

CLAYTON, JACKSON & MC GHIE MEMORIAL DEDICATION DINNER

JUSTICE PAUL H. ANDERSON

October 10, 2003

It is a pleasure to be in Duluth with you on this special evening. Before I begin, however, I need to ask you to bear with me for a bit. When I was asked to speak, it was for 15 minutes on the significance of this day and what it means for the future. I am now encountering a problem often faced by the last speaker on the agenda—we have not only used up our allotted time, but are ten minutes over and I have yet to begin my speech. Therefore, bear with me as I do some quick editing and speak rapidly.

To say it is a pleasure to be with you tonight does not really do justice to this event. Tonight is something different. Tonight I am honored to be with you. It is also humbling to be with you. Today the city of Duluth has done something special—something very special—something extraordinary. As one of the speakers said this afternoon: “Today Duluth is a light in the world.” You are remembering and memorializing an important, but painful, event from your past. The memory is painful because of the awful nature of the act of a lynching. It is also painful because it happened here, in Duluth. It is painful because it is so hard to explain. Things like this are not supposed to happen in Duluth. There was talk of this today. And news accounts from 1920 confirm this point.

Being here to share this day with you is humbling because, despite this painful memory, Duluth is, as Mayor Doty said this afternoon, doing the right thing.

It is important to remember the past—to learn from the past. Evil must not be forgotten; the truth must be told; it must be brought to light. I have come to understand

that very often in life the lesson follows the experience. Duluth had a very bad experience 83 years ago. Fortunately, this city has decided to teach its citizens and a broader community an important lesson by establishing the Clayton, Jackson, McGhie Memorial.

I also find it humbling to be here because this memorial is a result of ordinary citizens taking the initiative to do something. This memorial is a tribute to what dedicated citizens can do when they decide that an idea's time has come.

We have heard from other speakers what a horrible act lynching is. It is an act of terror. It is an act that has very much to do with power, domination, and intimidation. By its very nature, it is designed to maximize intimidation. To this effect, it was almost ritualized. Dr. Rusk spoke earlier about lynchings in Georgia. The lynchings in Georgia and other southern states were often ritualized to the point that they extended over a period of days; persons actually chartered trains in order to witness the lynching. There was almost a carnival atmosphere. Besides being lengthy, they were horrible. There were beatings, there were mutilations—in addition to the ultimate murders that occurred. Oftentimes, lynchings had an economic impetus to them. For example, in Memphis, three young men who became successful in the grocery business were lynched on trumped-up charges just to keep them and other African-Americans in their place.

It is important to understand that lynchings were an act of terrorism. This knowledge will enable us to fight its legacy. Fear is the turf of terrorists. Democracy is our turf. Fear and democracy are mutually exclusive and we must understand that fear will disappear only if persons become actively engaged as citizens. If you are a spectator, you are naturally more fearful. This is why this memorial is so important—because citizens of

Duluth are becoming actively engaged and, in the process, communicating with each other on the issue of race relations.

But let us not deceive ourselves. We cannot afford the deception that acts like the 1920 lynching of Clayton, Jackson and McGhie cannot happen again. The past is not so far removed from the present. Mr. Washington talked about feeling fearful and intimidated when confronted with the horror of the murder of Emmett Till in Mississippi in 1955. Tonight, I shared dinner with the daughter of Bob Karon, a distinguished attorney from Duluth. Mr. Karon told his daughter about his own fear when he hid in his own home as the lynching occurred within a couple blocks of where he lived. Recently, Matthew Shepard was murdered in Wyoming, and in Texas, in 2000, James Byrd, Jr., a black man, was dragged to his death in chains behind a pickup truck. Post-9/11, there have been numerous acts of shootings and assaults upon persons who were Arab-American or who were East Indian. It is particularly important in these years following 9/11 that we be vigilant. The Southern Poverty Law Center indicates that nationally and in Minnesota the number of hate groups is increasing.

Thus, it is our hope today that by promoting honest communication and understanding, we can prevent future acts like those that happened here in 1920. We must make sure that good people come forward and that they are energized to act. Again, this is why the Clayton, Jackson and McGhie memorial wall in Duluth is so important. Nothing said it better than the comments of the woman interviewed on Minnesota Public Radio this morning. This citizen of Duluth said that as she walked to work each morning, she felt compelled to stop and to look at the memorial wall. Looking at the wall caused her to

reflect upon the nature of the act that occurred, what can happen when hate prevails, and what can be done to prevent such acts.

This noon I was privileged to witness a number of people observing the memorial, taking in and absorbing the wise sayings on the wall, and understanding the act that had happened across the street. This memorial causes reflection. I can only hope that school children will stop and be inspired to write papers and to ask their parents and teachers about the incident that happened and how it could happen. I hope that college students will be encouraged to do research papers and discuss the issue. Some may in fact even go on to be professors and develop special studies in this area.

This leads me to the second main point of my speech. It is important to remember that we cannot legislate the elimination of bias or mandate good will. Change must come from within ourselves. Therefore, I have developed some simple guidelines to help us better understand race relations.

Number one is we need to communicate more honestly, openly, and earnestly. In many ways, we do not know how or are not able to talk to each other honestly about race. Misconceptions can be eliminated only through honest discussion. We must learn how to speak to each other and how to listen. Learning how to listen is very important. The inability to listen can interfere with how we speak to each other. Sometimes a person will speak to us in a strident manner or tone and we are put off as much by how something is said as by what is said. But before we reject those words, we must first examine whether or not we have been capable of listening. Often strident language is the result of our failure to listen to the speaker's message. In a democracy, citizens must be able to talk to each other. Again, this is a reason why this memorial is so important—because it promotes the type of

honest dialogue that has occurred here tonight and during the days before the creation of the memorial—and hopefully hereafter.

Number two—We must develop a heightened consciousness of our own prejudices and stereotypes. There are all kinds of prejudices and stereotypes. We all have them. Who here in this room has a prejudice? Raise your hand. I am glad to see that a number of you joined me in raising your hand. Having prejudice is a part of being human. It is part of human nature to respond and often act negatively in response to things that are different. But we need to understand this tendency is inherent in the nature of being human, and therefore we need to understand the whys and the wherefores of these prejudices. I have a particular prejudice with respect to speech patterns. And I continually have to keep myself from making a judgment on how someone uses the English language. There may be prejudice based on clothes, age, weight, hair length, how someone looks. In order to eliminate and deal with our prejudices, we must understand that we in fact have them. Also, remember that a person's perception of being discriminated against is as real as being the victim of actual discrimination. Therefore, be aware of your actions that are not intended to be discriminating, but may be perceived that way.

Third, we must stop offensive conduct by ourselves and others. We need to interrupt a racist joke. We need to question broad stereotypes. Speak up and say—I find that offensive. And then say why you find it offensive. We need to raise each other's consciousness. Here, again, I refer to the memorial wall and the words of Marian Wright Edelman when she says if parents snicker at racial and gender jokes, another generation will pass on the poison adults still have not had the courage to snuff out. We must be prepared to act now, to snuff out this type of behavior.

Four—Take some risks in your conduct with persons who are different from you. Sometimes these are small things; sometimes they are large. Look people in the eye. Greet them. Do not look down or avert your eyes. I recently talked to a Nigerian immigrant and he made an interesting point. He said “You people in America do not look me in the eye. Why do you always look away?” We need to interact. We need to put ourselves in situations where we can interact. Get to know your neighbors. Start conversations with persons of other cultures. And educate your children to do the same. We must do what we can to further our own understanding of not only our own culture, but other cultures.

Five—Accept other people for who they are. Accept the fact that they may not share the same interests. Learn to know the differences and appreciate them.

Six—Understand the difference between criminal and cultural behavior. Baggy clothes and different hairstyles are cultural. Baggy clothes and drug dealing are criminal.

Seven—Help your children to understand and accept differences. Educate them and help them understand other cultures as I previously mentioned. Discuss issues openly with them. You should engage them in what I call appreciative inquiry about other people and other cultures. Be careful about the message you send, both overt and subtle. You are always a role model. Dr. Stephen Carter recently commented how naïve it was for professional basketball player Charles Barkley to say “I ain’t no role model.” He said to Mr. Barkley, whether you like it or not you are a role model. You are always being observed—especially by children. And they will take in what you do and they will follow what you do. So you must remember that you are always a role model and you must act that role properly.

Eight—Appreciate differences, do not just tolerate them. Here I ask you to listen very closely to the distinction I am about to make. We must get outside of the paradigm of talking about toleration. As Thomas Paine said: “Toleration is not the opposite of intolerance, but it is a counterfeit of it. Both are despotisms. The one assumes to itself the right of withholding liberty of conscience and the other of granting it.” If I say I am a tolerant person, essentially I am saying to you that I have something within my power to grant to you. That is not what we are talking about with each other. We are talking about appreciating each other—appreciating the differences—appreciating who we are. So let us get beyond talking about tolerance and toleration.

Nine—Be understanding and forgiving. Let us cut each other some slack. Leave some room for our mutual humanness. We need to mediate differences. We need to find ways to deal with hurt feelings and misunderstandings other than violent interaction or resorting to the courts. The flip side of this equation is that we should not and cannot accept frivolous use of the race card in society to promote selfish means to an end.

Finally, and probably most importantly, we must remember that we are all part of the family of man. Recent scientific evidence shows how ignorant and stupid it is for anyone to believe that we are greatly different from each other. We all contain essentially the same genetic make-up. We need to understand and focus on how similar we are. And we need to understand that we are all members of the human race and we undertake this journey through life together.

What I hope these simple rules can lead to is a means to discover how to work together and live together. A broader commitment to work together and to work hard at it is not easy. Any meaningful relationship requires commitment. So does meaningful race

relations. It is my hope that the memorial that you have created today will not only indicate that commitment, but will serve as a support to those who want to act on that commitment.

As I make my closing remarks, I cannot help but reflect upon the words of Robert Kennedy on the evening that Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed. On that evening, Senator Kennedy said:

What we need in the United States is not division; it is not hatred; it is not violence and lawlessness, but love, wisdom, and compassion toward one another, and a feeling of justice toward those who still suffer within our country, whether they be white or they be black.

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The vast majority of the white people and the vast majority of the black people in this country want to live together, want to improve the quality of our life, and want justice for all human beings who abide in our land.

Let us dedicate ourselves to what the Greeks wrote so many years ago: to tame the savageness of man and to make gentle the life of this world.

Let us dedicate ourselves to that, and say a prayer for our country and for our people.

Tonight, if I were to follow Kennedy's plea and invoke a petition on behalf of our country, I would do so by paraphrasing the words of my favorite national anthem—America the Beautiful. I would begin by acknowledging that we are flawed, as individuals, as a city, as a state, as a nation. The Clayton, Jackson, McGhie Memorial reminds us of

this truth. Then I would ask that “God mend [our] every flaw, confirm [our] soul in self-control, [our] liberty in law.

Today in Duluth I believe that God has shed his grace on this city and this great country of ours. We have been shown a way to mend our flaws. The work of the good citizens of this city has brought truth to light, as your slogan behind me says. Your work has cast light through this city, and this light is so bright, it has reached the rest of the state and beyond. This fact is confirmed by the words we have heard tonight from emissaries from other parts of our country. You have articulated a dream that sees beyond the years. I hope that the good that has occurred here today is crowned with brotherhood and may this brotherhood extend from sea to shining sea.