

The Houston Branch - N.A.A.C.P.

L I F E M E M B E R S H I P

T E S T I M O N A L D I N N E R

Monday, October 29, 1962  
3 P.M.

Antioch Baptist Church

313 Robin Street

PROGRAM

Toast Master - Rev. Earl R. Boone

Selection ..... Choir

Prayer .....

Dinner

Selection ..... Choir

Remarks ..... Toast Master

Solo..... Atty. Weldon H. Berry

Awards ..... Atty. Barbara C. Jordan  
Mrs. F. A. Robinson  
Dr. Thelma Patton Law

Presentations:

Presentation of Freedom Queens .....

Introduction of Speaker ..... Mrs. Hosea Evans

Speaker.....Dean Kenneth S. Tollett

Announcements.....

Benediction .....

Mrs. Ann Robinson, Chairman  
Atty. Barbara C. Jordan, Co-Chairman  
Mrs. Viola Flix, Program Chairman

It is peculiarly fitting and proper that we gather this evening in testimonial of Life Members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The world is uneasily poised upon a calamitous cliff. We know not whether mankind will jump to an abrupt oblivion or return to solid ground, dedicated to life and human goodwill. We must remind ourselves that the risks we take are to no avail, if they are not premised upon freedom and the betterment of mankind. It is reassuring to know that those for whom we have gathered to give testimony have invested their resources for the vindication of human rights. A totalitarian conspiracy has been challenged in Cuba with naked power; however, if this is all that can be said about our posture today, we may win the battle of this power struggle but lose the war against human oppression.

Current events have required me to rethink what I have to say this evening. I hope you will bear with me while I make some comments upon the world situation, for I think what I shall have to say will have some relevance to the purpose for which we are gathered.

First, it might be appropriate for me to give a title to my remarks: "Can Mankind Rise Above Inhumanity?" History is a dreary catalog of destructive inhuman wars. And when madmen are not engaged in wars of conquest and bloodshed, they are engaged in orgies of oppression and inhuman exploitation of fellow men. In times of so called peace we become amenable to war by our habitual cruelty and unconcern for our fellow men. We, so to speak, adjust ourselves to

famine, poverty, ignorance, and suffering when they manifest themselves in innumerable ways during our daily routine lives so that the threat of their magnified incidence in times of impending war do not disturb our complacent indifference to them. A society cannot live long with rank injustice without becoming desensitized to the atrocities and outrages of war. The United States of America has adjusted itself to the remorseless mistreatment of the Negro and other minority groups so that it is not especially concerned in a human way with the possible awful consequences that might flow from our challenge to Russia and Cuba today. Of course, we are not alone in this desensitized state of mind. The world has adjusted itself to famine, poverty, ignorance, and suffering--at least a large part of its ruling cliques has. I might add by qualification of the above statement regarding America that, with aplomb and monumental selfishness, we do stock our fallout shelters with food and firearms to make sure our neighbors do not share in our foresightedness.

To paraphrase a statement of Immanuel Kant, as long as there is anywhere in this world widespread deprivation, exploitation and injustice, no other part of the world is safe from them in one form or another. Just as we can become inured to the mistreatment of our brothers and therefore have no qualms about mistreating our neighbors; by allowing our neighbors to be mistreated we soon find it necessary to kill or threaten to kill our neighbors to prevent them from mistreating or threatening to mistreat us. In other words, if we mistreat those close to us, it becomes easy to even more brutally mistreat those

who are not close. This is one side of the desensitizing coin. The other is that if we permit others to be mistreated, we have to mistreat or kill them to keep them from mistreating us.

I know you are wondering what I am driving at. I have suggested it earlier. Racial and social injustice in America have desensitized us to the horrors of war. Our shameful unconcern or inaction toward the aspirations of the deprived masses south of the border and over the world has placed us in the position to having to wage an aggressive warlike policy to preserve ourselves from a threat to our national security. This is the price we pay for unconcern and cynical indifference.

Let us be perfectly frank about our recent action regarding Cuba. Our blockade is neither legal nor moral, but I suppose it is necessary now. However, let me hasten to add that if I were in President Kennedy's shoes, I would probably do the same thing. I am not proud to say, yet I do say, my country right or wrong. Indeed, I wrote a book review several months ago (it is published in the current issue of the Southwest<sup>er</sup> Law Journal) in which I said that if Cuba allowed Russia to place missile launching sites and bomber bases there, it would be difficult to live with the well established, but infrequently honored, international principle of non-intervention. I find it, in all sincerity, difficult to make a meaningful distinction between Russia's offensive weapons in Cuba and ours in Turkey and other countries close to Russia. We say our motives are purely defensive and peace loving. Obviously, our missiles and bombers are no more peaceful and defensive than the Russians'. It is a

vestige of ethnocentrism and Anglo selfrighteousness or egotism that makes us think our motives and actions are always pure and the other fellows' impure and evil. We may yet pay very dearly for that myth and illusion.

This is not the occasion to enumerate our misdeeds and blunders in South America, Cuba, and other places. It is disturbing to contemplate that we did not make any serious efforts to curb or discourage in any way the oppressiveness of Batista's regime and many other like regimes throughout South America. Can we speak with any kind of pride concerning our friendly and military alliances with Franco, Chiang Kai-shek, and other such anti-communists. Too long we have allied ourselves with oppressive regimes. Castro's Cuba, I say, is almost the inevitable outcome of such misalliances. The Alliance for Progress is commendable, but it may be too little too late.

What I am driving at is this. We can ill afford to be unconcerned about our fellow men. The consequences are more than just a little suffering here and there. Indifference, mistreatment, and unconcern breed more indifference, mistreatment, and unconcern until these vices which we practice toward others come and threaten our own security.

Obviously, it would be <sup>a</sup> gross oversimplification to say that the mistreatment of the Negro in the United States is the cause of the current world crisis. However, I do say the kind of attitude displayed in the United States toward the Negro and underprivileged people throughout the world has very much to do with our current world crisis. I repeat myself, but I think what I am trying to say bears repeating over and over, mankind risks self-destruction when he manifests

unconcern and cruelty toward his fellow man anywhere in this world.

The most disturbing thing about the current crisis is that it validates, it seems, the teaching I received from a world famous expert upon politics and international relations when I was in graduate school. He taught politics is the struggle for power. Very little I observed then and since has done much to disprove this assertion. The most we can hope is that ultimately those who wield the most power wield it for the benefit and elevation of mankind instead of the suppression of ~~the suppression of~~ mankind. President Kennedy has been recently exercising an awesome amount of power<sup>e</sup> in the Steel Controversy and at the University of Mississippi. I do not think there is any question that his objectives in both cases were noble and humanitarian. Because of these past acts of determined leadership, I have to presume his motives in this Cuban crisis are for humanitarian purposes also. But please reflect that in all three of these instances, rational and moral persuasion were <sup>W's</sup> inadequate to change the course of conduct of obstinate people who seemed set upon pursuing courses <sup>of action</sup> against the best interest of the common good and world peace. If force or the treat<sup>h</sup> of force is the only means of getting people to act the way we think they should, I cannot say the future prospects of the human race are good.

Some of us are pleased that at last Uncle Sam is respected by those south of the border because of President Kennedy's valiant, courageous stand against Russia in Cuba. I am happy that we are respected more, but I would much prefer that that respect stem from President Kennedy's promulgation of the Alliance for Progress <sup>PROGRAM</sup> than his threat to invade or bomb Cuba. There is too much the echo of respect

and admiration for the matador in the present good impression the President is making. Admiration and respect for the matador are too much influenced by a lust for blood and the heroic confrontation of death. I am not sure the grandeur and glory of the bullring are a happy formula for foreign policy and relations.

When we pay homage to <sup>Thelma Bates F. A.</sup> Dr. Law and Mrs. Robinson because of their life membership in the N. A. A. C. P., we are not just honoring them for the great financial contribution they have made to the Association, but we are honoring them for the contribution they have made for the betterment of mankind, the betterment of his civil rights and the recognition of his human dignity. The N. A. A. C. P.'s war against the mistreatment of Negroes in the United States is more than a parochial effort to improve the Negro's plight here. Every battle the N. A. A. C. P. wins is a victory not just for the Negro and the United States, but it is also a victory for human decency and fair treatment of human beings all over the world. Indeed, if what I have been saying is not completely in error, it is a victory for peace.

Through selfishness and nearsightedness, we too frequently give little time and attention to the problems of our fellow men. Most of us are ruled by a "number-one" philosophy. We are not only indifferent to what is going on in far away places, but we do not give a darn what happens to our fellow countrymen, even our next door neighbors. We are so busy getting and spending for ourselves that we do not take the trouble to see if our neighbors are getting anything to spend, except, perhaps, to envy and covet what they have when we do not have it. Maybe, one of these days we will realize that so long as our



neighbors, here and abroad, are deprived of <sup>the</sup> goods of life, the goods we have ourselves are not secure. This is not a vice peculiar to the white American. I have often observed with sadness that many educated and well-to-do Negroes are frequently least concerned about their fellow men even their Negro brothers. I cannot for the life of me understand how any Negro can really be conservative in his politics and thinking or indifferent to the injustices inflicted upon others. I know conservatism is a luxury that only the affluent can afford. However, as I have said before, even they risk their affluence when they show no concern for the welfare of others.

For example, how can the Negro professional be anti-labor and anti-little man when practically all that he makes is made off of the laboring, little Negro. Some of us drive big cars and live in fine houses canopied by tall pines. But why is it so many of us well-to-do and so called educated Negroes take such a little interest in civil rights and politics and when we do take an interest in politics we get on the wrong side? It is this self-destructive "number-one" philosophy we have acquired from some where <sup>which is the answer</sup> Why are there so few Life Members, but so many Lincolns, Cadillacs, and Thunderbirds in our garages? If a Negro is the owner and driver of the car, it matters not whether it is a T-Model Ford or Lincoln Continental, if he takes a cross country trip, many hotels and most highway restaurants and motels will not welcome him or his fine rolling stock. It matters not whether he lives in a one room shanty or a fifty thousand dollars split level home, his children will not be welcomed in the best equipped schools, if he is colored. Yet so many of us indulge the luxury of not voting or voting

for conservative candidates. Even more of us do not give moral and financial support to the N. A. A. C. P. which is brave and willing enough to fight our battles for us, battles we are too cowardly or nearsighted to fight ourselves whenever the opportunity arises.

Please do not accuse me of indulging in the "pious hokum" of liberal critics of Negroes--Henry Lee Moon, Director of Public Relations of the N. A. A. C. P., quite appropriately used that phrase to characterize the recent editorial in the Harper's Magazine which suggested "What the Negro Needs Most: A First Class Citizens' Council." I agree with everything Moon said in his reply in the October Harper's to Fischer's editorial criticising Negroes for certain so called deficiencies. I especially agree with Moon's concluding sentence, "Moreover, we are damned tired of having to be nicer than white folks." I am not really asking us to be nicer than white folks for the sake of being noble paragons. Our self-interest requires us to be concerned just as it really requires the white folks to be concerned. The current Cuban crisis proves that.

However, do not misunderstand my agreement with Moon. We are no more above criticism than white folks are. Constructive, positive criticism is always valuable. Indeed, I should like to think that the hallmark of the liberal is his willingness to frankly recognize sound criticism. The liberal's mind is open to suggestions and criticism. He is not so sure of himself or his thoughts as to believe he knows it all or has found the definitive solution to all of mankind's problems. Conservative critics of liberals, such as Buckley, recognize this

characteristic of liberals and have used it as a basis of searching criticism. He has suggested that we are so uncertain in our convictions that we are not able to act. He would say, I suppose, that we are Hamlets whose resolutions to act are sickled over with the pale cast of thought and indecision. This, indeed, may be a weakness of liberals, but thought and <sup>~</sup>mental powers are the essence of man. Human beings are distinguishable from other animals, I submit by their power to think logically, critically, and constructively. But a liberal, I believe, is more than a thinking man. He is a man thinking about how he can better improve his fellow man's condition. He is an optimist about human possibilities. He does not accept the proposition that famine, poverty, ignorance, suffering, and war are inevitable and ineradicable. He does not believe all that is right are on his side and all that is wrong are on the other side. He finds it difficult to overgeneralize that all white folks are bad and that all Negroes are good or vice versa. He recognizes that the great achievements and failures of mankind have been forged in the smithy of man's mind. He recognizes that a cultivated and responsive mind, attuned to the needs of mankind, can design and mold improvements in man's existence. If a thinking mind cannot be trusted, then all that civilization has wrought, its science, art, technology, and religion, cannot be trusted; indeed, mankind himself cannot be trusted.

Please do not misconstrue my remarks about liberals. It would be illiberal for me to suggest that only liberals are concerned and have the interest of mankind at heart. Conservatives are more pessimistic about human nature and the possibilities of collective improvement. In some respects they may be more realistic. They are

skeptical of welfare programs and other nostrums for social improvement brewed up by my so called liberals and do gooders. They some time, not too much in error, say we are very much concerned about mankind but care little for the individual, except as he is a part of a social group. That we forget courtesy and good manners are conducive to improved human relations. And I must confess that I have met many conservatives that have a deep appreciation of fair play and individual effort. Of course, I do not believe these conservative virtues are alien to liberals, although at times we act as if they are. Maybe, we do overestimate the rational powers of man to improve the lot of his fellow man.

It would be fantasy thinking to believe that man is totally a rational animal. Certainly, the Negro has been subjected to too much irrational prejudice and abuse to believe such a demonstrably false proposition. Man is still an animal. He has not completely arisen above the aggressive and destructive drives of animals. The passions of hate and love often ravage our lives. I suppose the love I have for our country caused me to say my country right or wrong. But at least I am rational enough to recognize this possibly irrational feeling. I would rather we displayed as a nation, people, and individuals in time of peace a kind of selfless concern for our fellow man so that we are not placed in the agonizingly traumatic situation of being constrained to follow a warlike course for the sake of self-preservation.

Cannot we invest our resources in programs and campaigns of human betterment as our honorees have done? The world direly needs more Life Members who have invested their resources in the cause of

freedom, equality, and human dignity. Mankind can rise above inhumanity, if he would only be concerned about the welfare of his fellow man. If mankind does not develop more Life Members soon, the world may soon have no members alive.