

Remarks to Reporters Following a Visit to the National Archives and Records Administration

January 16, 2006

It seems fitting on Martin Luther King Day that I come and look at the Emancipation Proclamation in its original form. Abraham Lincoln recognized that all men are created equal. Martin Luther King lived on that admonition to call our country to a higher calling, and today we celebrate the life of an American who called Americans to account when we didn't live up to our ideals.

Allen, thanks for having me. I would strongly recommend our fellow citizens come to this house of archives—a house that archives a lot of our important documents. It's really an amazing place; it's really fascinating. I appreciate you and your staff, thanking you.

All right, thank you all. See you later today.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9 a.m. in the East Rotunda Gallery. In his remarks, he referred to Archivist of the United States Allen Weinstein. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks at Georgetown University's "Let Freedom Ring" Celebration

January 16, 2006

Thank you all. Thanks for the kind introduction, and thanks for the invitation to be here. It's an honor to join you on this national holiday celebrating one of America's most important lives: Martin Luther King, Jr.

Every year on this day, we reflect on the great movement for civil rights that transformed our country. We remember leaders like Rosa Parks, who today is being honored with the John Thompson, Jr., Legacy of a Dream Award. And we recommit ourselves to working for the dream that Martin Luther King gave his life for: an America where the dignity of every person is respected; where people are judged not by the color of their skin—by the content of their character; and where the hope of a better tomorrow is in every neighborhood in this country.

I'm sorry Laura is not with me. She's leading a delegation to Liberia for the swearing-in of President Johnson Sirleaf, who, by the

way, is the first elected woman President on the Continent of Africa.

I want to thank Dr. DeGioia and the good folks at Georgetown University. I want to thank the members of my Cabinet who are here. By the way, Condoleezza Rice is not here, because she's with Laura. [*Laughter*] I want to thank Majority Leader Bill Frist and his wife, Karyn, other Members of Congress who are here. I appreciate Bruce Gordon, the president of the NAACP, for his strong leadership.

It is such an honor always to be in the presence of Dorothy Height. And I want to thank Tiffany Thompson for being here to represent her good dad—wondering where your brother was. [*Laughter*] DeGioia hired him, and he's working. [*Laughter*] Thank you all for being here.

When our Founders declared America's independence, they invoked the self-evident truth that all men are created equal. Our Constitution was written to put the principles of a free and equal society into practice. It is a living document. It required amendment to make sure that promise was fulfilled, amendments like the abolishment of slavery, the guarantee of equal protection, and the right to vote for all Americans. Dr. King called these documents America's great "Charters of Freedom," and he continued to trust in their power even when the practice of America did not live up to their promise.

As children of the South, Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks both came to the civil rights movement with long personal experience of the evils of discrimination and segregation. Dr. King called the daily humiliations endured by black Americans "the jangling discords of our Nation." And Rosa Parks famously experienced it when that bus driver had her arrested for refusing his order to give up her seat to a white man.

But Mrs. Parks and Dr. King shared a deep belief in a hopeful future. They strongly believed that segregation could not stand once it was held up to the light in all its ugliness. And because of their spirit and their work, the cruelty and humiliation of Jim Crow is a thing of the past.

As well, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mrs. Parks' faith in the future reflected their faith