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When I was down in Selma last weekend celebrating the 35th anniversary of the civil rights march, I was researching the things that various people had said, trying to get ready for it. And I noticed something Martin Luther King said about the end of the whole legacy of slavery. He said, you know, "When, finally, African-Americans are freed, the white people will be free, too." And as a white southerner, I identified with that. And it's literally true for me. If that hadn't happened in the South, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton never would have been elected President of the United States.

But America still labors under the burden of the terms that we struck with the Native American tribes so long ago and the fact that the deal never worked out in a way that was fair to both sides and honorable.

And in some ways, it was maybe doomed from the beginning to have problems. But now, we're trying to get it right, and we've made all this progress in the last few years. That's the importance of your being here today. I want you to feel good about this. And I want you to understand that the rest of us are getting a lot out of it.

This is the part of our historical legacy we want to be proud of, and it will never be right until we get it right. You just remember, every time you come to Washington, every time you lobby for something, every time you try to do something to empower your own people and to help them, you're doing something for the rest of us, too, because this is a country that's supposed to be founded on equal opportunity, equal justice, mutual respect, everybody having a chance. The belief that we all do better when we help each other. That's what this is all about.

So I hope you think I have done something for you. But believe me, I still remember the little boy I was in the library over 40 years ago. You've done a lot more for me, and I thank you. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:23 p.m. in the Phoenix Park Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Bobby Whitefeather, chairman, Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians of Minnesota.

Remarks to the One America Meeting With Religious Leaders

March 9, 2000

The President. Thank you. Well, first of all, welcome to the White House. Welcome to this wonderful East Room, where Thomas Jefferson and Meriwether Lewis planned the Lewis and Clark expedition to explore parts of America no one had ever seen, to try to find an ocean that no one thought could be reached by land. In a way, we are here on an even grander expedition, to try to find a place in the human heart no one has ever seen, that many believe we cannot reach in this life. And so I thank you all for coming.

Thank you, Sandy, for your passionate and vigorous leadership. Thank you, Ben Johnson, for telling me that you like your job every day. [*Laughter*] I was afraid that I had given you an impossible job; you would only hear from people who were disappointed in us and that you would quit on me. So I'm glad you're happy, and I appreciate you.

Thank you, Maria, for your leadership on this effort. And I want to thank the members of the administration who are here, who have been introduced. And Dr. Franklin and Judy Winston, thank you for being here. And I thank my good friend Congressman Amo Houghton for being here, for proving that this issue is not a partisan issue, and for being in Selma. Didn't we have a grand day Sunday? One of the great days of my life, and many of you were there.

I was thinking, when I was in Selma Sunday and we were walking across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, what an important role the faith community of that day had in the civil rights movement. And there was an elderly woman there who was 90 years old, who was telling me about a rabbi who came to march with them. And I think it was Rabbi Heschel, but I'm not sure because she didn't remember, but I think that's who it must be. And the rabbi had a very, very long beard, and she said, "You know, a lot of us thought God, himself, had come down to Earth to go with us."

I say that because even today contemporary surveys show that the American people look to the faith community to lead us

forward on this great journey. Some of you have a foot in both worlds, so to speak. I see my great friend Reverend and former Congressman Floyd Flake from New York out there. But all of you must have a foot in this world on this issue.

I also want to comment that if we had had a meeting like this 35 years ago in the White House, and it had been a very inclusive meeting, there would have been probably—probably—African-Americans and Hispanics here, and European-Americans, maybe some Native Americans, although we were pretty tone deaf about that back then, and maybe—maybe—one Asian-American. And all the faiths represented here would have been Christians and Jews, and maybe Native Americans.

Today we have a large number of Muslims; we have Buddhists here; we have Baha'i members here, and perhaps many other faiths. I say that that make this point. I think you can make a compelling argument that getting this right in the United States and putting us in a position to play a role of leadership in the world is not just a racial and ethnic issue anymore; it is also inevitably a religious issue.

If you look around the world where I have been so involved—take my people, the Irish—there's no ethnic difference; all the differences are religious. Or if you look at our continuing efforts in the Middle East, is that an ethnic conflict or a religious one? In our attempts to resolve the difficulties between Greece and Turkey and on the island of Cyprus, is that an ethnic conflict or a religious one? When you see the continuing efforts to resolve the future of Tibet and the role of the Dalai Lama, is that a religious conflict or an ethnic one?

I'm sure all of you have thought about this more than I have. The most dangerous place in the world today, I think you could argue, is the Indian subcontinent and the line of control in Kashmir. Is that an ethnic conflict or a religious one? So I think in order to understand this even and make this journey, we have to learn not only more about our ethnic and racial differences but our religious differences, how are we different, how are our world views different, how are they in common, how do we find a way through it all to reaffirm our common humanity.

We know that the three great monotheistic religions that grew out of the sturdy but difficult soil of the Middle East all say that we're supposed to love our neighbors as ourselves, that if we turn aside a stranger, it's as if we turn aside God, that we should not do to others what we would not like to have done to ourselves. And we know that, in various ways, all the faiths in this room, however they define man's understanding of the divine, at least recognize the fundamental importance on this Earth of our common humanity.

So I hope that we will be able to talk today about what you're going to do, but I hope beyond that, you will be thinking today about how more and more of this racial and ethnic diversity, both within America and beyond our borders, has an inevitable religious component, and therefore, how people of faith speak about it, behave about it, what their body language is even, will have a profound impact on how this whole thing plays out in 21st century America.

If you heard the State of the Union, you heard me tell the story about the evening we had in this very room that my wife sponsored to observe the millennium, where we had one of the founders of the Internet, the man who sent the first E-mail to his profoundly deaf wife 18 years ago, Vint Cerf, talking with Eric Lander, one of our human genome experts. And the beginning of their whole discussion was about how we could never have uncovered the mysteries of the human gene without the revolution in computers, because it made it mechanically, scientifically possible to deal with things that small and that diverse.

But in the end, Lander just said, almost in passing, he said, you know, we're all genetically 99.9 percent the same. And if you get an ethnic group together, the differences among individuals within the group will be greater than the differences between one group and another, between African-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Native Americans. The differences within the groups, genetically, are greater than the group profile from one group to another. And when I said that, there was almost a groan in the Congress, you know, because the Republicans

and Democrats having to recognize they were 99.9 percent the same. [*Laughter*] It made them physically uncomfortable. You know, you could see that they were having real trouble dealing with this. And I think it made them understand how others have real trouble dealing with it.

But I think—one of the things I think is most interesting is how the advances of science sooner or later seem to confirm the teaching of ancient faiths, the teaching of people who maybe counted with an abacus and wrote in a language now long dead or had no writing at all. This is worth remembering.

So I wanted to make this point to you. I mean, America would have never had any of its great movements for social justice had it not been for leaders of faith—none of them. And the same can be said of many other nations as well. But as we grow more diverse, our opportunity to do good around the world is even greater if we can be good here at home.

But I would argue to you, we will not be able to do it unless we understand that this whole diversity, more than ever before, is not like bringing the preachers and the priests, and the rabbis to help heal the soul of the sinful races. Now it's caught up in our entire world view and this multiplicity of faiths we now have in America. And we need to take this whole effort to a different level. And that's why I ask for your help—to begin with, understanding. It's hard to understand this, if you've never lived in a culture different from your own.

So, I've already talked a little more than I meant to, but I wanted you to be thinking about that because I think—you know, none of you are term-limited, except by the Almighty. [*Laughter*] And so you will be around here doing these kinds of things, presumably, when I am no longer President. But I will predict to you that the work of building one America and dealing with this diversity will more and more require a deeper understanding of the diversity of faiths, and the understanding of the relationship between human nature and the divine, and how it's articulated and played out in life than it ever has before to this day. Which means your role will be even more important in the new century than it was in the pivotal struggles of our Nation's past.

Thank you very much.

[*At this point, the discussion began.*]

The President. I would like to say two things very briefly, because I want to hear more from you.

First of all, I do think this whole issue of economic equity and empowerment is important. And I believe there are two elements to that: One is, are people who are poor being given enough support from their Government and from their religious institutions; the other, that I think is the far more important question—and one to which Mr. Flake, among others, has done so much—are we doing enough to empower the poor to support themselves and to take a different path to the future. And that is what this whole new markets effort we're making this year is designed to do. So I hope you'll be involved in that.

Let me just say about the Diallo case, I tried to think of something to say which would be true, relevant, and wouldn't put us all in the position of second-guessing the jury. That is, we didn't—or looking into the hearts and minds of those police officers. That is, we didn't sit there; we didn't hear the evidence. Four African-Americans did, among others. So let's posit. The jury rendered a verdict, and it is the verdict. But the larger fact is that we all have the feeling, I think, that it probably wouldn't have happened, as I said, if it had been a white young man in a white neighborhood under the same facts.

And so the real issue here—and again, we're getting more diverse now, more racially diverse, and another thing, linguistically, we're getting much more diverse. So you're going to have people in neighborhoods that can't even communicate in tense situations with the people whose job it is to enforce the law.

Keep in mind, this also puts more pressure on the police. A lot of them believe that it's not the color of their skin; it's the color of their uniform that causes them to be distrusted and to feel like aliens. So when they

get treated that way, then they feel more endangered and more threatened, and they're more likely, then, to do something.

So one of the things—I didn't say this earlier, but one of the things that I hope will come out of the Diallo case, if you looked at the powerful image his mother has made—she's been quite a grand person, I think, the way she has tried to free herself of what any parent would feel, to go to the larger issues. I just hope that one of the things we can all do, coming out of this, is not only to make sure that the police forces in our diverse communities are themselves properly diverse. That's important, but that's not all there is to it, because you're never going to be having a time when there won't be, let's say, black police officers who have to arrest Hispanics and Asian police officers have to arrest white people or, you know, whatever it is. There's never going to be a time when you're going to have total racial homogeneity between the police and the communities they're working. So I hope that we can come out of this so that within a period of time, a reasonable period of time, you could all stand up and say, "Whatever happens, I don't believe it would have happened differently if the police and the person involved had, themselves, been of a different race."

That's what I want you to be able to say. That's the big issue here. I wish I could bring that boy back for his mother and his friends, to give him the life he should have had. But I can't do that. You can't do that. And we can't be in a position where we second-guess a jury that sat there and, I believe, honestly made their best judgment. And we didn't hear all those facts. But we do know the larger truth, and that's what I hope will come out of this, a real determination—and a lot of you can have an impact on this in your communities, to bring the police and the community together. And role-play this. This is a matter of training as well as tone. It's a matter of disciplined work as well as the heart.

You know, you'd never think about sending a police force out unless they've trained in how to use their guns, unless they knew how to put on their bulletproof vests, unless they knew how to give someone their Miranda warnings, unless they knew these things. You have to train for this. This is not just a matter of having a good heart. This is work. This is discipline.

How many times have you had to remind yourself of that in your own work? Not just enough to have good intentions, you've got to train and work for this.

I've talked more about this than I meant to, but this is a big deal. We'll never get this race issue right unless we get the police-community relations issue right. And most of these police officers—listen, they get up every day; they put on those uniforms; and they've got their lives on the line; and they—most of them really do try to do the right thing, in a decent way and an honorable way. And we shouldn't lose sight of that. And we've got to train for this so that we don't have these Diallo-type cases again.

Yes, sir. I promise to call on you in the back.

[*The discussion continued.*]

The President. Thank you. Let me be very brief here. Number one, we have this national effort to reduce violence against children, especially in the schools. And we've got a lot of things going; it's a subject for another moment. If you would like to be involved in it, if any of you would like to be involved in it, if you would give to Ben or Maria a card or address or something, we'll get you involved. We've got a lot of things going on here, because there is much more we can do.

Secondly, on the perception of the United States around the world, first of all, I think sometimes people think we can do more than we can, which, when we don't do it, therefore, gives us a negative perception. And then sometimes, we try to do things, that if we do it in the wrong way, we're seen as being arrogant or high-handed. And then, we are having our own debates in this country, which you saw in the debate in the Senate over the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, for example, about what the role of the United States and the world should be.

So I think that some of this misperception is inevitable. But one of the reasons I'm about to go to the Indian subcontinent is that I want to try to minimize—if people are mad

at us, at least I want them to have an accurate perception. [*Laughter*] If they think we have a certain policy or a certain attitude, I want them to have an accurate view of what that policy or attitude is. And it's a constant effort, but I appreciate that.

I wonder if—I promised this gentleman in the back I'd call on him, but we have some people here from different religious traditions, from East Asia or South Asia who have not spoken. I wonder if any of them would like to be heard before we go.

Go ahead, sir.

[*The discussion continued.*]

The President. First of all, I strongly support what was done in South Africa. And I have tried on various occasions to do that for the Japanese who were interned here during the war, for the African-Americans that were subject to the Tuskegee experiments. And I wish you would work with our people, and let's try to give some shape to what your thinking is.

I do believe that it's—I was thrilled that you mentioned that old debate between John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, because when people look at John Adams, they sort of have this preconceived notion of what he was like and what Jefferson was like. You would think that Jefferson was arguing for passion, and Adams was arguing for reason. And it was actually the other way around, which is maybe just their own form of denial, who knows? [*Laughter*]

But anyway, it was a great debate. And I agree that this is fundamentally a problem of the heart.

[*The discussion continued.*]

The President. Thank you. Let me say, I want to have a chance to greet you all individually, so we're going to have to break up. I do want to say, Bishop, that I don't believe I'll ever forget that remark that without followers, a leader is just a person out on a walk. [*Laughter*] Without you and some of our friends of the last couple years, I would have been taking a lot of walks. [*Laughter*] So I thank you for that.

I want to end this on a high note, if I might, since we're here talking about one America. After a 4-year wait, Judge Richard Paez, a Hispanic judge from California, of the Mormon faith, and Marsha Berzon were confirmed by the United States Senate today.

They got the highest rating by the American Bar Association, and they added to the diversity of the bench. This week Judge Julio Fuentes of New Jersey was also confirmed. So I think maybe we're, by fits and starts, moving toward our one America. And we will work with you more.

I look forward to seeing you all individually. Thank you very much.

Oh, wait. We've got to have a benediction, and this is my fault. Tell them to stop the music. [*Laughter*]

Deputy Chief of Staff Maria Echaveste. I would like to have Jake Swamp from the Mohawks lead us in closing prayer.

The President. Thank you, sir.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:30 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Sanford Cloud, Jr., president and chief executive officer, National Conference for Community and Justice; John Hope Franklin, former Chair, and Judith A. Winston, former Executive Director and member, President's Initiative on Race; Vinton G. Cerf, senior vice president of Internet architecture and technology, MCI WorldCom; Eric Lander, director, Whitehead/MIT Center for Genome Research; and Bishop Chandler Owens, Church of God in Christ. The President also referred to West African immigrant Amadou Diallo, who died after being shot in the Bronx Borough of New York City by four police officers, who were acquitted of all criminal charges on February 25 in Albany, NY. Ms. Echaveste referred to Jake Swamp, founder, Tree of Peace Society. The conference was formally entitled, "The President's One America Meeting With Religious Leaders."

Statement on the Treasury Department's Debt Buyback

March 9, 2000

Today we reached another historic landmark in our fiscal turnaround. For the first time in 70 years, the U.S. Treasury Department completed a "debt buyback." This buyback of debt is a striking reminder of the extraordinary progress we have made in putting America's fiscal house in order. In the last 7 years, we moved from the largest deficit in history to the largest surplus in history.