



Department of Justice

REMARKS

BY

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AT THE

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE CEREMONY
IN HONOR OF
DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

WASHINGTON, DC
TUESDAY, JANUARY 15, 1991

We come together today to honor the man who had a dream, and to remind ourselves, once again, of the charge his dream has imposed upon us. "In dreams," an American poet has said, "begin responsibilities." Thus, as we recall how this dream came to be uttered -- we are reminded anew of how our responsibilities began.

In August of 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. addressed a great gathering of his peers -- both black and white -- in front of Lincoln Memorial. He stood and asked what Abraham Lincoln before him had promised, that "this Nation, under God. . . have a new birth of freedom." Dr. King spoke out -- the inspired pleader to a nation that had delayed too long -- for an immediate rebirth of that freedom, and this time the nation heard him. We took up his dream, and made it the law of the land.

Having done so, we became -- particularly those of us here at the Department of Justice -- the defenders of that dream. As one such defender, I want to restate, on this occasion, our strong commitment to vigorous enforcement of our nation's civil rights laws and to the removal of all barriers to equal opportunity on behalf of all Americans. That is, to help enable all Americans -- in the words of Dr. King -- "to sit down together at the table of brotherhood."

But over this last year, how well have we defended that dream, how hard did we strive to set still other places at that

long table of brotherhood? The answer -- as with the fulfillment of all dreams -- lies in responsibilities fulfilled. And on that score, we can speak today with considerable pride.

I am proud to report, first of all, that we have taken up, with renewed vigor, our responsibilities for fixing firm that keystone of Dr. King's dream -- the right to vote. In Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas, we have brought suit to ensure minority votes are not lost through discriminatory electoral practices that unduly constrain the people's choice of legislators and judges. And in California, we have prevailed in court upon the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to cease from deliberately fragmenting the Hispanic vote by inequitable voter-districting.

This last holds important consequences for the dream, because now, across the nation, the next redistricting -- state by state, on the basis of the 1990 census -- must pay heed to judicial mandates to recognize minority rights in all patterns of voter representation. Our Civil Rights Division will be monitoring over 1500 redistricting cases to assure fairness -- and prevent gerrymandering against minorities -- in this coming redistribution of our nation's franchise.

We have also taken up anew our responsibilities for housing rights and, since 1989, more than doubled the number of anti-

discriminatory suits annually -- including 15 cases to protect the right of domicile for those with disabilities. We are vigorously pursuing our responsibilities for education rights to eliminate the last vestiges of racial segregation in higher education and sex discrimination in military academies.

We have also pressed forward on employment rights. As only one measure of our responsiveness, we have recovered in court \$13 million in the last two years in backpay for victims of racial and gender discrimination in the public workforce. Perhaps our most challenging responsibility is to find effective ways to continue to support affirmative action without yielding to the temptation of artificial and divisive quotas that separate rather than integrate minority employees within the nation's workforce.

Each time civil rights are enlarged in this country -- as we have learned from implementing Dr. King's dream -- they extend over the whole of our society. All Americans, not just minorities are involved in every new extension of such rights. The passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act, for example, emancipates not only the 43 million Americans with disabilities who will directly benefit, but even more so the rest of us -- now free to benefit from the contributions which these Americans will make to our economy, our communal life, and our individual well-being.

So much for the positive, the pro-active agenda for implementing the dream. There is, regrettably, another darker side to our responsibilities as well.

It is imposed whenever the worst of our nightmares re-emerges -- that nightmare of violence inspired by the very race hatred that took the life of Dr. Martin Luther King himself. Let there be no doubt, no hesitancy about our concern here -- only the law brought to bear, with vigor and certainty, upon the threat of violence. That nightmare -- I am sad to report -- is with us again. And it has indeed jolted awake our national conscience.

You will recall, for example, that last December four deadly parcels -- home-made nail bombs -- were delivered through the holiday mails. Two of these package bombs were -- thank God -- found and disarmed. But the other two killed first a distinguished federal judge in Birmingham, Alabama, and then a noted black lawyer in Savannah, Georgia.

I was proud to report, less than a year later that -- thanks to the fine investigative work by our FBI -- these bombings, seemingly inspired by racial hatred twisted into one man's revenge, had been solved.

We are always relieved to run such assassins to ground, but it is a far greater relief, I will say -- and immediately more profitable -- to take direct action against the nightmare of race hatred itself. And that is what, I am proud to report, we have been doing, with unrelenting diligence, through an unprecedented series of prosecutions against "hate crimes."

Let us be clear. Whatever their evil dimensions, there are simply no bounds within which acts of racial, religious and ethnic violence and intimidation will be tolerated. Justice in this nation is based, in my view, on the goodness of the vast majority of Americans. We can count on that goodness for deep and abiding support, across the reach of our citizenry. But it is up to us here at the Department of Justice to assume special responsibilities -- to pursue our investigations and prosecutions vigorously, so as to bring hate groups and their conspirators and assassins to account before the law.

Only then can the dream of the martyred Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. be plumbed for its most positive hopes. "I have a dream," Dr. King stated on that historic occasion, "that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." And that dream defines our goals.

Much of our success in reaching these goals will depend upon the strength of our commitment to the Rule of Law -- both at home and abroad. Indeed, on this solemn occasion, the world stands poised on the threshold of an international encounter between nations which seek to uphold the Rule of Law worldwide and those who claim the pre-eminence of the Rule of Force, of Violence, of Aggression and of brutal subjugation of the rights of their people. Would that Dr. King were here today to lend his eloquence to our prayers for peace -- and for the Rule of Law -- which we can only offer in his absence.

Let us then, indeed pray, in his memory, that the forces of good will conquer the forces of evil -- in our hearts, in our nation and in this troubled world, and that the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. will see its day of triumph, sooner rather than later, everywhere.