

Dr. Brothers not typed, by request

Dr. DiPietro: Thank you Dr. Brothers. The lives of very few persons become legends in their own times. We are extremely privileged tonight to have such a person with us. When he entered major league baseball, he focused national attention on the deep-seated emotions and wide-spread inequities facing many minority groups, black and white, in our society. By his brilliant performance as a ball-belting, base-stealing, second baseman with the then Brooklyn Dodgers and by his restraint and good sense both on and off the field, he set an example that was admired and emulated by many. Now Vice President of Sea Host Inc. and Chairman of the Board of Freedom National Bank, he continues to work for the elimination of economic and social barriers among men. As special assistant to Governor Rockefeller, as National Vice President of the National Association ~~of~~ for the Advancement of Colored People, it is my pleasure to present a member of the Hall of Fame, in every way, Jackie Robinson.

MR. JACK ROBINSON: Thank you very much, President DiPietro.

Honored Guests, Class of 1969, Parents, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen. First, let me say it's a pleasure for me to share the dais and platform with Dr. Brothers, and I have had a truly wonderful discussion as I have ~~was~~ sat here about some of the things that I believe are troubling each and every one of us here today. And I think that tonight as we think about our seniors and think about graduates all over this country, I think there are so many things that are challenging our young people that I hope that they have prepared themselves for a very very troubled future as our new and fresh leaders. I think, however, if you have prepared yourselves well here at Franklin Pierce College, the task may not be too difficult. Many problems that we are going to face and that are going to challenge us were problems that have been around for a long, long period of time. It just so happens that today our young people and people in colleges, even though they may not be so young are beginning to ask questions about them, and they are beginning to make challenges that I think are tremendously important.

I feel that Dr. Brothers loosened you up considerably and you are a little bit more relaxed than you may have been otherwise, so I believe I will be able to talk to you about a man that I felt was tremendously proud, a man that did a great number of things that I think should be a lesson for all of us. For legend has it that this man

had everything. He had health and he had wealth. He had a great family. He had respect and he had power. People said that he was a good and a great man who led a blameless life. But suddenly these things were taken from him--his children died, his wealth disappeared, his health failed, and those who had envied him now scorned him and those who had loved him were revolted by him. An obvious question was driving this poor man to despair, "Why?" "Why has this happened to me? Of What am I guilty? Do I deserve this? Does God despise me?" And then friends came to him and they thought they were consoling him and they said, "Accept what has happened. If evil has befallen you there must be a reason. You must deserve it. You must be different. You must be guilty. You must be inferior for God is unhappy with you."

The man listened to all his comforters had to say and he was tempted to wallow in self-pity and tempted to resign himself to his condition, but he refused. Instead he said, "Wherefor do I take my flesh into my teeth and put my life into my hands. Thou he slay me yet will I trust in him, but I will maintain my own ways before him."

That man's name was Job. And I am sure most of you are familiar with the rest of the story. How God spoke to Job, how the world went, how he was only testing Job, how he restored all of Job's goods twofold.

Now that's a good story with a happy ending. But I don't want to focus here tonight on an ending, but on the nature of Job's attitude. Although he slay me, I will maintain my own ways before him. I think it takes an extremely unusual man to tell God "to get off my back" and I don't think there is anything else like it anywhere in the Bible--the old Testament or the New--the Book of Job stands alone in this fantastic and incredible display of personal conviction, arrogance and pride. To question God was unheard of yet Job did it.

Now just image this man on his knees, ragged, covered with lice and sores, bereft of children and goods and counseled by his bitter and angry wife to curse God and die. Imagine him in his agony saying, "I will not curse God, but I am a man and therefore worthy."

No one could convince him that he deserved misfortune. He could not grovel even before God, how much less could he grovel before man. For Job knew himself

Job trusted himself, trusted his own instincts and remained true to himself, not just when things were going good, but also when they were deep in adversity. And consumed by what he thought was the wrath of God, he stood firm. For the man who knows himself and trusts himself, the man who refuses to sell himself is an admirable creature, and the story of Job has always interested me as I said. I frequently think about him especially in these troubled days and days when the world is full of people telling us what to think and ^{what} direction to go and really how to get there. And as a black man I have a special affinity for Job.

And it may be an exaggeration to do so, but I translate his story into the story of the black man in America today. Like Job we were subtly bereft of our wealth, our land, our civilization, /our health--we were brutalized by slavery, we had no families for slaves had no family rights, we were kept in bondage enduring the scornful eye of the community and the revoltion of our masters. Like Job was, we have been on our knees in this country, covered not with physical sores but with spiritual and psychological sores and like Job we know misery. Like Job, we have advisors telling us if we are so mistreated it must be our own fault. Our natural inferiority. But like Job we answer, "I am a man and therefore worthy. ^{Though you} /~~Though you~~ slay me I will maintain my own ways before you."

Now, I said that the story of Job was unlike any other biblical narrative. And I don't think scholars are even sure who wrote it. They suspect that the author was not an Israelite at all. For so is the story of the black man in America unlike any other tale of bondage. We were horrified to recall that 10,000,000 Jews were murdered in the 1940's but records that have been checked out back and forth prove that there were 140 blacks killed during the slave trade era. Now, as an individual I don't pretend as to the status of Job. For his innocence and his goodness and courage are beyond me but as a black man I understand him and it was as a black man that I had to make my way and maintain my own way. My life is checkered with the criticisms of friendly counselors--the critics who thought they knew better than I what I should do, what I should feel and what I should think. And then there were the acquaintances whose advice I refused. There were the envious who wanted me to get on my knees ~~and~~ in gratitude for what baseball has done for me. Like the newspaper man

He said 140 that he must have must something more

from Miami, Florida, who said that Jackie Robinson of all the people I know in this country, all the black people, has less right to protest against the kind of things that are happening for had it not been for the white man in America where would Jackie Robinson be? He's got it made. Well, I sat down and I wrote this gentleman a letter and I told him about Nat King Cole and his tremendous ~~opportunities~~ ^{opportunities} ~~opportunities~~ when Nat went to Birmingham, Alabama, to sing before an integrated audience, before Nat could finish one song, out of the audience jumped some hoodlums who beat Nat King Cole up, and I said to this gentleman that you could certainly say that Nat King Cole had it made but being black in these United States he is subjected to the same kind of abuse that any other black person is subjected to. Or, Lena Horne, out in ^{Los Angeles} California, wanting to enjoy an evening of fun subjected to heckling and abuse because she was black and beautiful, and I said you could certainly say that Lena Horne has it made, but being black is subjected to the same kinds of abuse or Willie Mays--when the Giants moved to San Francisco, recognized at that time as the greatest player in the game of baseball, making more money they said than anybody else, but Willie tried to buy a home in an all-white neighborhood, rejected to such an extent that the Mayor of San Francisco let the entire world know that Willie Mays in his opinion is a wonderful human being and can come and live in his home if he wishes. But Willie Mays was a great black baseball player--had it made but was subjected to the same kinds of abuse as any other black person was subjected to, and we say to people who are constantly saying that we have got it made that there is not a single black person in these United States that has it made until the most under-privileged black person has it made, and we intend to pursue our goals in this country.

There were the baseball fans, the ones that I thought were somewhat mentally disturbed. I recall one ball game in particular--we were playing at ^{Ebbett's} ~~Emory's~~ Field and the ushers came and gave me a note that I had to rush immediately to the hospital because my daughter had been taken ill, seriously ill. We rushed out to go to the hospital and all of a sudden we didn't have the name of the hospital so we had to call home to find out where, and it was only somebody, a crank calling to disrupt what was going on at that ball field.

Well, I had to chose early in my baseball career, but I had only two alternatives--to be owned or to own myself, and I chose the latter. For the only freedom there is is the freedom to be ~~myself~~ ones self. And through it all I had to follow my own instincts--when I made mistakes they were my mistakes--when I succeeded they were my successes. For me there was only one choice, I had to be me. Right or wrong, good or ill, I had to be me. I had to be me when black people told me to get guns and go out and kill "Whitey." Well, that wasn't me. I had to be me when white people told me to cool it, to take all the abuse and not react. That wasn't me either. And I have to be me today as I look at incidents like Cornell--and guns and admit that I am confused.

I am proud of the way that black youngsters in most incidences have conducted themselves--youngsters that are seeking their own identity, but there are times such as Cornell and guns that we cannot condone those kinds of acts.

Now in many ways my life is somewhat unique but in more ways it is not. As Jackie Robinson, I have led an unusual life, but as a black man in America, it is like any other black man. I think we must say that right now, black men all over this country are saying, "I have to be me, and me means the color of my skin, the texture of my hair, the history of my race, the arts, the music, the customs of my people and the style of my life." And that is about all that black people are saying, "get off my back--I have to be me. Though you have tried to slay me, I will maintain my own ways before you."

Now, we will make mistakes. I think we have made a terrible mistake in some of our college institutions, but I think they have to be our mistakes and that we have to correct them. Just as our successes have to be ours as well. I think that we must let people know that we don't despise white liberals help, but I think they have to recognize that we are not subservient to it either. I think you must know that that is not black separatism, that's black individualism. That is not black racism, it's black pride. And I think that too frequently when a black believes in himself and promotes his own interests, does his own thing, too often white America cries "Racism." What we do is not out of hatred for white America, it's out of love for black America, and we have to ask, "Is that black power, is that threatening?"

Well, I am reminded of something Jimmie Baldwin said on a television interview. Addressing some white people in the audience, he said, "What do you feel inside when I say white power. You feel nothing at all do you? The term doesn't trouble you at all. Now, what do you feel in your stomach when I say black power? You feel something unpleasant, don't you? Something uneasy happens inside you."

"The difference in feeling tells a great deal about the nature of white power in America. In other words," he said, "If power is fearful if a black man has it it must be a terrible thing white people know about themselves. Wanting power to ~~survive~~ survive is natural, keeping power to oppress is evil. And whites are sometimes shocked, surprised and grieved by black demands."

Let me quote once again, this time from John Paul Sarty's "Black Orpheus." It to me is the perfect example to white outrage at black demands, and I quote: "What then did you expect when you unbound the gag that had muted those black mouths-- that they would chant your praises? Did you think that when those heads that our fathers had forcibly bowed down to the ground were raised again you would find adoration in ~~them~~ their eyes?" And still there are whites who will say, 'You have come a long, long way.' What do you want?' ~~Well, I say~~

Well, I say to you Class of 1969, to think as you go out into the real world about what you want--well, black people want that, too. We want our children educated in schools that respect the way they are, that teach them the history of their race, the ~~language~~ language of their people. We want the opportunity to work at a job that gives us ~~a satisfactory~~ satisfaction as well as profit. And we want to own the land that grew fertile from the sweat and blood of our fathers and we will not rent the abandoned ghetto, we will own it. White people move from neighborhoods when it is no longer desirable and we move in, but we are not allowed to own any of the property there or the businesses there, as usual, we are treated as slaves with no property rights, no citizen rights, no power. We also want our young black athletes who exhaust their bodies on the fields for the pleasure of others to get a place in the sports ^{begun} establishment if they ~~began~~ their early descent from their peak. We ~~a~~ want more owners to think as the Boston Basketball Team thinks--Bill Russell is, in my view, one of the most outstanding and most outspoken black men in this country. Yet, the Boston Ball Club

look to Bill Russell as a man and they felt that Bill had the ability to coach and to be a leader and they gave him the job, and I think the results speak for themselves. And as we think about our young black athletes who have begun their early descent, ^{we have to ask} "Does this sound like a great deal to want, and if so, ^{we say} /it is unfortunate."

What we want is so simple through life that we are not asking any longer, we are telling. Two thirds of the globe is water, but once we had to beg to swim in it. A warm glass of root beer in a Southern United States bus depot is probably the most unrefreshing drink there is but once we had to beg to be served it. A decent education is the right of every American child but once we had to beg that some youngsters in Little Rock, Arkansas, be given an opportunity to get an education. And I say, believe me the begging is done. We'll swim in the sea and we'll run our lunch counters, we'll educate our own children and shape our own ~~curriculum~~ curricular. For the man who begs and the race that begs is asking permission to be like his benefactor and that for what it believes that is slavery. The man who fights and the race ~~who~~ fights/and who listens to the sounds of his own drummer--that's freedom. The freedom to be ones self. We'll not settle for survival for we have already survived. We will not settle for endurance for we have already endured. We believe we will triumph, and we say to white America that you have got to join us for we believe that right here in this country black triumph is America's triumph. And our triumph is the triumph of the human race.

I usually end my little speech by reading from a quote of William Faulkner as he gave his Nobel prize acceptance speech, but lately I have been reading the book of poems by Margaret Burrows, "What Shall I Tell My Children Who Are Black?" I think that this poem best explains the frustrations, the desires, the pride of black people, and I would like to conclude by reading to you, if I can find it real quick, "What Do I Tell My Children Who Are Black?"

"What Shall I tell my children who are black? Of what it means to be a captive in this dark skin. What shall I tell my dear one, fruit of my womb, of how beautiful they are when everywhere they turn they are faced with the ~~(A)~~ appearance of everything that is black. Villians are black with black hearts, a black cow gives no milk, a black hen lays no eggs, bad news comes bordered in black and black is evil and evil is black and devil's food is black. What shall I tell my dear ones raised in a white world?

A place where white has been made to represent all that is good and pure and fine and decent. Where clouds are white and dolls in heaven surely are white, white place with angels robed in white and cotton candy and ice cream and milk, ruffled Sunday dresses and dream houses and long, sleek Cadillacs and angel food is white--all, all white. What can I say, therefore, when my child comes home in tears because a playmate has called him black, big lipped, flat nose and nappy headed? What will he think when I dry his tears and whisper, "Yes, that's true, but no less beautiful and dear." How shall I lift up his head and ~~give~~ get him to lift his shoulders, to look his adversary in the eye, confident of the knowledge of his ^{worth} ~~work~~, serene under his sable skin and proud of his own beauty? What can I do to give him strength that he may come through this life's adversities as a whole human being ~~unwarped~~ unwarped and human in a world of biased ~~in~~ laws and inhuman practices that he might survive and survive he must for who knows, perhaps this black child here bears a genius to discover a cure for cancer or to chart a course for exploration of the universe. So, he must survive for the good of all humanity. He must and will survive. I have drunk deeply of late from the fountain of my black culture, ^{savored} ^{for me and learned from} Mother Africa, discovered the truth of my heritage--the truth so often obscured and omitted and I find that I have much to say to my black children and I will lift up their heads in proud blackness with the story of their father and their father's father and I shall take them into the back time of ^{kings} ~~king~~ and queens who ruled the Nile and measured the stars and discovered the ^{laws} ~~rules~~ of mathematics. Upon those backs have been built the wealth of continents, and I will tell him this and more. And his heritage shall be his weapon and his armor ^{will make him} ~~sharper~~ strong enough to win any battle he may face. Since this story is often obscured, I must sacrifice to find it. for my children even as I sacrifice to feed them, to clothe them and shelter them. So, this I will do for them if I love them for none will do it for me. I must find the truth of heritage for myself and pass it on to them. In the years to come I believe because I have armed them ^{their} with the truth my children and ~~my~~ children's children will venerate me for it is the truth that will make us free. I say whether it is true or not that truth won't make us free. Whether you slay me I will maintain my own ways before you."

Basically this is what black America is saying today, and I think this as we think about where we are headed today white America must play an important role. I think we must be willing to accept the truth that a house divided ^{unto} ~~among~~ itself cannot stand. And, as we look at America today we surely must say that we are on the course of a divided nation--one black and one white. And I hope that through an understanding the kinds of and through unity and through/research and the desires for learning that our college youngsters are reaching out for that we understand the truth and are willing to go forth. I wish I were young, because I can't help but to feel that if we really would put into the hands of our young people the future of our country, let them go with it, that we would have very, very little to be disturbed about. I don't care whether they are white, yellow, black or green, we are learning tremendous amounts of things from our young people and whether or not I can condone some of the acts of my young black brothers, I certainly believe they have given us tremendous inspiration to move forward to all of the goals that all of us have set for ourselves.

These days it's a real difficult ~~time~~ time to be black, but also in more times than not it is ~~always~~ such a wonderful kind of a thing to be a black person in America, to look at the obstacles that we pushed aside, look at the distance that we have come and then to look around at white America who have joined in as well to help push these obstacles aside. For most of us recognize that black America could not and has not made this progress all by itself. We have done it because of the decency of people who believe in the dignity of the individual, and I say if we are successful in this country it is going to be based upon the dignity of the individual and certainly the lessons that have been learned here in the four years that this class, or whatever length of time that you have been here, the things that you have learned, the dignity that has been brought to you is going to hold you in good stead in the immediate future.

I can only wish the Class of '69 the very best of luck and I can only wish that those adults of us here in the office, parents, would try to understand what motivates some of our young people and to get in and work with them and join with them. Let them know that we want to help whenever we possibly can.

I am certainly proud to have had the opportunity to have been with you here tonight. It has been a meaningful experience for me, and as I say, I want once again to wish the

graduating class the very best of luck because our future certainly depends on all the graduating classes that are happening throughout this country within the next month or so. So, thank you/once again for the opportunity of being here.

DEAN GOLES: Tomorrow the ceremony will be on Daylight Saving Time .

THE REVEREND STANLEY M. POLAN: I askyou for a moment to join with me. Oh, God, our Heavenly Father, we give thee thanks for all that we have shared this evening. We ask your blessing upon us, that the blessing of this evening may give us strength and courage and may give to the graduating class the inspiration to accept the gift of life and to use it to build the world that will be a world in which each one can find his joy and happiness in being a full and complete person, with God's blessing upon him. Amen.