the right direction. Teen pregnancy and drug abuse among young people are down; the number of people without health insurance is down; 2½ million more kids have health insurance. The environmental quality of the country is up—cleaner air, cleaner water, safer drinking water, safer food, 3 times as many of these toxic waste dumps cleaned up in our 8 years as in the previous 12—and we've protected more land than any administration since Theodore Roosevelt of New York almost 100 years ago. Now, that's the fact.

So question number two is, do you want to build on this until America is the safest country in the world, until we have provided Medicare prescription drugs for the seniors who need it, all of them, until we have a Patients' Bill of Rights that protects people and their health care, until we solve the energy problems that bother you every winter when home heating oil comes around—you worry about it going to

be too expensive—with long-term energy solutions to develop conservation and new sources of energy, the stuff that Al Gore knows a lot about? Do you want to do that?

And look at our schools compared to 8 years ago. The dropout rate is down; the African-American high school graduation rate is equal to the white rate for the first time in history. The test scores in math and science are up. We've had a 300 percent increase in the number of African-American kids taking advanced placement tests for college in the last 3 years alone—a 300 percent increase.

We see schools turning around that were failing. I was in a school in Harlem the other day, where 2 years ago, 80 percent of the kids were doing reading and math below grade level; today, 74 percent of the kids doing reading or math at or above grade level—in just 2 years. We're turning these schools around.

Now, do you want to build on that with the program that Hillary and the Vice President and Joe Lieberman have advocated—100,000 teachers in the classroom; hook them all up to the Internet; double the number of people in after-school programs so you won't have these latchkey kids, and they will be able to stay in school and work their computers and do stuff like that after school; give people a tax deduction for the costs of college tuition; and require these failing schools to turn around or put them under new management so all the kids get good education? There is a clear choice here.

So the second thing you need to say to people is, "Look, it's not just about the economy. Crime is down; the schools are better; we're providing more health insurance; the environment is cleaner. And are we going to build on these changes, or are we going to support policies and candidates that will reverse our crime policy, reverse our environmental policy, take down our education policy, and don't support our health care initiatives?"

It's a choice. It's not like there's no choice; there's a huge choice. And again, you don't have to say anything bad about our opponents, but they are different. There's a difference here. They have a different view here. *[Laughter]* And if we were having a debate, I could go over there and stand there and argue their position; I could come back here and argue ours, but I think ours is better.

It's not like you don't have any evidence here. Just look at the way it was 8 years ago, and

look at the way it is now. And the third thing may be the most important thing of all. So number one, we're going to keep the prosperity going; number two, we're going to build on the social progress; number three, we're going to keep building one America. We're going to keep going forward together.

Our side is for increasing the minimum wage, strengthening the equal pay laws for women in the workplace, strengthening the civil rights laws, passing hate crimes legislation, passing employment nondiscrimination legislation, and having appointments to the U.S. Supreme Court that will stand up for civil rights and human rights and individual rights.

Now—so that's where this election is, in a nutshell. If 100 percent of the people understand, number one, this is a real important election; number two, it's about three things. Do you want to keep the prosperity going or change those policies? Do you want to build on the social progress or take down the policies that have contributed to them? Do you want to build one America and keep moving forward together? Those are the three things at stake in this election that people need to understand.

And in the Presidency, I would just say one other thing. I think we're doing well in these congressional races, but you look at what I've had to do the last 6 years. The American people should think about it before they run the risk of leaving Congress and the White House in the hands of the other party, because I've stopped a lot of bad things from happening, as well. And that's another good argument for—of course, if they decide to give the Congress and the White House to the Democrats, that would be quite wonderful from my point of view, and that's a possibility. But if it doesn't happen, that's another thing people ought to factor in.

So I say to you, in my lifetime, we've never had an election like this. And I'm 54 years old. We have never had an election where we had so much economic prosperity, so much social progress, the absence of domestic crisis or foreign threat to our existence. It never happened in our lifetime. It may not happen again in our lifetime. It may not happen again for 50 or 60 years or more. Therefore, you need to go out and tell young folks who may think it's always been this way—you know, somebody 18 years old, they were 10 when I got elected President. But they're old enough to vote now.

They weren't paying attention, maybe, before they were 10. Right? You have memory, and you have to impart that. This is a precious opportunity.

One of the greatest honors I've had as President was walking across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the voting rights march with Congressman John Lewis and Hosea Williams and others. We did it a few months ago. And Mrs. King was there; Reverend Jackson was there; lots of folks who were there then. But John Lewis got beat up bad that day. You need to go tell the young people that that people died so they could have this right to vote. When I grew up in the South, black people still had to buy poll taxes, and other people bought them for them and handed out like raffle tickets on election day and gathered people up. And then other places, they couldn't vote at all. And people died for the right to vote—unfettered, unencumbered, unthreatened.

And now, lo and behold, we've had an administration where 14 percent of our appointments have been African-American, 17 percent of my judges, where we've all been part of this. But it worked for other people, too. You didn't gain anything that Latinos and Asians and white folks didn't gain. We all went forward together. That's the only way we can do it. Black Americans never asked to go ahead of the line; they just wanted to get in the line and go on. Right? Is that right? [*Applause*]

I wanted everybody to have a home in America. I wanted us to be one family. But I'm telling you, you just go out there. You hear what I'm telling you. You don't have to remember all these statistics and all these details. Just say, if you want to keep the prosperity going and take it to the people and places left behind, we've got to keep paying this debt down and invest in our kids and our future and take a tax cut we can afford. We can't afford to go back into deficits and high interest rates and get off the track.

If you want to keep the crime rate coming down, the number of uninsured people coming down, give all of our seniors a Medicare drug benefit, keep helping the schools to turn around so that all our kids can have a good education—you don't want to reverse the policies we're on—we need to build on them, not reverse them—and if you want to keep building one America, there is one party that favors all these

things: the hate crimes legislation, the employment nondiscrimination legislation, stronger civil rights enforcement, stronger enforcement of equal pay laws for women, a minimum wage, and a Supreme Court that will protect civil rights and the ability of the National Government to protect civil rights and human rights.

Now, the last thing I'd like to tell you is, I'm very grateful not only for the way New York has treated me these last 8 years but for the way you have taken my wife in and accepted her and supported her and lifted her up.

I've been doing this a long time. I was, I think, 6, 7, 8 years old the first time I started handing out cards for my uncle when he ran for State legislature. And my aunt hated politics so much, she made him quit after one term. [*Laughter*] So they sort of—they got the political virus over to me then. And I didn't quit. I liked it more. So I've been doing this a long time, and I've liked most of the people I've known in public life, the Republicans and the Democrats. I find that on balance, they're more honest and hard-working and try to do what they think is right—they are better than they get credit for being. I've never known anybody that cared more, knew more, and worked harder and had a better ability to blend heart and mind and passion and commitment than Hillary—never. She will make you very proud.

And don't forget, they're big shoes to fill. Senator Moynihan was a giant in the Senate. Robert Kennedy changed the life of a whole generation of young Americans, including me. She will be a worthy successor, if you help her get there. And don't let all this last-minute mud-slinging deter you.

But the main thing I'm here to say is, you all got your minds made up, and you're all going to show up. So we're having this whole event for people that aren't here tonight. So when you leave here, you promise yourself—and you promise yourself, this is a big deal. The way you live is going to be affected by the decisions that are made. If you want to keep the economy going, if you want to keep the society going forward, if you want to keep us pulling together, make sure that everybody you can find is there a week from today for Hillary, for Al Gore, for Joe Lieberman, for Charlie Rangel. We'll do the right thing. I am proud to be here for them.

Thank you all, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9 p.m. at Kelly Temple Church of God in Christ in Harlem. In his remarks, he referred to Bishop James Gaylord, Kelly Temple; Bishop Frank O. White, Church of God in Christ Little Zion; Rev. Reginald Williams, Charity Baptist Church; Rev. Herb Daughtry, founder, National Black United Front; C. Virginia Fields, president, Manhattan Borough;

New York State Comptroller H. Carl McCall; former Mayor David Dinkins of New York City; and Bishop Chandler D. Owens, presiding bishop, Church of God in Christ, Inc.; civil rights activists Hosea Williams and Rev. Jesse Jackson; and Coretta Scott King, widow of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Remarks at a Reception for Hillary Clinton in New York City October 31, 2000

Thank you. Well, first let me say, I understand that Hillary has already spoken, so I really don't have to say much. [*Laughter*] But I want to say first, I'm late because the radar went out in Louisville, Kentucky, today, and so it took us a while to get off. Even Air Force One needs radar because there are incoming planes. So we found some innovative way to get here, and I'm glad we made it.

Niall, thank you; and thank you, John. And I thank all of you for being here. A lot of interesting people in this crowd tonight—my friend Frank McCourt, thank you for being here; and thank you, Tom Cahill. Thank you, Gabriel Byrne, for being here. It's nice not to have to go to the movies to see you. [*Laughter*] And I thank all the rest of you for being here.

I want to tell you how grateful I am that somehow, some way, when I first started running for President, the Irish in New York found me. It happened in other places, too. My friend Neal Hartigan, former attorney general of Illinois, is here from Cook County, Chicago. But Bruce Morrison, who Hillary and I had known since we were in law school, and a couple of other people, somehow they hooked us all up, and we started this odyssey. And people thought I was nuts when I said, if I got elected President, I would try to help in the Irish peace process. And they said—and then I got elected, and then all these people who had helped me in other contexts and were steeped in the foreign policy lore of America said, “You can't do that.” I said, “But I told them I would.” [*Laughter*] “I gave my word; I've got to do this.” And they said, “But it will be terrible.” I said, “It won't be terrible.” I said, “I love Great Britain; I went to college there.” I said, “We'll be shoul-

der to shoulder with Britain on a thousand other things,” but I said, “Within 6 months, they'll be glad we did this.” And sure enough, they now are.

So I can't thank those of you enough who started out with me, who gave me the chance to do this. It's been one of the greatest things about being President, to know that the United States, the home of the largest Irish diaspora in the world, had played some positive role in bringing that long conflict to an end. Now, we're not out of the woods yet, but Mr. Trimble dodged a bullet this week, and we still have work to do. And all of you know what it is as well as I do. But I just want you to know, for all of you who have helped me to do this, I thank you.

And the second thing I want to thank you for is when 800 of you showed up on the White House lawn during a rather difficult time for me—[*laughter*]—and said that the Irish-American community still thought that I should serve as President of the United States, which I will never forget. I'll never forget that.

But most important of all to me, I want to thank you for what you're doing for Hillary. Because when we started this—and this is, by the way, a big issue in the national election, too, Presidential election—when we started this, and Hillary—you know she went to Northern Ireland once without me, in addition to the two times we went together. And she was working with all these women in this Vital Voices group, and she said, “If we can just get all these women together, they'd figure out a way to get over this problem.” And I think she made an independent and significant contribution to the