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Lesley College Diversity Day: Keynote Speech, October 1996

Cornel West

I'd like to thank my friend, Sam Turner, for that generous introduction. I am inspired to be here on this great day in the history of this grand institution. I'd like to thank my new friend and sister, the courageous and visionary captain of this ship, President Margaret McKenna. It is true that when Jennifer asked me to come to Lesley, I said yes because Jennifer, I'd do anything you say. She's that wise. Her father, mother and her brother and sister mean so much to me.

I stand before you this morning as but a small part of a great and grand tradition. And this day, in part, has to do with how we can connect with that tradition. In fact, I was speaking earlier with a Lesley College graduate who is a new member of the staff at Harvard in the Afro-American Studies Department, Sister Jill Salk, and I said, "Oh, really? You know your old institution is going to be linking with a tradition of struggle." And she said, "I've been to Lesley, and we are well acquainted with that tradition. Nothing new to us."

In all seriousness, it is a tradition of struggle, the struggle for decency and dignity, the struggle for freedom and democracy. We are reminded by that towering high-brow modernist poet and reactionary figure, that great wisdom but wrong in his political views. I am talking about the great T.S. Eliot. That means you can learn from anybody. You can be wise and reactionary at the same time. Eliot said that tradition is not something you inherit. If you want it, you must obtain it with great labor. You've got to fight for a while for a tradition -- and struggle for decency and dignity.

Which means in part that you first must situate yourself in a story bigger, and be able to locate yourself in a narrative grander than you, that will take you outside of yourself. That's very difficult to do in American society - individualistic and narcissistic and hedonistic, inward-looking, navel-gazing. But no, we, you at Lesley today say we are going to wrestle with the most fundamental question of what it means to be human and that is the problem of evil. How will we respond to the history - past and present - of forms of unjustified suffering and unwarranted pain and undeserved harm. To talk about diversity, destiny is talking. It's not simply a question of various peoples of various colors and genders and sexual orientation and physically challenged, and old, somehow coming together and feeling happy about being different. More than that: it's that we have the audacity to cut against the grain of most of human history which is a history of overlooking so many other peoples' suffering and pain and harm.

That's very difficult to do in the latter part of this century. Let's be honest. It's been a ghastly century: over 200 million fellow human beings murdered in the name of some pernicious ideologies that lost track of their humanity. The Nazism at the heart of so-called civilized Europe. Stalinism at the core of so-called emancipatory Soviet Union.

European colonialism and imperialism losing sight of the humanity of brothers and sisters in Asia and Africa. Indigenous peoples in this country. The patriarchy shot across social systems across the board, continued to leave such bruises of sisters of all colors. The homophobia that continues to bruise gay brothers and lesbian sisters. We're not talking about cheap p.c. talk.

We're talking about keeping track of forms of misery, sorrow and sadness, and how we can connect ourselves with others as they struggle against such adverse circumstances and conditions. But it is difficult to keep alive the tradition of struggle that talks about diversity in the latter part of this century, because as you can imagine, many are simply fatigued. They've had it. Turn on the television, read the newspaper - the Middle East - oh my God, here we go again! Another extension of bestial behavior across the board - unable to stay in contact with each other's humanity. Contempt, hatred. Burundi. Guatemala. Burma - let's never forget the sister in Burma right now, struggling. It's a global affair; it's a human affair. A challenge to each and every one of us. That's why it's not a question of simply being a person of color, a member of the working class, or working poor, or being a woman. It is a human question; it's a moral question because the tradition that I'm talking about has always said 'whosoever will, let them come if they're willing' to make certain moral choices, and we all have the capacity to choose - if we're willing to have some convictions, and if we're willing to pay the costs. And that's the most important one. Yet so many people have a wonderful vision of the world. We have a highly sophisticated nuanced and refined analysis of society, but they lack the courage to follow through and to treat people right. So it becomes like sounding brass and tinkering symbols. Emptiness, vacuum; it's not for real.

The tradition that I'm talking about, as always noted, it will be imperfect people who will constitute that tradition. That means that we look inside ourselves as much as outside. The great Tolstoy used to say: there's so many people who want to change the world, and so few who want to change themselves! He's absolutely right. In fact, I would recommend to all you wonderfully intellectually curious students here to read Tolstoy's 1882 text *Confession* where he reflects on how difficult it was for him to fully accept the humanity of peasants and serfs who worked for him because he was a count. Count Leo Tolstoy! When he fundamentally accepted their humanity, his world turned upside down, even though he had been fighting for their cause for many, many years. It is a struggle!

And to talk about race and gender and sexual orientation is to talk about the evil in us. I often encounter white brothers and sisters who tell me, oh, Brother West, you know I'm not like Mark Furman. I'm not a racist at all. I've gone beyond that. I say, oh really? I say, I'm a black man, and if there's some white supremacy in me, my hunch is there's still a little in you. A woman living in a patriarchal society: if there's a little male supremacy in sisters of all colors, then I know there's some male supremacy in brothers of all colors. Gay brothers, lesbian sisters, the homophobia in them is not a question. Being pure and pristine, and somehow being untainted by these vicious forces of history, because we all are so deeply shaped by them, the question is are we willing to struggle against it, and to unite with others such that we can have impact on a larger level. That's what we've been talking about. Reread Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Young Goodman Brown* -- wrestling with

that evil on the inside and how it connects with the larger institutional and structural forces of evil on the so-called 'outside'.

How difficult it is to talk about it. That's why it is fighting precedent for Lesley pause, to take this time out, a *kind of chryros* moment - you know a meaning-infused moment separate from your everyday routine - and say, let me reflect on the most fundamental question of what it means to be human. Oh, how difficult that is in America.

Culture. Henry James called us a "hotel civilization". That's one of the reasons why he left and went to Britain. He said American culture is too thin, it's too impoverished; they don't want to wrestle with the most fundamental question of what it means to be human. It's a hotel civilization, preoccupied with comfort and convenience and contentment. Everybody wants to be Disneyland-like. That's what a hotel is, isn't it? Some place so clean and manicured. You don't know who's doing the work. You leave your room, it's dirty and when you show up it's clean. You don't see the laborers. You don't know what they struggle through. Hotels: that fusion of the home and market - how American.

How could you talk about the problem of evil in a civilization in which its basic pillars are home as haven and market heartless world, cut-throat competition? Who has time to think about the vicious legacies of white supremacy and male supremacy, the vast class and economic inequality in such a money-making, profit-taking culture? Our great artists have always reminded us that we have to have something profoundly un-American to wrestle with the problem of evil, namely, a sense of history, a sense of history. The history of that family, that haven as it were, that we often idealize and romanticize, what does the great Eugene O'Neill tell us about the Tyrone Family of Long Day's Journey into Night? America is a city on the hill where the sun's shining? No. Eugene says, let's do some deep-sea diving in the darkness, cutting against the American grain. Tennessee Williams tells us about the Wingfield family, or Lorraine Hansbury tells us about the Younger family. Glass Menagerie, A Raisin in the Sun - our artists trying to convince us that the problem of evil is shot through our institutions, even as we often would rather live lives of denial and evasion, and avoidance. And so the same with the market...the quest for liquidity and mobility. We see the problem, we can run from it. If you have a problem with civilization, strike out on the frontier. Just go, go, go!

Ralph Waldo Emerson gave his famous American Scholar address in this very church. He used to say 'everything good is on the highway.' Everything good on the highway, when you're moving. That word "mobility" is probably the second most American word in the English language. Just move. Nigger's number one. Moving away from! Cause they're immobile, stuck in slavery, stuck in Jim Crow. They can't move. Well, they can actually move, but they can't get about spatially. They do a lot of movement with their bodies, but that won't get them there. Mobility. The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Huck, that one 'raft' won't land for long because civilization is spelled with an 's'. But there's Jim there. History. Breaking the law. Huck's runaway slave, what ya gonna do? Ahab on that Pequod, Moby Dick - in one sense, trying to put at arm's length. Society constituting a microcosm of that society on the ship itself: to do what? To conquer that white whale. Of course, the whiteness of the whale is not simply a metaphysical construct, given the

centrality of white supremacy in 1851 when that text was written. A powerful critique leading to what? Self-destruction. Jack Kerouac - *On the Road*. William Carlos Williams want the variable foot, not the fixed foot in his very American poetry. Wanting to move. And there's nothing wrong with it. Wanting to move if you are not running away from, wrestling with, struggling with evil.

But if it's simply a mode of questioning, as I mentioned before, - in fact we know no democracy can survive without heroic energies of citizens who are wrestling with various legacies of personal and institutional evil. And if there's one fundamental hypothesis I want to float out this morning, and you all can slice it up, interrogate, question it, unsettle it - but I'm going to float it out: that there should be no discourse about diversity without its connection to democracy. Diversity in and of itself can become idolatrous, ahistorical and cathartic without some rooting in a democratic ideal that says there's some end and aim for our concern about diversity. Because democracy is about a critique of those forms of hierarchy that associate people who are different with degradation. We're trying to decouple difference and degradation. And we're trying to insure that if we have hierarchies, for those at the top will have some accountability for those at the bottom because democracy is fundamentally about individual responsibility, mutual respect, and social accountability. Yet, you can have a whole lot of diversity in undemocratic conditions. Who wants that? The question is what is the moral content of our discussion about diversity? What are the political consequences of our talk about diversity? And we say the exact same thing about identity. Talking about identity: I am black. I am from California. I am Chekhovian, intellectually. I have a lot of identities, don't I? Certain ones become salient if you get hit upside the head by the police. Then I take out my racial identity. I better check in on that one! I get in arguments with those who would trash Chekhov. I say this is my intellectual identity, I must struggle. My religious identity: I'm a Christian. A number of different identities must be pluralized.

But the question is: what is the moral content of that identity? I know a lot of black folk who have a lot of problems with it. We might catch hell together because of the legacy of white supremacy, but we still have deep disagreements. I know a lot of Christians, like Brother Ralph Reed (God bless him and be with him), I have deep disagreements with, but we still have a similar Christian identity. But the question is: how do we link our talk about diversity with some moral vision, some social analysis and some way of mustering the courage to follow through on what we are talking about. That's one of the reasons why the sense of history that I invoked earlier is so varied. Any discussion of diversity for me has to do with the various contexts in which we find ourselves. And for me, multicontextualism is as or more important as multiculturalism. You have to be able to move from one context to the next, and preserve your sense of who you are, but be able to shape that context in such a way that it accents the democratic stabilities in these contexts. It means also we have to have a knowledge of the larger historical context.

As we gather today, I submit to you that we're living in one of the most frightening and terrifying moments in the history of this country. It has much to do with a certain, not so much complacency as a certain sense that we fundamentally solved a problem of diversity; or are we so far along that we ought to feel good about ourselves. We've made

so much progress. And it's true, we have progress: if I were standing here and you were sitting here 30 years ago, it would be a very, very different situation, wouldn't it? White supremacy had a different form. Male supremacy a different form. Class inequality. I'm saying, in part, that all this talk about progress can be misleading. Malcolm X used to say you don't stab a man in the back nine inches and pull it out three inches and say you're making progress. We have to be honest about the movement owing to vision, analysis, courage, of so many brothers and sisters of all colors.

But let's look at this present moment, the context in which we gather in this country, and see how it relates to diversity and democracy, keeping in mind that democracies are very rare in human history, and they tend not to last that long. America is the oldest surviving democracy in the world, showing signs of running out of gas. Usually when democracies begin to unravel, there are two fatal viruses: poverty and paranoia. Increasing poverty generating escalating levels of despair. No democracy can survive with escalating levels of despair of the poor who feel they have very little stake within the society or economy, and therefore expressing their rage. There will never be enough police and prisons to deal with that avalanche of despair. And then paranoia. An increase in paranoia generating escalating levels of distrust. No democracy can survive with increasing distrust among its citizens, especially on racial, gender and class lines that balkanize and fragment and segment the body politic so that we feel as if we are not in this together; that we feel as if somehow we can go in our own privatistic and individualistic ways that cultivate our gardens. ? No democracy can survive their citizens feeling their fundamental duty is to cultivate their private gardens, and devalue and debase public interest and common good. Fragmented. When I look at U.S.A. in 1996, I can see signs of this unraveling. To talk about diversity is in part to talk about the future survival of democracy.

What evidence do I see? First, the economic front; the relative decline of the well-being of the majority of American citizens. Yet, in most of our public conversation, we listen to our candidates running for office, trying to convince us that the economy is stronger now than it's been in 30 years, that we ought to be proud of our achievements and accomplishments. And you say that the economy has been strong - for who? For the top 20% , yes, I understand. The top 1% are euphoric; I thoroughly understand. But what about the majority of fellow citizens of all colors wrestling with stagnating and declining wages? They know the 205% increase in profits of American corporations, and a 499% increase in the salaries of CEO's, but their wages are still dipping, and their family income is hardly holding on because in so many cases, both wife and husband are working. That generates deep anxiety and insecurity which is the worst thing that can happen in a democracy among 80%. Because that anxiety and insecurity tends to promote this all-too-human proclivity to want to scapegoat the most vulnerable. It looks as if things are out of control. Maybe if we turn to those who are marginal and blame them, then maybe I'll be able to gain some handle over my seemingly uncontrollable situation. No democracy can survive with the racist scapegoating across the board of such a large number. Maybe it's the immigrants. If we keep them out, that will keep the economy in tact. Things that accommodate the antagonism. How long have you been here? Well, I'm third generation. I'm glad great-great- grandmother got here. I think I'll just close it up now. No men and women: let's put the women back in the kitchen; that's the problem.

Because so many of them are in the labor force now they no longer provide the spaces for the men. Men need to have good jobs in order to be good fathers and the economic backbone of the community. You think in fact that by suppressing the talents and imagination and intelligence of 53% of the population that we can actually have a grand democratic project? No! It's the gay brothers and lesbian sisters, that's the problem. They stepped out of the closet and civilization began to disintegrate. Four or five percent: that's the group that did it.

Or traditional scapegoats: the suffering which constitutes the precondition for the flowering of American democracy. The subordination of people of color. The prerequisite for the flourishing of American democracy. Malcolm X called the victims of American democracy, and Malcolm X was never subject to the charge that we hear from conservative thinkers these days when engaging in victimology. He always saw subordinated peoples as agents in the world; that he was going to keep track of the victimization and constituted the very thing they were fighting against. That 's very different; very different. The black folk, the brown folk, yellow folk as scapegoats. They make such special pleas, especially those black folk. 244 years of slavery, and they're back serving as part the foundation for the nation. After 81 years of Jim and Jane Crow, segregation and second-class citizenship went hand in hand with American democracy. The American apartheid in the South and other parts - after such a history they then become scapegoats. 'I lost my job because of black folk' You lost your job because the factory left. Who owns the factory? -

- Black folk, no. Affirmative action, that's what did it. Took my job and they got an unqualified black person in it. How many black folk in your workplace? Oh, about 3 out of 82. They're taking over, aren't they?

Of course, then, there's the same debate over higher education. State of California. Going to shambles: non-meritocratic criteria. I say, well, what are you going to do? Let's take Harvard itself, given that it's right across the street. It had 18,000 applications, 1800 slots, what are you going to do? 4000 meet the minimal qualifications. 14000 don't make the cut, and that's just the first cut. Well, it's hard to do. And they say, 'we're going to make sure we get highly qualified students, we'll choose only from among those 4000. And they start with alumni sons and daughters. Very meritocratic, isn't it? It's part of a natural lottery born to a Harvard grad -- you got a jump start for life. Harvard's got a long history. In fact, I would argue that probably some institutional continuity ought play some role. But let's be honest. Harvard then moves to regional diversity. We don't want to be an institution where 95% of our students come from Washington, D.C., Connecticut, New York, and Massachusetts. We want some people from Idaho, Arizona, Oregon. We want to be cosmopolitan in our student body. If I say that's fine, that's just wonderful, but not necessarily meritocratic. They've already met the minimal qualifications. Then they move to athletes. They say we don't give out any scholarships, but we know that in higher education there is some peculiar practice that says that the collective self-definition of the institution depends in part on how well their athletic teams do. We don't want a football team that loses game after game after game. That humiliates students. Then, that's difficult for the community to read Shakespeare and Toni Morrison. Field hockey, we can work with that. Football, basketball, no, no no. So you bring in the athletes. Still non-

meritocratic in terms of academic excellence, but they meet minimal qualifications. And then after the 1960s, President McKenna can tell you how intense those days were. It was not just a civil rights movement: there was a war going on: 329 rebellions in 257 cities; 212 uprisings on one night, April 4, 1968. There was a war going on. The National Guard protecting the White House for the first time since the Civil War. The elites at the top said, 'I think we might have a problem. I think maybe we should reconsider and let some of these folk in. Become more diverse.' Not just diverse. It's more democratic in terms of access of those who meet minimal qualifications. We had brilliant women...couldn't get in. Brilliant black folk...couldn't get in. Afterwards those challenges in 1990, we focused on these black folk gaining access. Why? Because it violates the meritocratic practice. They're targeted. Some of the black students appear on campus - there goes one of those affirmative action beneficiaries - look at them, there they go! It started in Texas: 99 white brothers and sisters who have a board score lower than the person who was promoting the suit, but she focused on the black folk. 99 white ones, that's not important, but I want that black one. That's the one; that's my slot that she got.

What's going on? Scapegoating. The most vulnerable situation, we find ourselves in. A situation which, it is true, that the vast majority of us are wrestling with intense competition, increasing wealth and income inequality, and fearful that we may become one out of five fellow citizens in our economy who work more than 40 hours a week who do not receive one penny from the federal government - we call the working poor. Increasing all the time - their plight invisible. Tremendous challenge.

The economic front is inseparable, but by no means identical with the cultural front. By *the cultural* front I mean the most precious dimension of any society is the quality of its systems of caring and nurturing. It has a tremendous impact on young people. What is most frightening about our day is we are witnessing the relative erosion of the system of caring and nurturing, with devastating impact on children. And it's not just the fractured family; it's the fractured neighborhood; the fractured community; the waning influence of civic institutions: church, mosques, and synagogues, and citizens' organizations.

And no democracy can survive without putting a premium on caring and nurturing, especially the young. Why is that so, you can imagine, is another lecture, seminar, book, volumes. Quickly, I think it has much to do with the fact that we live more and more in a culture so shaped by intense bombardment of market forces that leads to market morality that are hedonistic and narcissistic, and market mentalities that want to gain access to pleasure now and power now, and property now, that create, what is most frightening, which is "gangsterized" dispositions. So, the ultimate logic of a market culture is the gangsterization of culture. Everybody out for their own, trying to get over, regardless of what the moral standards are, regardless of how you relate to others. And if you can imagine, I'm not just talking about gangster rap. Brother Shakur who reflects and refracts a larger cultural atmosphere of people trying to get over any way they can, gaining access to their pleasure, whether they're abusing other people's bodies or not - usually women's bodies - gaining access to power, whether by law or not, or gaining access to property, sometimes your property which we have to take now. Scared. In such a culture, increasing fear of violent attack and vicious assault and cruel insult because we begin to

lose the very art of how to relate to one another as fellow citizens, and fellow human beings.

Or another way to put this is, in a market culture, publicness, or public spaces are devalued. Look at public education; public health care; public transportation, they're held at arms length. Look at the quality of public conversation. I'm not just talking about Brother Rush. Can't blame it all on Rush Limbaugh. This fellow human being is symptomatic of the problem of the difficulty of engaging in high-quality conversation of Rush and others because we're affected by the larger culture. It's more difficult to deal with our anger and aggression than mediate it with some respectful talk with fellow human beings and fellow citizens. It affects each and every one of us. I'm saying, in part, that on this cultural front without promoting non-market values in our market culture, then our talk about diversity and democracy becomes more and more empty. Because at the very core of our talk about diversity and democracy are non-market values like love, caring and empathy, especially empathy, i.e., conceiving of what it's like to be in the skin of other people, to walk a mile in their shoes before you engage in your devastating critique. Nothing wrong with criticism; must play a crucial role. But will the criticism be enabling? Will it be empowering?

One of the reasons why it's so very difficult to talk about race in America is in part because it's difficult to talk about any evil; but also because we feel as if once we enter into the conversation, we won't be empowered. We'll be convicted. Or we won't be enabled. We'll be paralyzed, so why engage? In part because we lose more and more of the art of public conversation. The wonderful book by the great John Dewey written in 1927 called *The Public and its Problem*, says show me a democracy that is unable to engage in candid, critical, high-quality communication with itself about its public problems, and I'll show you a democracy sliding down the slope to anarchy and chaos. That's 1927! It's amazing. What a challenge in 1996. But without non-market values, it's going to be difficult to engage in dialogue. And by dialogue I mean what Martin Buber meant. You all read *I and Thou*. You ought to be a little different when you leave dialogue than when you entered because you've listened; you've been challenged; you've been unsettled. You've been provoked. That's dialogue! Not chit-chat; not evasive exchange. That's dialogue, and it also ought to hurt a little bit.

In fact, talking about race and gender, difficult as it is, there might be some tears that will flow. There might be a little rage that spills over, because if you're honest about it, if you're most successful which is to allow the other to open up and become vulnerable such that the depths of who they are can be affected, then there might be some non-rational aspects to the dialogue. Just like a love affair. If it's all rational, you've got a problem. A big problem. I don't want this argument, honey. I want empowerment. I want affirmation. I want affection. I want connection. Maybe I want something of a non-market sort. I want some gentleness and tenderness and kindness. Smile at me as we converse. Believe in my potential to change, even though it looks as if I'm stuck. That's how conversation takes place. Conversation is the very life-blood of democracy. If we can't talk to one another, how can we even think about solving the complex problem. No one of us has the solution. Democracy is about proximate solutions to insoluble problems. Because human

history tells us there will always be new problems, new forms of hierarchy, new needs to account for elites.

Elites are so clever. They're so clever You have 1% of the population right now that owns 36% of the household wealth. How can you insure that they have civic responsibility? The tax code doesn't work - too many loopholes; they're too clever. Their lawyers are too sharp. Continual need for accountability, both for ourselves and everyone else. Non-market values: empathy, sympathy, care, nurture, sacrifice.

The economic front, the cultural front, we've come to the political front. What do we see more and more? Pessimism and fatalism and cynicism. And cynicism anyway is an understandable response. Cynicism is in part a perception of the situation, the dangers, and one wants to avoid humiliation, and therefore one holds back, and identifies with aggression. So one can be on the attack, and not have to be on the defensive being attacked. So let's be cynical. It becomes a near- slogan. I'm not just talking about jealousy. We're very good at it. How do we look at this cynicism and pessimism and fatalism and say, look, we're part of a tradition of struggle, and of those who came before that said that talk about diversity must be linked to democracy; and even though it's a very dark and difficult moment, that we still have a chance because we have each other. We have grand ideals, we've got some analysis, and we've got some courage. That's been the plight of all persons who have tried to be, in the language of John Coltrane, a force for good, even at a time when it seems that the good is relatively impotent, helpless and powerless.

I like President McKenna's talk about hope because I think that's so important. If we have a sense of history, a tragic-comic sense of history, not sentimental or melodramatic, with all the good on one side and the bad on the other, or one group having a monopoly on truth, but an attempt to generate heroic energy against limits we know not of, but we know there are limits. And there must be some sense of the comic because if we can't laugh at ourselves, then we're not doing something right. Our own incongruities and contradictions with that sense of history expanding the scope of it, putting the stress on courage. And let me say one footnote about courage. Frederick Nietzsche reminds us, and he's absolutely right, that courage is not simply a matter of standing up for your convictions, but it's also having the courage to attack your convictions. You could be wrong, and it takes courage to admit that, so that what you do stand up for has to have some real ethical substance to it, because you listen to other people long enough and you're open enough to the counter-arguments against your point, even allow people's hearts and souls to affect your heart and soul.

But hope is so crucial. And I must say I do not believe that hope and optimism are the same thing. I am in no way optimistic about the human adventure in the 21st century? Not at all. The 21st century could be as barbaric as the 20th. You've got a global capitalism looking for profits all around the globe, focusing on cheap labor markets. We've got growing tribalized mentalities. We've got "gangsterization" going on in everyday life as well as in high office. Those are the very threats to any democratic project. Security systems going up all around the country; closed- in neighborhoods: what

would lead any rational human being to think there's enough evidence that would allow us to infer that things are going to get better if we keep doing what we're doing. But I am a prisoner of hope, like Ms. President, and a prisoner of hope says, "I know the evidence looks flimsy, but I'll make the leap of faith beyond the evidence by energizing and galvanizing fellow citizens and fellow human beings to keep alive this tradition of struggle for decency and dignity; to keep a dialogue about diversity linked to democracy alive, even in times in which it looks as if it is foolish or sheer folly, it still is worth fighting for, because it's right and moral and just."

And it's not a question of numbers; I'm not discouraged because the vast number of persons seeming to think that this tradition of struggle - this democratic tradition that I'm talking about - is somehow peripheral. It's a question of having enough people with vision, integrity, character, a sense of sacrifice, to keep that tradition alive. The great T.S. Eliot used to say that ours is in the trying; the rest is not our business. The Four Quartets. He's right. So many people who want to engage in the discourse they want people to be transformed overnight, as if they are a kind of savior because usually they're bringing the grace with it. They've got the insight. And we're reminded that if you're going to be part of this tradition, you better be a long-distance runner.

Another text that I recommend before I stop, as the Turkish philosopher told Candide at the very end of Candide, 'hold your tongue and shut your mouth! Said enough.' There's a book called *The Long Haul* by Miles Horton. Miles Horton is one of the great prophetic figures of this century. He's a white brother from Appalachia. (We say Appalaachia, they say Appalahchia.) He was in that struggle, the same black freedom struggle referred to earlier for over 65 years, and he said you have to be in it for the long haul. It's not just a question of one day of dialogue, or one week of dialogue, it's being connected and bonded to this tradition over time. Being affiliated with organizations and institutions; being willing to be organized and organize others, and to mobilize and mobilize others. And Miles would say it is a matter of hope, and that hope has nothing to do with the notion that we're going to save each other, or save the country, or save the world. Not at all. The question of this tradition staying alive should make things a little bit better for those who come after. It has so much to do with my own tradition, but as you can imagine, black folk who looked at America for 363 years have said in many ways this is an absurd place: a land of liberty and opportunity, but slavery; a land of mobility, but Jim Crow; a land of meritocratic standards, but being targeted as always being anti-meritocratic. And, yes, still making that leap of faith beyond the evidence.

My grandmother used to say coming out of the black church, that if the Kingdom of God is within you and everywhere you go, you ought to leave a little bit of heaven behind. Which is, that you ought to check yourself as well as check others. In terms of your ability to fight the evil in you and outside. Yes, it's true that white supremacy in its various forms, no matter how subtle, is still evil, and sexism, and heterosexist. It loses sight of humanity. Yes. But the question in part is whether you, are you treating people right? Are you part of organizations fighting against it? Are you honest and open in your conversation with others in your workplace? That's also a crucial challenge, and that's the challenge I leave with each and every one of you. Today I thank you so very much. I

simply say for those who are willing to meet that challenge, I'll be there with you because I'm going down fighting.