

THE PRESIDENT'S INITIATIVE ON RACE

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RELIGIOUS FORUM

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THURSDAY,

MAY 21, 1998

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TULANE UNIVERSITY

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NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

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The forum came to order, pursuant to notice, in the Kendall Cram Room, University Center, Tulane University, at 9:00 a.m., Rev. Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook, Moderator.

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REV. DR. COOK: Good morning.

AUDIENCE: Good morning.

REV. DR. COOK: I'm a Baptist preacher from the Bronx, so you have to talk back to me. Good morning.

AUDIENCE: Good morning.

REV. DR. COOK: Now I feel better this morning. We are so happy to have you here. I'm the Rev. Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook. I'm one of the seven members of the advisory board on race for President Clinton. I'm the only faith leader representative, and I'm so happy that you came this morning.

We want to thank Tulane University and all of its helpers and staff and administration and president for receiving us and hosting us. I want to thank the mayor and the City for receiving us into New Orleans. But most of all, we want to thank you for coming this morning.

It's going to be a great day. It's already a wonderful day, and it is that because you are here.

It is my pleasure to introduce to some and present to others the mayor of the City, the Mayor Marc Morial. He is one of the youngest mayors in the history of the City, and he has brought vitality and energy, electricity into this place. We like to say he's excited, ignited, and delighted.

(Applause.)

1 REV. DR. COOK: Amen. Just a mover and a
2 shaker, and why we're here today is pretty much
3 representative of what his whole coalition has been
4 around.

5 He has formed a Gumbo Coalition that shares the
6 diversity and all the various cultures that are
7 representative of this particular state. And just
8 last week, one of the rabbis came over and shared that
9 at his inauguration -- he won by more than 80 percent
10 of the vote, which is certainly a vote of confidence
11 for the City.

12 But last week, there was a wonderful
13 inauguration service, and it had more than 15
14 denominations represented and prayers in more than 17
15 languages. And it's the kind of thing that we're
16 talking about as we become one America in the 21st
17 Century, a man who's sensitive and understands and
18 reads the times well.

19 And so it is my pleasure to present a man that
20 I've just met, but I've already grown to love and bond
21 with, Mayor Marc Morial. Let's receive him this
22 morning as he comes.

23 (Applause.)

24 MAYOR MORIAL: Ignited and excited. Let us get
25 ignited and excited. Good morning.

26 AUDIENCE: Good morning.

27 MAYOR MORIAL: You're not here to be a quiet.

1 This isn't a class in history or philosophy. This is
2 a conversation. It's a conversation, yes, about race;
3 yes, about faith; but more importantly, it's a
4 conversation about America and the world in the 21st
5 Century.

6 To Rev. Cook and all of the members of the faith
7 community, other interested cities, New Orleans is
8 very proud to be able to host this component of The
9 President's Initiative on Race. And I think it's a
10 special component, a special component because
11 bringing together peoples and leaders of all different
12 faiths and denominations to speak together and work
13 together, I believe, may be the most important
14 component of this initiative on race.

15 I think it is within the faith-based communities
16 where people can confront the past without the
17 political agendas, without the rhetoric, deal with the
18 need for reconciliation, and design and engineer a
19 better America for the 21st Century.

20 And I hope that what today here in New Orleans
21 is all about is an open and frank conversation. It's
22 difficult to confront the subject of race. It's
23 difficult to do it without stereotypes, without anger,
24 without invective, without a level of ignorance on all
25 sides.

26 But, you know, sometimes to get the issue on the
27 table, we've got to let it all hang out just a little

1 bit. And I think that this initiative on race will
2 only serve the purpose that the President intended if
3 people are open, they're honest, and they are frank
4 about how they feel, but that they embrace the fact
5 that every individual can change and grow, become a
6 better individual and a strong individual.

7 I think the reason why this initiative is so
8 timely -- and I know that the President has gotten a
9 little criticism here and a little criticism there,
10 but the President didn't have to embrace an initiative
11 on race.

12 With the economy doing well, with unemployment
13 down and inflation down, with the budget finally
14 balanced, the President could sit on the side and not
15 tackle this controversial, difficult, and I would
16 suggest perhaps politically risky issue. But I think
17 he is and we are better and going to be better because
18 he's confronted this issue.

19 As I look out in the audience today, I see many
20 people of many colors and many faiths. Unfortunately,
21 one thing that I don't see is a lot of young people,
22 people under 30, people under 35, people who truly are
23 going to be the inheritors of the legacy that we
24 create in this generation.

25 All of us were shaped, those of us in our
26 generations were shaped by huge historic forces,
27 events that took place in the 20th Century: World War

1 I and everything that went along with it; World War II
2 and all of the horror and tragedy that went along with
3 it; the Civil Rights movement of the '50s and the '60s
4 and all that it meant.

5 New Orleans, the South, and the nation and the
6 world paid a terrible, terrible price in human life,
7 in human suffering, in blood, in tears, in lives, in
8 cities, in neighborhoods, and in buildings, because of
9 all of the conflict of these great historic forces of
10 the 20th Century. Maybe 100 million people died, lost
11 their lives.

12 One of the things that we are doing is we're
13 looking back at history, the history of ethnic and
14 racial tension, in this country and in this world.
15 And I think facing up to the fact that if we do not
16 design, vision, and dream about the new millennium,
17 that suffering could very well be repeated.

18 What is happening in Asia now ought be a wake-up
19 call that the power to destroy, that ethnic,
20 religious, and racial tensions are still a part of the
21 world community. If you look at this nation, this
22 nation is a changing nation that will be a much
23 different nation by the time 2050 comes.

24 The American experiment in multi-racial, multi-
25 ethnic, multi-denominational democracy is going to be
26 a different is going to be a different democracy in
27 the 21st Century than it was in the 20th or the 19th

1 Century.

2 We are here planning; we are here preparing. We
3 are here and you are here, because you want to be
4 here. And I hope that this initiative on race is
5 about a focus on the future.

6 I see in the young people different attitudes
7 than I saw in my generation or those ahead of us.
8 Some of what I see is very, very interesting. You
9 know, one thing about young people: There's almost
10 been the development in America of a single culture
11 for young people.

12 They wear the same funny-looking, baggy clothes.
13 They all want to wear earrings and God-awful tattoos.
14 They listen to the same music, because they're going
15 to Virgin and Tower and MTV and BET. There's a slow
16 movement and a slow melding of all of the cultures of
17 America into almost a gumbo culture which has strong
18 strands in each ethnic group and in each region.

19 But there's something singular about it. We
20 need to recognize the good in that, but we need to
21 understand and we need to prepare for the implications
22 for the future.

23 Those faith-based leaders who are here today and
24 those who are not here but who are going to be touched
25 by those who are here today have within their power,
26 I would suggest to you, more power than those of us
27 that serve generally in elected office or in a

1 political office, to help make change.

2 What can come of this? How many faith-based
3 leaders do cross-worshipping initiatives, where a
4 delegation from your congregation goes to a
5 delegation -- goes to another congregation? How many
6 faith-based leaders would invite one of your
7 colleagues from another denomination to come visit
8 with, pray with, and share with your congregation?

9 Now, all of you are probably saying, Those are
10 some things I'd like to do, but I've got some tough
11 characters in my congregation that I've got to change
12 some minds. And we know that. But out of this, we
13 should leave New Orleans with some ideas, not just
14 with a conversation where we feel good and we've
15 learned.

16 This is the President's initiative, not the
17 President's task force, not the President's study
18 committee, not the President's class, The President's
19 Initiative on Race, and out of this initiative ought
20 to come some initiatives that the President can
21 embrace and suggest what the nation can do to continue
22 on the path of racial reconciliation, racial equality,
23 to make the experiment of American democracy work.

24 My last word is to share with you my personal
25 challenge. Mayors, more than any other elected office
26 in America, represent diverse constituencies and
27 communities.

1 The most personally rewarding aspect of this job
2 for me in the last four years has been my ability to
3 be exposed to the intimacies and the histories of
4 different religions other than mine, to have the
5 opportunity to learn about different ethnic groups and
6 their histories, their traditions, their challenges,
7 to learn that every ethnic group from the outside
8 looks so monolithic, but if you walk in the door, it's
9 full of strands and divisions and pushing and shoving.

10 It's been personally rewarding to me. In my job
11 to do my job, to do it effectively, I have to do that.
12 And I've done it with enthusiasm and with relish, and
13 it's helped me in four years, I think, to become a
14 better person.

15 We all must venture out of the comfort and
16 convenience of the cocoons of our own neighborhoods,
17 our own congregations, our own business groups, our
18 own social groups, if we're going to learn, and by
19 doing so, set some examples for our children and for
20 our grandchildren, that it is okay to break the mold.
21 Be proud of who you are, but break the mold.

22 Let's have a great conversation here in New
23 Orleans. I want to thank the staff here at Tulane
24 University, President Kelly and all. Please help me
25 by giving them a round of applause, because they have
26 made --

27 (Applause.)

1 MAYOR MORIAL: And I also want to thank the
2 staff of The President's Initiative on Race who very
3 quickly began working to put this initiative together,
4 and ask that you give them a round of applause, and if
5 they'd stand at this time. There's several of them
6 here. Stand up; we want to thank them.

7 (Applause.)

8 MAYOR MORIAL: And lastly I want to thank my
9 staff, because I ask them to do so, so much. They
10 never miss a beat, always get it done, and I want to
11 publicly thank all of them, the Human Relations
12 Commission, the Office of Communications staff, who
13 mostly got together, and I want to ask them to stand,
14 because I want to give them some props too. Thank
15 you.

16 (Applause.)

17 MR. MORIAL: To the preacher from Bronx, I'm
18 giving the mike back to you. God bless you,
19 enlightened, delighted, and ignited. All right.

20 (Applause.)

21 REV. DR. COOK: I think you'll join me in
22 agreeing that not only is he ignited and excited and
23 delighted, he's also educated, dedicated, and
24 liberated. Amen. He's somebody.

25 (Applause.)

26 REV. DR. COOK: We are so happy, and this is a
27 faith walk. And I think you heard the mayor say we're

1 going to prepare and plan, and we can also pray. And
2 so we want to do that. And we invite this morning
3 Pastor Kim Tran of the Vietnamese Alliance Church of
4 New Orleans to lead us.

5 PASTOR TRAN: You just see the best of New
6 Orleans; you just see the new star that made mayor.
7 Now you see the simple and the common.

8 On behalf of the Vietnamese Alliance Church of
9 New Orleans, Disciples of Christ, a multi-racial and
10 an interracial congregations, I would like to express
11 my gratitude once more to Danielle Glosser, Maureen
12 Shea, Rev. Suzan Johnson Cook, members of The
13 President's Initiative on Race advisory board, of
14 course the mayor of New Orleans, the president, Eamon
15 Kelly, of Tulane University, and Maria Echaveste,
16 assistant of the President and director of the White
17 House Office of Public Liaison, and many other
18 honorable leaders of different faiths and race who are
19 present today, to allow me to offer to God invocation
20 prayer before we start our forum.

21 I'm going to read Psalm 47, and then we'll go
22 unite and pray together for this great day.

23 "Clap your hands, all you people; shout to God
24 with loud songs of joy. For the Lord, the Most High
25 is awesome, a great King all over the earth. He
26 subdues people under us, and nations under our feet.

27 "God has gone up with a shout, the Lord, with

1 the sound of trumpet, sings praise to God, sings
2 praise; Sings praise to our King, sings praise. For
3 God is the King of all the earth; sing praise with a
4 psalm.

5 "God is King over the nations; God sits on His
6 holy throne. The princes of the people gather as the
7 people of the God; for the shields of the earth belong
8 to God; He is highly exalted."

9 Now I would like for you all to stand up and
10 unite with me to come before God.

11 Our Father, whose full glory is unseen by human
12 eye, as we settle our hearts now to seek You, help us
13 to seek You in the right place, not within ourselves
14 but high above us. Help us to seek you in the right
15 way, not each by ourselves but in unity.

16 Lord, you have been faithful to gather us before
17 you this day. Quiet now our thoughts, that we may
18 together hear your word. Empty our fretful minds.
19 Infuse with the actions of Your Presence.

20 Creator and Sovereign of human kind, we thank
21 You for these United States, for this national
22 immigrants; for this noble experiment with unity
23 within diversity. While it is our responsibility to
24 recognize and to mend much that is wrong with our
25 country, we give You hearty praise for so much that is
26 right.

27 We thank You for our legacy of enterprise,

1 fairness, and hopefulness passed down among us through
2 the generations, from our very beginnings. We praise
3 You for our system of government in which this saying
4 is not merely tolerated but expected and encouraged.

5 We thank You for a system of justice which, in
6 spite of many flaws, manages to make room for mercy.
7 And we glorify Your name for the men and women in our
8 midst who brought us, needle us, beg us to remember
9 the gap between our rhetoric and our practice, and to
10 work at closing the gap.

11 Creator and Ruler of humankind, our Lord and
12 God, command that we should love our enemies. He
13 assumed that we would have enemies and that we
14 probably should if we stand for anything at all. We
15 are bound to have enemies. So our Lord would want us
16 to be forbearing with a hostile co-worker, forgiving
17 of domineering parents, longsuffering with a
18 rebellious child.

19 As mediator between God and us, He would have us
20 act as agents of reconciliation, helping to knock down
21 walls and build bridges between people, especially
22 between us and others.

23 Does it not follow then, oh, God, that our Lord
24 expects us to knock down walls and build bridges
25 between race and religions as well, especially between
26 our race and other. Our Lord love His own people, but
27 was equally open to despised Samaritans and hated

1 Romans. With Him, race did not count; only persons.

2 Sovereign God, we pray today for races which
3 were until recently colonized. Remind us that our own
4 United States began as a colony and that our ancestors
5 had to shed blood to secure the freedoms we so readily
6 take for granted.

7 Keep us mindful of all the gross errors of our
8 early history, so that we may be patient with young
9 nations, struggling with problems youth, rapid change,
10 and unguided or ill-guided. May we help them help
11 themselves without exploitation or condescension.
12 Help us to mend in peace with justice our own border,
13 so that we may provide for them an example worth
14 following.

15 Remind us, Father, that your Son loved persons,
16 Jews and Romans, Greeks and Samaritan, all kind of
17 race, all kind of persons, each person. Help us to
18 show our love for Him by working to bring about a safe
19 orderly world in which the endless glorious value of
20 human beings who now live in confusion, hate, and fear
21 may live in mutual helpfulness and love.

22 Lord, gracious God, we pray in the name of Him
23 who consistently cautioned the strong and favored the
24 weak, our precious Lord, our God. Amen.

25 You may be seated.

26 REV. DR. COOK: Last year this time, we received
27 calls from the White House, asking if we would

1 consider being part of this race initiative, and
2 having been one who was a civil rights baby -- I was
3 born into the Civil Rights movement; I did not get
4 walk with Dr. King; I did not get to talk with Dr.
5 King; I could only hear about him from my parents
6 stories.

7 And so the justice issue had been very much
8 alive in my life, but I never had a chance to exercise
9 it and share my thoughts, other than my pulpit, and so
10 when the call came, because of the courage of this
11 President and the confidence I had in this President,
12 certainly I said yes.

13 And today we want to share with you a video,
14 some remarks from our President, who has taken the
15 courageous stand as he has begun this initiative.
16 Won't you join me in receiving President William
17 Clinton.

18 (Applause.)

19 (Via video presentation:)

20 PRESIDENT CLINTON: I'd like to welcome you and
21 thank you for participating in this important
22 conversation about race in America.

23 America has always stood for the shining ideal
24 that we're all created equal. We haven't always lived
25 up to that ideal, but it has guided our way for more
26 than two centuries, and as we enter the 21st Century,
27 we know that one of the greatest challenges we still

1 face is learning how we can come together as one
2 America.

3 America will soon be the most diverse nation in
4 the world. Will those differences divide or will they
5 be our greatest strength? The answers depends upon
6 what we are willing to do together.

7 We must confront our differences in honest
8 dialogue. Yes, but we must also talk about the common
9 dreams and the values we share. We must fight
10 discrimination in our communities and in our hearts,
11 and we must close the opportunity gaps that divide too
12 many Americans in real life.

13 That is why I launched this national initiative
14 on race, and I'm very glad you're joining us. Your
15 views, your ideas, they're very important. I ask you
16 to share them with Dr. Franklin and the members of my
17 advisory board. They're helping me reach out to
18 communities like yours all across our nation.

19 I look forward to hearing from them about the
20 results of your conversation. Please go back to your
21 neighborhoods, your schools, your work places, your
22 places of worship, and continue this conversation
23 about race. Take a leadership role. Together we can
24 build a stronger America for the 21st Century as one
25 America.

26 Thank you for helping us to meet this most
27 important challenge.

1 (Applause.)

2 REV. DR. COOK: At this date, the initiative is
3 just about a year old, and today is one of two faith
4 forums that we have launched around this country. The
5 next will be in Louisville on Monday, June 1, but
6 there's been a dialogue that's been going on for the
7 past eleven months.

8 We've had corporate forums, led by one of our
9 advisory board members, Robert Thomas. We've had the
10 distinguished pleasure of serving with our chair, John
11 Hope Franklin, and six other advisory board members
12 who bring their expertise to the table. And so around
13 the country, we've listened; we've talked. We've had
14 eight advisory board meetings around the country,
15 three forums for corporate leaders.

16 We've designated the month of April as a month
17 of dialogue on college campuses on the issue of race,
18 and students and faculty from more than 600 college
19 and university campuses participated in dialogues and
20 town hall meetings. More than 100 YW and YMCAs had
21 statewide day of dialogues.

22 And so this is one of two religious forums. Dr.
23 King, at the close of his life, said often the faith
24 community had acted as taillights, following agencies
25 and others, in the issues of justice, rather than
26 headlights, leading the way.

27 And it is our hope and prayer today that through

1 this initiative and through the dialogue that we
2 create, that we, indeed, can be headlights as we go
3 into the new millennium, that we will let our light
4 shine, that others will see the work that is before
5 us.

6 It is my honor and distinguished privilege to
7 introduce Maria Echaveste, who is the assistant to the
8 President of the United States and the director of the
9 White House Office of Public Liaison, who's a champion
10 in creating this dialogue, and we want to greet her
11 and receive this morning. Won't you join me?

12 (Applause.)

13 MS. ECHAVESTE: Good morning, everyone. I, too,
14 bring greetings on behalf of the White House and on
15 behalf of the President, and really thank you for
16 dedicating a few hours today on this very important
17 initiative.

18 I have been at the White House a little over a
19 year, and actually one of the first assignments that
20 I received when I got there was to help put together
21 this initiative. And I can tell you honestly that it
22 is one of the most rewarding, yet difficult, tasks
23 that the President has taken on.

24 And sometimes in the heat of all the things that
25 happen in the White House, you can probably guess that
26 there is some frustration with criticisms, and you
27 think, Well, why are we doing this. And we remind our

1 selves that, as Mayor Morial said, the President
2 didn't have to do this.

3 And the fact that he did and the fact that he's
4 put so many top people, the advisory board, Rev. Cook,
5 staff, our executive director, Judy Winston, resources
6 across the government to look at this issue, I think
7 is evidence of a tremendous commitment on the part of
8 the President, knowing that we have so much work to do
9 and realizing that it's going to take every aspect of
10 our community, including the faith community, to try
11 to make real the promise of America.

12 So my job today is to try to explain what we're
13 doing today, how you can help us continue, build, and
14 make this real. We, in debating how to engage the
15 faith community, realize that it has -- in many
16 cities, in many communities, the faith community,
17 faith leaders, are the leaders; they are the
18 headlights, as Rev. Cook says, on issues of race.

19 But the question is: Can we do more? How do we
20 do more? So our three objectives today is: First,
21 gain a greater understanding of the increasingly
22 diverse faith community. As Maureen Shea, who works
23 with us in the White House and who works as liaison to
24 the religious and to the faith community has said, the
25 face of faith is changing.

26 We also need to identify the key elements that
27 make for successful racial reconciliation efforts.

1 One of the things that Rev. Cook will speak to will be
2 the effort on the part of the initiative to identify
3 promising practices; that is, programs around the
4 country that really work, to help build those bridges
5 among races and ethnicities and communities and
6 different faiths.

7 What are those key elements? The idea, we hope,
8 is that we can replicate those in communities around
9 the country.

10 And lastly is: How can we work together to plan
11 ways in which we re-energize and remobilize our faith
12 communities about this important goal?

13 So we'll begin with a panel to really -- what
14 are the facts about the changing face of faith in
15 America? The President has said, We know what we will
16 look like in the 21st Century. The panel and others
17 have taken much data in terms of the changing
18 demographics. But his question is: Do we know what
19 we will be like?

20 Then Rev. Cook will talk about promising
21 practices, and we will break then for lunch. After
22 lunch, we will hear from Rev. James Forbes of
23 Riverside Church, which we are very delighted that he
24 is joining us.

25 After Rev. Forbes, we will have a panel on the
26 key elements of success. What makes some programs
27 work and other programs fail, moderated by Rabbi

1 Edward Cohn.

2 Now, the last part is the roll-up-the-sleeves,
3 where you can really help us. The critical part is
4 the breakout groups, and the number on the corner of
5 your badge is the number of your breakout group. And
6 what we want you to do is take what you've heard,
7 relate it to your efforts, and share ideas within your
8 breakout group about how to re-energize and remobilize
9 the faith community on the issue of race.

10 We've identified leaders for each table. In
11 your packets, you will find a series of questions to
12 be discussed in your session. We will be collecting
13 those. There's also a diversity assessment, which we
14 hope you will take home and use. Each table will
15 also -- each breakout group will also have a recorder
16 and timekeeper.

17 This is a bottom-up organizing effort. One of
18 the things that we find in Washington -- and it is
19 true that sometimes folks in Washington seem to think
20 that they have a lock on all the right ideas, and
21 we're constantly reminded that, in fact, the contrary
22 is true; that what we need are people to contribute
23 based on real-life experiences, based on what they've
24 seen, what they experience in their communities, to
25 really show us the way as opposed to sitting in
26 Washington and saying, Okay, this sounds like a great
27 way to energize the faith community.

1 So I urge you again to really -- as Mayor Morial
2 said, let's have an honest discussion about what
3 works, what doesn't work, how we can make it better,
4 how we can use the faith community, which are the
5 leaders in so many of our communities, to really bring
6 this vision of one America in the 21st Century and
7 make it real. Thank you.

8 (Applause.)

9 MS. ECHAVESTE: Our first speaker will be Diane
10 Winston, who is going to give us an overview of the
11 changing face of faith. She has a distinguished
12 academic career, including a master's in theological
13 studies from Harvard Divinity School and also a Ph.D.
14 in religion from Princeton.

15 She has written extensively on religion in
16 American public life, and we are very, very thrilled
17 that she is joining us to discuss the changing
18 demographics of the faith community in America.
19 Diane, Dr. Winston.

20 DR. WINSTON: Well, excited and ignited, I am
21 glad to be here today, and I'm honored to have been
22 asked to speak with you by the Initiative.

23 If we're going to talk about excited and
24 ignited, I'm wondering where all the signs are. Back
25 in New York, we have a lot of Godzilla signs all over
26 the place. Have you all seen those signs? Those
27 signs proclaim on bridges, on buildings, everywhere

1 you look, that size matters.

2 Well, I'm here to tell you today, regarding the
3 changing face of faith in America, size does matter.
4 Well, at least it matters some of the time. Size
5 matters when we consider the country's changing
6 religious complexion.

7 The five-million-strong Muslim community will
8 soon surpass the nation's 5.5 million Jews.
9 Approximately 2.5 million Buddhists equal the number
10 of Episcopalians. The 200,000-member Sikh community
11 ranks with the Unitarian Universalists, and the Baha'i
12 already surpass the Society of Friends.

13 Yes. The numbers of recently arrived religious
14 groups are growing, but if we really want to talk
15 size, the truth is they're only a blip. We have 79
16 million Protestants in this country, and 61 million
17 Catholics. Now, that's big.

18 But the numerical parity shared by Jews and
19 Muslims, Buddhists and Episcopalians, proves one
20 thing. It's not just a matter of size. It's also a
21 matter of influence, access, and having a privileged
22 place in our national history.

23 The American religious troika, Protestants,
24 Catholics, and Jews, have all three. Most important,
25 they have access to the social and political arenas.
26 Newly arrived religious groups are only beginning to
27 develop the networks that will earn them significant

1 standing in the American political scene and our
2 democratic process, and when that happens, the
3 competition for bragging rights will be nothing
4 compared to the debates on religion in our work
5 places, our schools, and our public square.

6 For example, a few years ago, a young Muslim
7 woman in Denver was challenged by Domino's when she
8 wore a traditional head scarf to work. The company
9 wanted to fire her. She took them on and kept her
10 place.

11 A similar event occurred in New York when a
12 turbaned Sikh waiter almost lost his job, this despite
13 the fact that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of
14 1964 prohibits employers from discriminating on the
15 basis of religion.

16 So what might the future look like? Last
17 summer, President Clinton issued an executive order
18 for federal employees, spelling out religious rights
19 in the workplace. Permitted are wearing religiously
20 mandated clothing, prayer in unused conference rooms,
21 the right to decline an assignment for religious
22 reasons, the right to keep a religious book like the
23 Bible or the Qu'ran on your desk, and the right to
24 proselytize workers, your fellow workers, until they
25 ask you to stop.

26 Now, think about your own workplace. How many
27 of these activities occur there now? What would be

1 the impact of colleagues were to discuss the Buddhist
2 Vedic scriptures during work? What if you saw a
3 colleague who had a statue of the Hindu deity, Ganesh,
4 the elephant-faced god, on his or her desk? What if
5 the day began with Jehovah's Witnesses passing out
6 tracts or Muslims laying down a prayer rug?

7 Now, now you're looking at the changing face of
8 American faith. Similar changes may occur in our
9 classrooms, too. Constitutionally permissible
10 activities exceed much of what current sensibilities
11 will allow.

12 For examples, there are ways that public schools
13 can accommodate prayer and Bible reading, as well as
14 to teach religion in classrooms. But right now,
15 finding ways to incorporate these things and also do
16 it in a way that will work for a wide variety of
17 traditions will take time and hard work.

18 While legal parameters can help us envision the
19 changing face of faith in our classrooms and in our
20 work places, the shifting landscape of the public
21 square pushes us to recognize what is already hidden
22 in plain sight. The largest Buddhist temple in the
23 Western Hemisphere lies right outside the world's most
24 complex and diverse Buddhist city. Anybody know what
25 it is? Los Angeles.

26 Likewise, the hub of the American heartland,
27 Chicago, is probably the most religiously variegated

1 city in our country. There are some 70 mosques there,
2 as well as Buddhist, Hindu, Jain, Sikh, and
3 Zoroastrian temples.

4 And what about New York, the epitome of the
5 secular city? Would it surprise you to learn the Big
6 Apple is religious at the core? Megachurches are
7 thriving, uptown, midtown, in Brooklyn and in Queens.

8 My point is that religion surrounds us. We see
9 it in our city skylines, resplendent with minarets,
10 domes, and spires. We can read about it in our
11 bookstores, where you can buy everything from a
12 Buddhist Guide to America to the Bible. We experience
13 it in the growing number of interfaith activities,
14 whether worship services, social actions, or community
15 dialogues.

16 Just what has happened here? More than 30 years
17 after the easing of immigration laws, the class lists
18 at our elementary schools read less like the ship's
19 manifest off Plymouth Rock and more like the U.N.
20 roster. And, yes, while much of the change has
21 occurred among Eastern religions and their growth and
22 flowering here, there are changes in Christianity
23 too.

24 The influx of Hispanic immigrants has challenged
25 and changed the Catholic Church and also provided a
26 fertile mission field for evangelical Protestants.
27 Many Asians have come here, already Christian and

1 reinvigorated mainline congregations.

2 Some of you will probably know the phenomenon of
3 a once-dying urban church, now housing several dynamic
4 immigrant groups. These groups cut ethnically as well
5 as religiously. Members complain that we, members of
6 the majority culture, tend to lump them as Asian
7 Christians. They're not. They're Chinese Baptists,
8 Korean Presbyterians, Hmong Methodists and so on.

9 And while I'm on the subject of American
10 Christianity, among the nation's fastest growing
11 churches are informal evangelical Bible-centered
12 congregations. Some are suburban boomer churches,
13 like Willow Creek outside of Chicago. But others,
14 like Times Square Church in the middle of Manhattan,
15 have a younger congregation that really reflect an
16 Hispanic, African American, Caucasian mix.

17 At the opposite end of the spectrum from these
18 strongly identified Christian groups are a growing
19 camp of what I call eclectic synthesizers. Sounds
20 like they should be a musical group, eh? These
21 eclectic synthesizers are developing new traditions as
22 well as remaking their own. They're individuals who
23 in their own life mirror the increased religious
24 diversity of the nation.

25 I once interviewed a young woman who called
26 herself Methodist, Taoist, Native American, Quaker,
27 and Jew. While it would be easy to dismiss that

1 hodgepodge, she was faithful in her own fashion. She
2 lived in a spiritually based community; she worked for
3 world peace; she practiced yoga; she attended church;
4 she had a Jewish grandparent; and she regularly
5 participated in Native American rituals.

6 While such experimentation may be limited to
7 those with lots of time -- she was a recent college
8 graduate -- many Americans are grafting alternate
9 religious practices onto their base traditions, and
10 here I'm thinking of Jewboos, self-described Jewish
11 Buddhists. I'm thinking of African American
12 Christians, interested in the Yoruba revival. And I'm
13 thinking of garden variety WASPs, who are now
14 interested in yoga, chanting, and sweat lodges.

15 Some of us denigrate these combinations as mix-
16 and-match spirituality or cafeteria-style religion.
17 But they are flourishing, and they do provide a path
18 for many. So -- and here we get to the tough
19 question.

20 So what? What difference does it make? How
21 does it affect us? Why should we, why should our
22 communities care? And here's the bottom line. We
23 don't have a choice. Diversity is a fact, and
24 pluralism, learning how to live together, is the
25 future.

26 The notion that the United States is a secular
27 society is something that I believe has to go. We

1 need to envision our national culture in a way that
2 describes the dynamic, if diffuse, role that religion
3 plays. As the First Amendment directs, we live in a
4 country with secular institutions, but public schools,
5 offices, courts and governmental agencies are filled
6 with true believers, spiritual seekers, soulful
7 dabblers, and diehard agnostics and atheists, of all
8 perspectives and persuasions.

9 The concomitant conflict is twofold. First, we
10 must balance our own ultimate beliefs with others'
11 equally compelling claims. Then we must find a way to
12 coexist in a legal system that protects all, yet
13 privileges none. So the first step in coming to terms
14 with the changing face of American faith is re-
15 explaining the notion of who we are, rejecting the
16 idea of secularization as a description of who we are,
17 and describing what actually is, because this -- and
18 this is crucial -- words and ideas have power.

19 When we call America secular, we affirm a
20 condition that does not actually exist. Likewise,
21 when we talk about American religion, I bet that many
22 of us envision a white guy in a clerical collar or
23 some powerful Black preacher. We need to move beyond
24 stereotypes and see the myriad figures in front of us:
25 Buddhist monks, Hasidic rabbis, Indian imams, and
26 feminist wiccans.

27 By letting go of these old images and these old

1 terms and re-envisioning religion, we take the first
2 steps in our encounter with the changing face of
3 faith. That face, that future, is religious
4 pluralism. It is a reality of dozens of traditions
5 competing for America's hearts and minds. It is the
6 reality of seeing the Qu'ran on a colleague's desk,
7 teaching a child about the Vedas, being served by a
8 turbaned waiter.

9 The absolute challenge posed by competing
10 religious absolutes is a Gordian knot of the 21st
11 Century. The Gordian knot, you remember, could only
12 be undone by the future ruler of Asia. Challenged to
13 unravel it, Alexander the Great took up his sword and
14 cut it in a bold stroke.

15 How do we live with and learn from people who
16 look, think, believe, and behave differently than we
17 do? How do we teach our children that difference is
18 human, not better or worse?

19 Like Alexander, we must strike boldly. We must
20 begin by acknowledging that this is no longer a Judeo-
21 Christian nation, much less a Christian one. Rather
22 it is a nation made up of Albanian Orthodox, Korean
23 Presbyterians, Mexican Catholics, Suni Muslims,
24 Russian Jews, Tibetan Buddhists, atheists, agnostics,
25 and so on.

26 The new pluralism brings us to the table as
27 equals. It means no one religious group has power

1 over any other. It does not mean that we have to
2 accept the legitimacy of others' beliefs, but it
3 commits us to disagree respectfully.

4 The new pluralism demands we cut through the
5 knot of fear, prejudice and even privilege, to behold
6 the changing face of American faith. And then, seeing
7 that face, we will find our own reflection alongside
8 many others.

9 Thank you.

10 (Applause.)

11 MS. ECHAVESTE: Thank you, Dr. Winston. That
12 was quite informative. I was struck when you said
13 that words and ideas have power. I was once in
14 Israel, and what struck me about visiting Israel is
15 that it is, in certain places, very forlorn; it's not
16 hugely rich in terms of natural resources.

17 And yet three very great religions all claim it
18 as a place, and it really to me exemplified that at
19 the end of the day, if you will, the power of ideas
20 and the power of belief and faith, and how incredibly
21 powerful that force is, that Dr. Winston has described
22 as ever-changing and will be very different in the
23 years to come.

24 Our first panel here, we're going to ask -- I'll
25 introduce them, and ask them to take a few minutes to
26 make a presentation, and then we're going to have
27 questions and answers, and try to spark some

1 discussion, and then encourage you all to participate.

2 First, Joel Orona, Dr. Joel Orona, director of
3 the Native American Baha'i Institute in Houck,
4 Arizona. A Native American, Dr. Orona has a special
5 interest in diversity training and the culture and
6 traditions of all indigenous people.

7 To my left is Imam Wali Abdel Ra'oof. I hope I
8 did not totally massacre that name, resident imam of
9 the New Orleans Masjid of Al-Islam and the state imam
10 of Louisiana. He serves on the board of the National
11 Conference of Community and Justice. This was
12 formerly known as the National Conference of
13 Christians and Jews.

14 And then over to my far right is Carol Cotton
15 Wynn. She is district superintendent for the New
16 Orleans District of the United Methodist Church. In
17 1990, she became the first woman to be named a
18 district superintendent in the history of the
19 conference, and she is recognized as an outstanding
20 teacher and preacher.

21 Welcome. Thank you all for joining us.

22 (Applause.)

23 MS. ECHAVESTE: I'll start with Dr. Orona, if
24 you will.

25 DR. ORONA: Thank you very much. I prepared all
26 three minutes of my presentation here.

27 I would like to bring our conversation to pay

1 close attention to the intrinsic or innate values that
2 are quite observable changes in the demographics of
3 American religious communities.

4 The collective human experiences throughout the
5 course of history, brought on by this societal
6 phenomena, has advanced mankind from a stage
7 synonymous with early childhood through turbulent
8 adolescents, and now to a stage of early maturation or
9 a coming of age.

10 This coming of age brings on new characteristics
11 in the spiritual development of mankind. Whereas
12 religion brought early man a set of beliefs to live by
13 in largely segregated communities, today a pluralistic
14 society and the interrelationships that it demands
15 awakens both individually and collectively spiritual
16 dimensions never before demanded nor realized.

17 These spiritual dimensions which characterize
18 individuals and communities aligned with this
19 maturational process that I speak of now view today's
20 physical, mental, emotional, and societal phenomena in
21 a more global perspective, in which spiritual context
22 must now address, if not answer and solve, issues
23 brought on by the complexities of this pluralistic
24 society.

25 Whether individuals in communities realize it or
26 not, in the complexities of this world, no one can
27 seclude him or herself from an ever-advancing

1 civilization that demands interaction and
2 responsibility to one another. Therefore, the
3 characteristics of any population in America and in a
4 city such as New Orleans is and must be in conformity
5 with the demands of this maturational process,
6 awakening us, nudging us, and even thrusting us
7 forward to a new set of religious principles.

8 The demographics, then, that characterize the
9 religious community in New Orleans or in a place such
10 as this in America are mature, timely, and expressed
11 values that are manifested in observable and
12 functional principles. Among these principles,
13 whether clearly expressed or not, nevertheless are
14 expressed in functional terms and are sought out by
15 many, by the populace, to displace age-old ideologies.

16 These new spiritual foundations speak to the
17 equality of men and women, the oneness of religion,
18 universal education, the elimination of prejudices of
19 all kinds, including religious, eliminations of
20 extreme wealth and poverty, the harmony between
21 science and religion -- very important; science and
22 religion must harmonize -- and spiritual solutions to
23 economic problems.

24 There are more, but in summary, it can be said
25 that the new spiritual dimensions are innate
26 components of human functioning that acts to integrate
27 other societal components, thus maximizing the

1 potential for growth and self-actualization for
2 everyone.

3 These are innate changes in the demographics
4 among the religious communities, observable anywhere
5 in the United States. As a Native American and as a
6 Baha'i, I say to every Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Jew,
7 Zoroastrian, Buddhist, and fellow Baha'i that the
8 establishment of the changing demographics are a
9 fulfillment of all of the prophecies long awaited by
10 all of the peoples to complete, in my terms, the
11 circle of life, the medicine wheel, the great
12 announcement, and further as a Baha'i, once again for
13 all the religions, an end to the cycle of prophecy to
14 the prophetic cycle and the entering into an age of
15 fulfillment and self-actualization.

16 Thank you very much.

17 MS. ECHAVESTE: Imam.

18 IMAM RA'OOF: Peace be unto you. With the name
19 of God, the merciful benefactor and the merciful
20 redeemer, we are very, very honored and very, very
21 thankful to have an opportunity to share with this
22 great experience, initiated by our President,
23 President William Clinton, and also our mayor here in
24 the City of New Orleans, to actually address the
25 demographic changes here in America and New Orleans in
26 particular.

27 I guess it's sort of ironic in that when Dr.

1 Winston was speaking, she was speaking of the beauty
2 of America being a pluralistic society in that we're
3 basically made up of a group of immigrants. Everybody
4 immigrated to America from someplace or another.

5 So I think to really hit the demographics of
6 America, I guess I sort of represent that, in that as
7 an African American who really didn't immigrate and
8 also coming before you with what is not accepted as a
9 traditional religion or not a traditional religion, an
10 Islamic religion, if this doesn't represent the
11 demographics of America, I don't know what does.

12 (Applause.)

13 IMAM RA'OOF: Let me try that again. What are
14 you talking about, Wali? What I'm talking about is
15 that basically from the history of America, people
16 immigrated, came by choice. You know, one of the
17 beautiful statements was made earlier about if we're
18 going to address the concerns, we can't be so
19 sensitive not to realize that in the past, history
20 made some -- some mistakes were made. We have to
21 address those mistakes; move from the mistakes and
22 hope we don't make them again.

23 So we, as an African American people, we did not
24 immigrate to America. The slave trade did exist as a
25 reality that existed in America, and until we face
26 that that was a reality that existed in America, we
27 can't move ahead. And particularly among those group

1 here of religious scholars, religious people who have
2 a faith and belief in God, if we can't confront the
3 truth, reality, then society as a whole will never
4 change. So that's why I addressed it that way.

5 Secondly, in terms of demographics, when someone
6 speaks of Islam, they think of Islam as an Eastern
7 religion. You know, we all recognize the fact that we
8 have been blessed by Almighty God, to have visited
9 Mecca on several occasions, and we know that Muslim
10 basically come from Saudi Arabia, so we think, but
11 really Islam is not a Saudi Arabian religion; it's a
12 universal religion. There are Muslims throughout the
13 whole world.

14 I had an opportunity approximately ten, twelve
15 years to do a conference of Jewish rabbis here, and I
16 mentioned at that time, before the great Russian bear
17 fell down, that there were millions of Muslims in
18 Russia, millions of Muslim in Russian. Of course, now
19 we see that since the walls have fallen down, there
20 are millions of Muslims in Russia.

21 Also there are millions of Muslim in China, and
22 there are Muslims in Indonesia, so likewise in looking
23 at the demographic changes in America, just like we
24 addressed the economic problems of the world on the
25 global economy, in order for us to address the concept
26 of religion and race in America, we have to address
27 that on a global economy, a global sphere also.

1 It's not a localized thing; it's a global thing.
2 As long as we think that the only 5 million Muslims in
3 America, 5 million Jews in America, when in all
4 actuality Al-Islam is the largest populated religion
5 in the world, similarly we have to look at and see
6 that all of these religions are connected together.

7 On a local level, we must realize that as
8 religious leaders -- demographics is a unique thing
9 that many of us would pass 100 churches or pass 100 --
10 or ten mosques in our city to go to our particular
11 mosque or particular church that we want to go to.

12 And I think that on the whole, there's nothing
13 inherently wrong with that. Basically, our tradition,
14 we've grown up in church, and the reason why I'm
15 talking the way I'm talking -- another thing that --
16 talking about the demographic changes of America, not
17 only am I an Islamic imam, but my father was a Baptist
18 preacher, so I can come that way, too. Yes, yes.

19 And really, you know, a Baptist preacher who
20 preached and gave his all, literally; that is, in
21 terms of -- to the point of serving communion and
22 having a massive heart attack and died in church, so
23 he was a Baptist preacher. So I'm connected all
24 together, so we're one family.

25 But we have to face the things that are not that
26 pretty, put them behind us, and then move ahead, so
27 therefore we can go to our local congregation or local

1 churches, but then we have to move ahead and bring
2 about the serious change.

3 So I really think that today if we sort of relax
4 ourselves, really be genuine in our concerns, discuss
5 the things with a sophisticated and intelligent mind,
6 intelligent outlook, we'll find out the demographics
7 of America are not bad. They are really healthy.

8 Thank you very much.

9 (Applause.)

10 MS. ECHAVESTE: Rev. Wynn.

11 REV. WYNN: I'm a part of the ever-changing
12 culture of Louisiana and its religious life. I grew
13 up in North Louisiana in a very segregated, separate
14 community, where all the leaders of our churches were
15 male, and where all the worship at eleven o'clock was
16 separate. I find it different now in New Orleans, and
17 I celebrate that. I celebrate being na part of a
18 changing world and a changing church.

19 And what we are doing across our churches -- at
20 one time, we had hoped that openness would come as we
21 appointed pastors of different races across churches,
22 but what I am seeing now as I look across our churches
23 is that change is coming in the pews, as people just
24 simply find the church in which they're comfortable
25 and become a part of that.

26 You know, no one can legislate that or mandate
27 it. It just simply happens naturally as people find

1 the faith community in which they are comfortable. It
2 is changing across the Methodist churches as well in
3 New Orleans.

4 And we are taking our people literally by the
5 hand and saying, Won't you go out beyond the walls of
6 your church and meet your neighbors, because the truth
7 is our churches at one time were neighborhood
8 churches, but now our people have moved to New Orleans
9 East; they've moved to the Westbank; they've moved all
10 over the city; and some are coming back to their home
11 churches.

12 But they don't know the neighbors anymore, and
13 we say to them, Won't you get beyond the walls of your
14 church and meet your neighbors. That is so simple,
15 but it is so primary to being faithful.

16 And then we say to them, Won't you do something
17 in your community. Please do something for somebody
18 beyond your own kind. Won't you do something for the
19 people in your community; make a difference to the
20 children; make a difference to the young people; make
21 a difference to the elderly. But please do something
22 to make a difference in that community.

23 Yesterday afternoon, my five-year-old neighbor
24 came over with her mother to show me her yearbook from
25 her elementary school, and I said to her, Now, who is
26 your best friend in your room. And when she pointed
27 to Danielle, Danielle was not of her race, and I said,

1 Yes. Isn't this the way our children should grow up,
2 so that they can find the wonderful things to
3 celebrate in each other, that they can march into the
4 future.

5 None of us want to go back to the way it was,
6 and that is why we're here today. We want to go
7 forward, and we want our children to go forward in new
8 ways, and we want our faith communities to be
9 faithful. And when they are faithful, we become the
10 way God has created us to be: one people, one faith,
11 with one way of reaching out across into our
12 neighborhoods.

13 (Applause.)

14 MS. ECHAVESTE: Well, I'm going to try to throw
15 out a few questions here. And there's a couple. The
16 first one is: When we talk about race in America,
17 it's sort of like how do you get into the issue and
18 what is it that we're really talking about.

19 And then a contrast is it seems we've reached a
20 point now where people seem to find it much easier to
21 say, you know, we need to value diversity; we need to
22 respect each other's differences. But there's a
23 tension in our country as we move into the next
24 century of what does it really mean to be an American.

25 For example, many in the Latino community,
26 myself included, when we're at home, when we talk
27 about other groups, we use -- we say, you know, los

1 Americanos. We are not -- we don't include ourselves
2 in that description, even though all of us were born
3 in the United States. When we say, Los Americanos, we
4 mean white, Protestant. That is American. And I'm
5 sure I'm not alone, and my family's not alone.

6 Why is it that there is this image of, you know,
7 American means something, and it doesn't include my
8 face? I work in the White House. And it sometimes
9 strikes people, oh, a couple of different ways.
10 Sometimes when I'm speaking to business leaders, who
11 are predominantly white male, and I'm trying to
12 explain different issues to them, I have said quite
13 honestly, I know some of you think that I am in the
14 White House because this President really believed in
15 diversity and therefore that means I'm not qualified
16 for my job.

17 And that is part of what the assumptions are.
18 It doesn't matter that I went to Stanford undergrad or
19 Berkeley Law School. They see this face, and they
20 make assumptions.

21 Now, contrast sort of that the race, ethnicity
22 assumptions, and then look at what we've heard this
23 morning about the tremendous diversity in religion and
24 the tolerance we seem to have as a nation for
25 different religious beliefs.

26 We seem to accept that, yes, you can be Jew, you
27 can be Catholic, you can be Muslim, and that's -- that

1 doesn't create sort of any problems for us. Why is --
2 and I say that with gross generalization.

3 But some people have posited: Why is it that
4 America is willing to accept diversity of religious
5 belief but not feel -- we're not there when it comes
6 to race? So I thought maybe if someone would like to
7 maybe address or make some comment.

8 DR. ORONA: One of the things that comes to mind
9 is someone mentioned comfort zones. People pick and
10 choose someplace where they feel comfortable, and for
11 a faith-based community, I think you're still looking
12 at the comfort zone to be one where you find people
13 much the same as you are.

14 I think that in the question of -- as I
15 mentioned earlier, there is a spiritual solution to
16 economic problems. There is one also to diversity.
17 And that is one of the investigation of truths, and
18 the investigation of truth brings one to see that all
19 humankind, the reality is spiritual.

20 When we learn that, when we learn that all
21 humankind have been given innate spiritual
22 characteristics and that is a reality, then we can go
23 forward in embracing everyone else. In the meantime,
24 if we don't look towards that, then we are putting
25 ourselves in that comfort zone and calling ourselves
26 los Indios or los Americanos or Belicana [phonetic] or
27 whatever it is that you find in that comfort zone.

1 So to break it is to come to the realization
2 that our reality is truly spiritual.

3 IMAM RA'OOF: I also think, in regards to that,
4 the spirituality is very, very, very important and
5 very, very significant, and I think that all people of
6 faith have a great base of spirituality. I also think
7 a lot of responsibility in terms of the faith-based
8 community, in particular locations, churches or
9 mosques or synagogues, is about economic development.
10 I think that the economic component is the component
11 that really sort of permeates.

12 We don't mind you going over there. It's okay.
13 We accept the different diversity in faith. But when
14 it comes time for economic development for certain
15 portions of certain segments of community, to lift
16 themselves up, since they don't have a base of
17 economic development, then other people feel
18 threatened, so now we see a movement in America,
19 conservative religious base, who say, Oh, no, no; we
20 can't help the poor out there, you know. We believe
21 in God; it's okay, but we can't help them
22 economically.

23 So on the reverse side, then we of African
24 American descent, then we have a responsibility to
25 take care of our economic development among ourselves.
26 We have a tremendous economic base, particularly as
27 the leaders here today.

1 The amount of money that diverts into our
2 congregations and that we are able to utilize, if we
3 could channel that into our community, to address some
4 legitimate concerns, not in terms of separatism but
5 basic economic development, a lot of that would
6 change. Until we decide to do it ourselves, that
7 problem is going to continue to exist.

8 MS. ECHAVESTE: Sort of going back to what Dr.
9 Orona was saying and this comfort zone, is it -- if we
10 posit that people choose to congregate, why is it that
11 many have said, the President has said, that Sunday
12 morning at eleven o'clock is the most segregated hour
13 in the country? And I'd like to ask each of our
14 panelists if they agree with that statement, and if
15 so, what they can say about how we deal with that.

16 REV. WYNN: Well, I think that's the culture in
17 which I grew up, when all the churches were separate.
18 But in New Orleans, I don't find it that way so
19 completely. It is one church at a time, one person at
20 a time, one day at a time, I find that changing, that
21 people are choosing to go to the church of their
22 choice, not just by race, not just by class. They are
23 choosing the place that is where they are comfortable.

24 MS. ECHAVESTE: So you would say that that is a
25 gross generalization and, in fact, does not reflect
26 changes in the country? Do others agree?

27 DR. WINSTON: I think that you're talking about

1 a Christian phenomenon, and I think that the fact that
2 we think of religion and Christianity in the same
3 breath is what I was alluding to before. This is not
4 a Christian nation, and if 11:00 a.m. Sunday is
5 segregated, it speaks directly to the history of
6 Christianity in this country and problems of race.

7 I think if you were -- when I have visited
8 mosques for weekly services, I don't see them
9 segregated necessarily. I see people from Southeast
10 Asia, praying with African Americans, praying with
11 Caucasians. They don't look segregated to me.

12 If you want to go to visit a synagogue on a
13 Saturday morning, maybe they are -- seem more
14 segregated racially, but you may often find a mix of
15 economic groups there. So I think that you really hit
16 the problem on the head: one, equating religion with
17 Christianity; and, two, thinking that that segregation
18 is a phenomenon which cuts across the board.

19 I also think that in some cases segregation is
20 not a bad idea, and what I mean by that is an ethnic
21 situation sometimes. Oftentimes faith-based
22 communities, especially for new immigrant groups, want
23 segregation, because it provides a comfort level where
24 you can have language in your own indigenous tradition
25 and follow cultural patterns.

26 So the only reason segregation becomes bad is if
27 it has a history of exclusion and tension, as it does

1 in many of the Protestant churches in the country.

2 MS. ECHAVESTE: I think that's -- go ahead.

3 DR. ORONA: I was just going to say I agree with
4 Dr. Winston, that this segregation term that we put to
5 Sunday worship is, in fact, a Christian phenomenon.
6 But I would like to speak also to the fact that
7 earlier we heard our wonderful mayor from New Orleans
8 lament the fact that there were no youth here or
9 younger people, should we say, from -- I think he said
10 from 30 and under.

11 I think some of those people represent those
12 seekers, those searchers, that are out there looking
13 for the other that we're all talking about, that
14 integration of all of us together. And so when I
15 speak to that, I speak to the fact that many of them
16 out there are looking for other ways to worship,
17 rather than in a particular setting like a church or
18 a synagogue, et cetera.

19 And in the Baha'i faith, of course, we look at
20 worship in many different ways, and so to worship is
21 also to work for humanity. That is elevated to a --
22 at least in the Baha'i faith, it's elevated to worship
23 when done in the service of God. And to establish new
24 frontiers towards a greater nation, towards social and
25 economic development, all of these are modes of
26 worship, other than the traditional setting.

27 And, of course, we all know that many younger

1 people are looking for those other ways in which to
2 worship.

3 IMAM RA'OOF: I think that from a historical
4 perspective, again, I think that the eleven o'clock,
5 the most segregated time, goes back into history. I
6 think that was Malcolm who made that statement at a
7 speech, and now I see Malcolm still lives. He comes
8 back today to haunt us.

9 But really at that time particularly, America,
10 not only in terms of the churches, but that was the
11 law of the land. Segregation at that time was legal.
12 That was the constitutional law of the land in
13 America. Segregation existed, so eleven o'clock was
14 the most segregated time.

15 Since that time, we have seen here particularly
16 in the South -- I think it was the Southern Baptist
17 Convention about three or four years ago, they had a
18 mass confession or something. The leaders of the
19 congregation came up and embraced African Americans
20 and cried, saying that, Yes, our doctrine actually
21 said that you could not be part of this congregation.
22 And they made a public testimony to that effect,
23 saying, Now that doctrine is removed; you're welcome
24 to come in.

25 So a lot of the problems that we are suffering
26 from, we are suffering from historical background. I
27 mean, that was the law in America, and even if someone

1 wanted to go someplace else, they couldn't do it. Or
2 if you wanted someone to come, they couldn't come.

3 But today, in 1998, headed into the new
4 millennium, we can change things. You know, things
5 have changed, and now we've seen a change,
6 particularly in our community. We can assure you that
7 eleven o'clock on Sunday is not the most segregated
8 time in Islamic community. Our day of worship is
9 Friday.

10 MS. ECHAVESTE: Exactly. In fact, I think the
11 next time I'm in the White House and we're having this
12 debate and someone trots out that phrase, I think I
13 will now be in a position to really challenge it,
14 based on the conversation.

15 But I want to go back to the sort of race
16 initiative. You know, how do we define what it means
17 to be American? And we talked -- and I think that's
18 a very good point that was made, that in many places,
19 we still think of -- we equate religion in America
20 with Christianity. It is just no longer true. It
21 wasn't true, but it's most definitely not true now.

22 But then Dr. Winston said something about, you
23 know, sometimes you have groups who are immigrants,
24 who come together, who want to worship in their own
25 language. And let me ask the question about --
26 language is another very divisive issue and one that
27 we as Americans must face in a way that, at the turn

1 of the century, if you will --

2 We have this myth that everyone assimilated,
3 that everyone learned English, you know, forgot their
4 old culture and became American. And what we see, I
5 think, now is a reluctance, if you will, to discard
6 our culture. And many people in this country are very
7 afraid of that.

8 I always describe the story of I was in LAX. I
9 grew up in California, and I went through the airport,
10 stopped to get some coffee, and was suddenly struck by
11 the following:

12 Everyone behind the counter was speaking
13 Spanish. The music over the Starbucks was Spanish
14 music, and I thought to myself, If I were white and
15 didn't speak Spanish, I might feel uncomfortable
16 because I'm in Los Angeles International Airport; this
17 is America; what is going on here.

18 And it just sort of gave me an insight. I
19 didn't feel uncomfortable at all, because I
20 understood. What if they'd been speaking Cantonese or
21 had been speaking some other language? So religion,
22 language -- you know, what does it mean to be
23 American, and how do we deal with this tendency -- we
24 do want to worship, if you will, sometimes with our
25 own kind in our own language.

26 How does that -- how will that work in the years
27 to come if we still want to be unified as a country?

1 How do we find that path?

2 REV. WYNN: Well, and amen. Don't we want to
3 worship in the language that we're the most
4 comfortable in? And I think that we affirm it, we
5 celebrate it. We have Korean Protestant churches. We
6 have Hispanic Protestant churches. We want to worship
7 in our own language, and we need to just keep
8 celebrating and keep allowing it and affirming it and
9 helping it to happen time and time again.

10 DR. ORONA: I also think that, again, this
11 faith-based community has a solution for
12 communication. First of all, language like culture
13 and art and these other entities that are given to us
14 are a form of enrichment to all of us, so the
15 diversity of languages should be something that we
16 should be fond of, and be appreciative of, to hear
17 Korean and to hear Vietnamese, to hear some of the
18 Native American languages that we're still hoping to
19 preserve before so many have died out.

20 So this rich language, this diversity of
21 language is, in fact, enrichment, and we're all
22 comfortable with our own languages, and, of course,
23 some of us speak more than one, and this is also great
24 and wonderful.

25 But there's another aspect to that. And I think
26 that -- and this is the -- I think this is the
27 question that you're speaking to, Maria, that the

1 world also needs what many of us believe is an
2 auxiliary, an international auxiliary language, where
3 we would call it the mother tongue.

4 And, of course, we have efforts in Esperanto
5 that have been towards that at the turn of the
6 century, and it has not taken well, but it's still one
7 of the early ways in which to bring forth an
8 international language, where people would be able to
9 move or work in Paris and be able to go to someplace
10 in Africa, to go to Malaysia, to go anywhere in the
11 world and speak your own language, Apache, Spanish,
12 English, whatever it may be, but still have the
13 international language, where we could all
14 communicate.

15 Now, there is one other important aspect to this
16 auxiliary international language, and that is that it
17 must be devoid of all national connotation. We must
18 escape those prejudices that creep up on us in
19 language; that is, I believe, one of the solutions to
20 communication through the spiritual -- through spirit
21 or through faith.

22 DR. WINSTON: Can I jump in for one minute?

23 MS. ECHAVESTE: Uh-huh.

24 DR. WINSTON: I think we have to envision a
25 future that is somewhat different than what we
26 experience today, and I think if we are going to make
27 room for diversity of languages and the ability to

1 affirm those in our ethnic and religious communities,
2 we also have to be cognizant that we must come
3 together, and that we do have to find certain unified
4 ways to work and speak with one another.

5 And I think for that reason, as Americans, I
6 would -- and here I'll go out on a limb -- affirm
7 English as a common language, which is not to say
8 people must speak English if they do not want to. But
9 I think that lest we wind up in a real tower of Babel
10 situation, where we don't affirm what we do share in
11 common, we need to go back to some of those historic
12 things, and one of them is finding one language that
13 all of us can have as a second language. And that is
14 English.

15 MS. ECHAVESTE: I'd like to open up for
16 questions from the audience. Right there, sir.
17 There's a microphone. If you'd identify yourself,
18 please --

19 REV. DR. BELL: Good morning to you. I'm Rev.
20 Dr. Timoleon Bell. I'm a faculty member here at
21 Tulane in the School of Social Work. And I want to
22 say that we need to make it clear that Sunday morning
23 is still the most segregated time in church. We need
24 to stop playing at that. It is.

25 I came to New Orleans in January of 1997 to
26 teach at Tulane and went to many Black churches over
27 six months and found all of them segregated. We

1 cannot fool ourselves to think that because we have
2 one or two white members or one or two Black members
3 or one or two Hispanic members, that all of a sudden
4 we're integrated.

5 We need to understand, too, that theology is
6 important in how our churches are rooted and shaped
7 and developed. Now -- and mainline white churches and
8 Black churches operate out of two different
9 theologies. Mainline white churches operate out of a
10 more Davidic theology, which is one of power, wealth,
11 prosperity.

12 Mainline Black churches operate out of a sense
13 of oppression, freedom from slavery, taking its roots
14 out of the experience of Israel or the Hebrew children
15 in Egypt. The theology of the Black church has stayed
16 that way. It has not changed, you know.

17 And the only way when you talk about having
18 integrated churches, you know, you have to be able to
19 integrate some of that power and wealth idea with some
20 of the freedom from oppression, you know, and that
21 does not happen in our churches.

22 I pastored a church in Madison, Wisconsin. I'm
23 originally from St. Louis, Missouri, but I pastored a
24 church in Madison, Wisconsin, in which I was very open
25 about whites joining our churches, and we had a number
26 of whites to join our church. But when they joined
27 that church, they were joining a Black church, not a

1 white church. They were joining a Black church, and
2 they knew that, and they came on that basis.

3 You know, so -- but, again, we need to
4 understand that until the roots or the reason that
5 churches were formed, the shape of the theology of the
6 churches change, churches will always be segregated.

7 MS. ECHAVESTE: Thank you.

8 (Applause.)

9 DR. FRANKLIN: My name is Robert Franklin. I'm
10 the president of ITC. It's the Interdenominational
11 Theological Center in Atlanta, the nation's largest
12 predominantly African American seminary. I have two
13 quick questions.

14 First, appreciation for the panel and its
15 insights on the religious diversity that we face. My
16 contention is that America entering the 21st Century
17 needs a story. We need a common, true narrative that
18 does four things.

19 It reckons honestly with our past and the way
20 that some of you have done that today in your remarks;

21 Secondly, it provides a balanced assessment of
22 our current predicament, in a way that neither Rush
23 Limbaugh nor Louis Farrakahn provides;

24 Third, a vision of our collective possibility in
25 the way that Martin King provided in his "I have a
26 dream" speech; that is, who can we be if we, in fact,
27 do come together and compromise some of our autonomy;

1 And, fourth, a strategic commissioning; that is
2 to say, an action plan where folks all over this
3 nation are working together on a set of common tasks.

4 And my contention, with all my respect for
5 President Clinton and Billy Graham and Jesse Jackson
6 and all the exciting leaders on the scene and folks in
7 this room today, is that we really haven't had a
8 compelling storyteller for the nation in the past 20
9 or 30 years, not of the kind that Robert Kennedy and
10 Martin Luther King were, who gathered up our many
11 stories and compelled us to do things that we weren't
12 otherwise inclined to do.

13 So the question is: Can the diverse religious
14 traditions craft a shared story, a common true
15 narrative that moves us forward?

16 Let me just ask this other mischievous question.
17 With all of the diversity of Dr. Winston's sketches,
18 I'd argue that there's still a religious tradition
19 that we haven't talked about today, that the dominant
20 religious tradition in America is capitalism, and that
21 its liberation theology is called individualism, that
22 the free market is its shrine that we all worship at
23 in some way every day when we purchase stuff, and that
24 its salespersons and marketers are the secular
25 priests, advocating the dominant religion in American
26 life, capitalism.

27 Dr. King recognized this, as did many other

1 leaders many years ago, and the question is: Does
2 religion today have the capacity to help us confront
3 the dominant religious tradition in America and
4 transform the market?

5 MS. ECHAVESTE: Thank you so much.

6 (Applause.)

7 MS. ECHAVESTE: I would -- just to try to give
8 a couple of comments, because you raised some very,
9 very good points -- one thing, going to your point
10 about there is -- you know, what is the story for the
11 next century, some of us working on this issue have
12 felt that what's been missing in the last couple of
13 decades is the moral imperative that pushes us into
14 and helps guide us into that new stage of America,
15 whereas the Civil Rights movement, if you will, had a
16 moral underpinning that galvanized people across
17 racial lines and brought, if not consensus, at least
18 a critical mass of people saying, This is wrong; this
19 is morally wrong; legal discrimination is wrong; it
20 must be changed.

21 And I would certainly urge in your breakout
22 groups: Is there, in fact, a way of creating a moral
23 imperative that, in fact, will get us to the place
24 that says, Yes, we value diversity and it's important
25 because --

26 And, number two, one of the things in terms of
27 the strategic plan: The President will issue a report

1 towards the end of this year that will have several
2 chapters. One of them will be, What are the facts.
3 We've just announced the National Academy of Sciences,
4 The Facts. What are the facts of state of race
5 relations in this country, so that we are all
6 operating from a common and valid facts, because there
7 is disagreement about what the facts are.

8 Another part of it will be the promising
9 practices. What works? How do you do successful
10 racial reconciliation?

11 But the third piece that we hope to have is
12 basically a work plan for the nation. What are the
13 three or four things that must be tacked as a country
14 that can bring us closer, if not fully there, to this
15 vision of an America of opportunity for all?

16 And one of the things that we're thinking about
17 and would love to hear feedback on is, Is it possible
18 that communities around the country, with faith
19 leaders as part of the leadership, help devise a
20 community action plan for their own community. You
21 know, what are the three or four things? Some people
22 talk about closing the opportunity gap, education,
23 making -- those kinds of things.

24 So I'll be happy to talk to you about it
25 afterwards.

26 REV. MATHEWS: My name is Graham Mathews, from
27 Dillard University and also a United Methodist pastor.

1 I have one question. How does the inherent xenophobia
2 of the American people co-exist with the changing
3 nature of the diverse religious groups that are on the
4 horizon?

5 MS. ECHAVESTE: Do you want to tackle that, Dr.
6 Winston?

7 DR. WINSTON: Yes. I was still pondering that
8 really challenging question of Dr. Franklin and the
9 problem of capitalism. Can I speak to that for one
10 second?

11 MS. ECHAVESTE: Sure.

12 DR. WINSTON: So many religious groups are in
13 bed with the capitalist system, I don't know how to
14 even draw the line and where we would begin and when
15 it makes sense and when it doesn't make sense.

16 On the one hand, one of the positive signs I see
17 on the American urban scene right now is the growing
18 willingness of corporate America to invest in economic
19 development, in faith-based economic development
20 initiatives. On the other hand, having some of these
21 companies come in to local communities is a mixed
22 blessing insofar as they are the shrines of capitalist
23 America.

24 So I would really, really be interested to hear
25 what other people think about this. It's very hard to
26 talk about disentangling faith-based groups from the
27 whole economic system which they as institutions and

1 we as individuals all benefit and participate in.

2 As far as the inherent xenophobia goes, earlier
3 you mentioned that Americans seem much more
4 comfortable with religious diversity than racial
5 diversity, and I think that's simply because we see
6 racial diversity and we don't see religious diversity
7 necessarily, until people proclaim themselves.

8 I think insofar as racial differences become
9 more apparent to people -- and not only black, white,
10 but also a whole spectrum of people -- faith
11 differences will become more controversial at the same
12 time, especially when they collide with certain basic
13 Judeo-Christian, if you will, assumptions.

14 I think at that point, that sort of xenophobic
15 streak is likely to become apparent, because at that
16 point, the foreigner is not just different in terms of
17 skin color and nationality. He or she also has a set
18 of beliefs which challenge or seem to relativize the
19 dominant majority culture.

20 So I think that xenophobia is still here in the
21 United States and still very present, and one of our
22 greatest challenges will be to think about how we deal
23 with it in the future.

24 MS. ECHAVESTE: Brief comments, because we have
25 a lot of questions. Thank you.

26 DR. ORONA: Yes. I'd also like to address that
27 very briefly. I know there are so many of you. We're

1 talking about diversity, and of course, this is the
2 initial step towards a new civilization built on love
3 and justice, but diversity is only the initial step.

4 We must look towards the vision of where it's
5 supposed to take us, and that I call unity in
6 diversity, where every Navajo, African American,
7 Bulgarian, Malaysian, and anybody else who is in these
8 American States can be part of this whole process of
9 love and justice.

10 And to do that, I think that we need to enter
11 into what I would also call a consultative process
12 where nobody takes ownership of their own rights, but
13 gives it up for the betterment of all and everyone
14 else.

15 Thank you.

16 MS. ECHAVESTE: Yes, sir.

17 DR. SARGENT: Good morning. I'm Dr. Alvin
18 Sargent, and I'm pastor of the Church of the
19 Sanctified Vision, located here in New Orleans.

20 My first thanks is to God Almighty for placing
21 President Clinton's heart on the racial problem here
22 in the United States.

23 I think you want to get some solutions, some
24 ideas, as to really what is the -- we can't change
25 eleven o'clock. That's existed from before you and I
26 came on the scene. Eleven o'clock will not change.
27 We have many reasons. I couldn't ask the Pastor Kim

1 Tran to come to our church and feel totally at ease,
2 so -- but we can share brotherly love, one toward the
3 other.

4 What I noted that maybe perhaps you need to
5 consider is what we are going through in the Black
6 community, and I can only relate to the Black
7 community because I'm a Black man and I'm a pastor
8 that a church is located in the Black community.

9 I made some notes. We can't look back as the --
10 our mayor indicated we are to look back, but we in the
11 church do not look back. We are looking -- the church
12 is about looking toward the theocratic government of
13 God. We look forward to that.

14 We ask you to consider some of these notes that
15 I put down, is that to correct or eliminate the
16 legislative economic red tape, discriminatory
17 applications on Social Security, for the helpless
18 poor.

19 Many poor people on Social Security have waited
20 on favorable decisions for years, only to receive
21 judicial denials by an independent, aristocratic so-
22 called judge. If special attention is given to quick
23 and fair decisions, to poor disabled Social Security,
24 SSI, applicants, then this could release much tension
25 in the poorer communities.

26 The practice of the rich gets richer and the
27 poor gets poorer, there's great economic

1 discriminatory practices given in considering giving
2 aid to poor Blacks and Hispanics. Change these
3 platforms, and then you will move toward the
4 President's initiative on race.

5 Correct the economic agenda of the money lending
6 institutions, as to how they relate to the Black
7 church, in assisting us financially in our efforts to
8 rebuild abandoned houses for educational purposes for
9 our children.

10 We need the banks to help the Black church, to
11 take our children out of the dusty streets and build
12 or erect more swimming pools, to reconstruct abandoned
13 buildings, to give more hope to the poor and
14 underprivileged.

15 We can't change how nor can we legislate love,
16 but this we can do. We can share the wealth. Race
17 relations will get better when the economic parity
18 ladder has two sides for climbers, not the traditional
19 single ladder of growth.

20 You can take this message back to the President.
21 I think you're looking for solutions, not just
22 conversations.

23 MS. ECHAVESTE: Oh, absolutely. And I think --
24 thank you very much.

25 I must really urge people to keep their comments
26 short, because there are a lot of people who would
27 like to speak, but one of the key issues is how do we

1 balance between race and class, if you will, economic
2 lack of opportunity and how that impacts race, so your
3 thoughts are quite appreciated. Thank you.

4 DR. SARGENT: Thank you. And I wish you would
5 bring that message back.

6 MS. ECHAVESTE: We certainly will.

7 DR. SARGENT: Thank you very much.

8 MS. ECHAVESTE: Again, if I could just urge
9 quick --

10 MR. GALMAN: Okay. My name is Carl Galman. I'm
11 president of the Louisiana Committee Against
12 Apartheid.

13 Sister Maria talked about reconciliation. In
14 order for there to be reconciliation, the church
15 itself must get out of the safe zone. The church
16 lives within its safe zone. They are afraid to talk
17 about issues that people might consider as
18 controversial.

19 Let me give you an example. Many of the
20 religious denominations in the South and throughout
21 the North benefitted and made millions off of slavery.
22 But yet there's no discussion about the church paying
23 reparation to the ancestors of former slaves.

24 Also I'm concerned about many of the religious
25 say they believe in God. Well, slavery was wrong.
26 Would you support legislation calling for reparation
27 for the ancestors of people who was enslaved?

1 Also I find the church itself playing a very
2 serious game. They say they're totally opposed to
3 injustice. I work with the Louisiana Committee
4 Against Apartheid, and the same denomination that was
5 involved in slavery had their investment portfolio and
6 their pension involved in South Africa and throughout
7 southern Africa.

8 We must discuss these issues. You cannot be an
9 oppressor and believe in God. You cannot be an
10 oppressor and believe in justice. You cannot be an
11 oppressor and believe -- you cannot believe in justice
12 and believe in racism. And I find in America, that
13 most religious orders or denominations are afraid to
14 even discuss racism, and most of the problems in
15 America are caused by racism. And we must discuss
16 that on a high level.

17 Thank you.

18 MS. ECHAVESTE: Thank you.

19 (Applause.)

20 MS. ECHAVESTE: Next.

21 MS. ROGERS: Hi. My name is Shafia Christhoff
22 Rogers. I live here in New Orleans, and I'm here
23 representing the Unity Universalist Association.

24 And I want to say with respect for what everyone
25 brings to the table and to the panel, I want to say
26 that I'm frustrated that there is not a white person
27 on this panel yet who has said the words "white

1 privilege." And that -- we can't have this
2 conversation without naming the word "privilege." And
3 we can't talk about celebrating diversity.

4 I think that it is probably experienced by many
5 as insulting to speak of tolerance and celebrating
6 diversity without speaking -- and celebrating
7 pluralism without speaking to the issue of genocide,
8 without white people saying, If we are spiritual
9 people, if our churches are in a spiritual and a moral
10 crisis, it is because we have not come to terms and
11 taken responsibility for the benefits of this society
12 that we have had access to, and the fact that the
13 institutions of this society have been doors of
14 opportunity for us while they have been foot, kicking
15 people in the butt, for people from other communities.

16 And I really have a problem with this panel not
17 having white people who are saying that, and I say
18 that with respect, but I think it's an omission.

19 MS. ECHAVESTE: And thank you for saying it.

20 DR. WINSTON: Can I say something, Maria?

21 MS. ECHAVESTE: Uh-huh.

22 DR. WINSTON: Maybe I didn't say it clear
23 enough, but I mentioned privilege twice in my speech.
24 And I mentioned the fact that those privileges -- what
25 I was trying to say was those groups that have had the
26 privilege of influence, access, and the positive
27 historical narrative were going to have to give that

1 up.

2 And when I spoke about cutting through the knot
3 of privilege to face our differences, that is what I
4 was implying.

5 MS. ROGERS: I hear you, and perhaps I missed
6 it, and perhaps if we really name it and we say, We're
7 talking about white privilege -- we can say that
8 with --

9 DR. WINSTON: We're not just talking about white
10 privilege. We're talking about Christian and to some
11 extent Jewish privilege.

12 MS. ROGERS: I am speaking about white
13 privilege, and that is what my critique is. Please
14 hear that. Thank you.

15 MS. ECHAVESTE: Thank you.

16 We're going to have a couple more questions,
17 because we need to move on. But go ahead.

18 DR. HALL: I'm Dr. Robert S. Hall from New
19 Orleans, and I was recommended by Mr. Bush from
20 Congressman Livingston's office.

21 So far I haven't been impressed; I've been very,
22 very depressed with what has taken place. For
23 example, I heard Superintendent Carol Cotton Wynn talk
24 about moving beyond the walls, and yet when -- if
25 there's an opening in one of the United Methodist
26 churches and I am of the African Methodist Episcopal
27 Church, and I call and ask to have an appointment

1 with -- a session with them, they say, Are you United
2 Methodist. I said, No. They said, Well, I don't have
3 anything.

4 So I think what has to happen here is that those
5 who are -- and former Superintendent Duerson told me
6 one day, I'd like to have lunch with you. I said,
7 Okay, whenever you're ready, let me know. The last
8 time I saw him, which was about six months later, he
9 says, How're you doing. I said, I just returned from
10 the hospital. he said, Well, what happened. I said,
11 I was suffering from malnutrition, waiting for you to
12 take me to lunch.

13 So we have to -- the hierarchy of the Christian
14 church must get their act together before they can
15 filter down to the people and tell them to get
16 together. I think this is what we have to look at and
17 what not. I think that, you know, we have to sometime
18 put Christians on a guilt trip and let them know that
19 racism is a sin. And it is definitely a sin to do
20 that, and maybe we can get through them and get
21 through the hard-core people.

22 And let's stop walking on eggs and walking
23 lightly, talking about these things. Let's get down
24 to the nitty-gritty and don't worry about what others
25 are going to say or what labels they're going to pass
26 on about you because you are with another persuasion.
27 You know what I'm talking about.

1 If one or two Caucasians embrace me, then they
2 become one of those counter-lovers, but you never ask
3 me what I can bring to the table. And I think that
4 this has to be done, to find out what people can do to
5 help out. And when they form these blue-ribbon
6 committees, the grassroots people are left out. And
7 you're always telling me what to do and how to do it,
8 but you never ask me how I feel about it.

9 I think that we have to get down to some of
10 these kind of things and what not. And then you're
11 talking about embracing -- pastors of all persuasions
12 and all races should let people know that there is an
13 open-door policy and embrace that open-door policy.

14 And I think you remember some years ago at John
15 Wesley, when some students from Dillard went down, and
16 the pastor came out of the pulpit and asked them out
17 of the church. Hello, are you here? Are you
18 following? The pastor asked them out of the church,
19 because it was, quote/unquote, a white church, and
20 they were Black students from Dillard University.

21 So we have to get our act together. And some
22 will say, Oh, I'll go to their churches, but I don't
23 like that neighborhood. Well, I've said this on many
24 occasions. They say, Don't you love the Lord, and
25 traveling up and down the road. I say, Yes, I love
26 the Lord. They say, Do you trust the Lord? I say,
27 Yes, I trust the Lord, but I just don't trust them 18-

1 wheelers.

2 MS. ECHAVESTE: We have time for a couple more
3 questions. I do want to say that this forum is really
4 try to get to that point, that you need people living
5 and breathing on the grassroots levels, to help guide,
6 if, in fact, we're going to come up with anything that
7 can be useful to get us into the next century.

8 And I urge that when we're in the breakout
9 session, we really talk about what is it that we can
10 do. One of the trends of thoughts I'm hearing here,
11 that we're hearing, is, of course, the relationship
12 between economic lack of opportunity and race and its
13 relationship, and the second and very important one is
14 as people of faith who, if you will, profess to have
15 these ideals, how is it that we are still in the place
16 we're at.

17 I think two more questions. Sir?

18 SPEAKER: Thank you. I want to thank Dr. Abdel
19 Ra'oof for your comments concerning slavery, and you
20 mentioned that we are not all immigrants on this
21 continent. You closed by saying, If we can't confront
22 true reality, then our society cannot change.

23 There's another reality that I think this
24 society has had a very difficult time confronting, and
25 we continue to hide that reality by using words like
26 "immigrant" and what my second-grade daughter is
27 learning about in New Orleans public school,

1 "settlement."

2 These two continents were not settled by
3 Europeans. They were invaded. There were more than
4 100 million people living in this Western Hemisphere
5 when Columbus was discovered by the Tano [phonetic],
6 and 400 years later, only about 4 million survivors
7 remained within the continental United States; 98
8 percent were exterminated, between 1492 and Wounded
9 Knee at 1890, the most systematic and complete
10 annihilation in the history of the world.

11 And yet we not only seem reluctant to admit that
12 today, but we continue -- this country continues its
13 oppressive policies, not just against African
14 Americans, but against Indians as well, and witness
15 the countless times that Washington Senator Slade
16 Gorton has introduced legislation or amended
17 legislation to completely abolish the sovereign
18 nations of this continent, and witness Bill Clinton's
19 consistent refusal to grant executive clemency to our
20 number one political prisoner, Leonard Peltier.

21 Every man and woman of conscience in the world
22 knows that Leonard is innocent. The FBI themselves
23 know it, and Clinton will do nothing.

24 (Applause.)

25 DR. ORONA: I would like to say very briefly,
26 just as a Native American, that that is true, and we
27 are very cognizant of this other holocaust that is a

1 reality. But we also want to be able to move beyond
2 that and be large contributors to this new
3 civilization that we're all trying to build together.
4 Thank you.

5 REV. WHITE: I am Rev. Carlton R. White,
6 associate minister of the Mt. Peter Missionary Baptist
7 Church in Baton Rouge.

8 Ten years or so before the President initiated
9 his President's Initiative on Race, Congressman
10 Conyers, John Conyers from Detroit, introduced several
11 pieces of legislation, which he have one now, HR-40,
12 asking Congress to establish a committee to study the
13 institution of slavery and the horror that went into
14 it, and to figure out whether or not some sort of
15 remuneration is warranted.

16 I want to ask the panel, the faith-based panel:
17 how does it feel about the issue of reparations as an
18 issue of justice and an issue of restoring the
19 wreckage of the past and reconciliation, thereby
20 moving us into the 21st Century as a whole people.
21 Thank you.

22 MS. ECHAVESTE: Does anybody want to take on
23 that issue?

24 DR. ORONA: I would like to just highlight
25 something that I said previously and some of the
26 principles that I tried to bring about, that I think
27 that all of us should espouse, and that is to

1 formulate a consultative process that goes beyond
2 tolerance towards total acceptance. We've got to move
3 from tolerance.

4 We've tolerated each other for the longest time
5 already. I lived in Chicago for six years, and I
6 tolerated every other community, you know, and I guess
7 Chicago is kind of like that. But I'm talking about
8 the vision, the vision beyond this initial step. And,
9 of course, you know, it's still embryonic, and we've
10 got a lot to do before we move there.

11 But we've got to have a vision, and the vision
12 is unity in diversity, where we are all who we are,
13 yet we have some common foundation, some common
14 boundaries that we are all enjoying. And to move
15 towards this is to enter into a consultative process
16 that will take us from tolerance to acceptance, and
17 from just plain unity to a unity in diversity.

18 So consultation is very important towards this
19 initiative. Thank you.

20 MS. ECHAVESTE: This is our last question,
21 because we need to move on, and I really apologize.
22 There will be other opportunities. Sir?

23 MR. ABDULLA: My name is Glenn Abdulla
24 [phonetic], and I'm a Muslim, and I'm also a member of
25 Eracism.

26 First of all, I'd like to say that I have
27 forgiven the past. And on religion, I think what all

1 religious groups have to do, the Christians have to
2 ask, is what they're teaching, is this what Jesus
3 taught; the Muslims must ask themselves if what they
4 are teaching, is this what Mohammed taught; and the
5 other prophets who came to religious people, are what
6 we are practicing today and teaching today, is that
7 what they brung.

8 And we all have to recognize the good that
9 America does instead of just pointing out to -- and
10 making the mistakes and the wrong that America does as
11 the big issue. The good far outweighs the bad. Just
12 go to another country, and you'll find out.

13 (Applause.)

14 MS. ECHAVESTE: Thank you.

15 If I may, I want to thank our panel. I think
16 there's some very interesting comments and, I think,
17 viewpoints expressed here, both by the panel members
18 and the questioners, and I think that the gentleman's
19 last comment certainly is something that is how the
20 President looks at this challenge, that we have this
21 ideal, and yet we can't seem quite to get there, but
22 we make steady progress.

23 And what we hope we are able to do in the
24 remainder of this day is really come up with some
25 solutions or proposed ideas for how we achieve that
26 ideal.

27 I would like to thank the panel, and now I'm

1 going to turn this over to Rev. Cook, who will talk
2 about promising practices. Thank you.

3 (Applause.)

4 REV. DR. COOK: Thank you very, very much.
5 Won't you join me in thanking this panel and our
6 moderator today. Thank you so much for all of your
7 views. You were wonderful.

8 (Applause.)

9 REV. DR. COOK: Promising practices are
10 nationally based and community based efforts that are
11 designed to promote racial reconciliation, and as
12 we've gone across the country, the advisory board has
13 been meeting, and the eight official meetings as we
14 shared, that were public, but we've also been covering
15 about three cities a week individually and sometimes
16 collectively, looking at what community-based
17 organizations are doing to promote racial
18 reconciliation.

19 I have been astounded and I have been so pleased
20 with what we've been able to see. We've gone to
21 mosques; we've gone to synagogues; we've gone to
22 churches; we've gone -- we've met with new faith
23 groups that we would have never had an opportunity to
24 sit down with.

25 We had a prayer breakfast at the White House in
26 the beginning of the fall, and we asked faith leaders,
27 you know, where should we go, and around the country,

1 we've seen promising practices, not only from faith-
2 based communities, but also the corporate sector,
3 schools.

4 We went to Oxford, Mississippi, where years ago,
5 James Meredith couldn't walk across the campus, but
6 where today they're intentionally working together,
7 and it was an exciting kind of growth pattern that
8 we've been able to see.

9 And what we want to do is to be able to know
10 about your promising practices. We want to shine
11 light on places that it's working, things that you've
12 been doing, things that you may know about that would
13 be effective. We have 147 promising practices that
14 are currently on our web site now. Our address is in
15 your pamphlet. Our goal is to have 500 by the end of
16 this Initiative.

17 And so we're going to ask you in your packets --
18 there is a form, and we're going to ask Anna Lopez, if
19 you'll raise your hand -- Anna Lopez is part of our
20 Initiative team. If you'll fill that out, if you know
21 something that we need to know about, bring to light
22 something that's happening, they don't always have to
23 be large and grandiose. Bigger is not always better.

24 Many times it's that small mustard seed that
25 begins to grow a great big plant, and so if there's
26 something that is working, we'd like to know about it.
27 We ask that you fill that out during your lunch time,

1 share it with Anna Lopez, and we'll be glad to share
2 it.

3 Our web site address is there. We hope that you
4 visit, but most of all, we hope that you begin to take
5 some time to think about ways that, as we go forward,
6 that we do look at the future differently than we've
7 looked at the past, because bottom line that Diane
8 Winston said, it's that we really have no choice;
9 diversity is here. And so what can we do to be one
10 America in the 21st Century?

11 We're going to break for lunch at this time.
12 Let me just share with you what our instructions are
13 in terms of our availability for lunch. Certainly you
14 can go anywhere you'd like. But we have provided
15 lunch for you on the opposite side of these blinds
16 here that are there, these curtains, and so to get
17 there, what you'll have to do is go to my left, your
18 right, out in the hallway where we had breakfast, and
19 just go to the end. Just follow this room around, and
20 then outside under a tent.

21 There's some wonderfully decorated tables been
22 set for you, and so we hope that you'll get to meet
23 someone that you may not have met before, share with
24 some old friends, meet some new friends.

25 We're going to ask, though, that you please be
26 back here at 12:45. Dr. James Forbes has come from
27 the Riverside Church in New York City where they're

1 doing some wonderful things in terms of race
2 reconciliation. He's here. We've heard the mayor;
3 he'll be back to join us, and it's going to be an
4 electrifying afternoon.

5 We have another panel, and then we'll have time
6 for breakout sessions, and our leaders are here.
7 They've also -- many of them are local, and many have
8 flown in from across the country, so that you will
9 get a chance to share some things, so that we may
10 leave here, not just with where things have been but
11 where things can go.

12 We thank you for your attentiveness and for all
13 of your sharing today. We hope you'll take time now
14 to eat. Be blessed. Thank you.

15 (Whereupon, at 11:55 a.m., the forum in the
16 above-entitled matter was recessed, to reconvene at
17 12:45 p.m., this same day, Thursday, May 21, 1998.)

A F T E R N O O N S E S S I O N

(12:52 p.m.)

REV. DR. COOK: Hello. How you feeling?
Blessed? All right.

It's good to be back together again, and we're
grateful. We hope you enjoyed the lunch. It was good
New Orleans catfish. I feel good. It was wonderful.

And many of you have asked for just a selection
to kind of set the tone, and we're going to ask Rev.
Lois Dejean if she will come. She's going to do a
verse of Amazing Grace to set the tone for what we're
going to receive this afternoon. Amen?

AUDIENCE: Amen.

REV. DR. COOK: So let's receive her at this
time.

(Applause.)

REV. DEJEAN: Thank you. At least we got a
verse in. Okay? But I don't want to do this by
myself. I want you to join in with me. There's
something about a song that kind of solidifies us and
brings us together and focuses us.

I thought to really do, We Are One in the
Spirit, We Are One in the Lord, and we pray that our
unity may one day be restored, and they'll know who we
are by our love, they'll know who we are -- but she
wanted Amazing Grace, but I want you to remember that
little saying: And they'll know who we are by our

1 love, by our love.

2 (Whereupon, a song was sung by leader and
3 participants.)

4 REV. DEJEAN: And everybody said --

5 AUDIENCE: Amen.

6 MAYOR MORIAL: Good afternoon.

7 AUDIENCE: Good afternoon.

8 MAYOR MORIAL: The excited, delighted, educated,
9 and liberated, multi-ethnic, multi-racial, and multi-
10 opinionated audience, good afternoon. And how was
11 lunch? How was lunch?

12 AUDIENCE: Great.

13 MAYOR MORIAL: All right. Give the hand that
14 prepared the lunch a round of applause.

15 (Applause.)

16 MAYOR MORIAL: I have the very special privilege
17 to introduce someone who's going to come and share
18 words of enlightenment and wisdom with us. That
19 person is the Rev. Dr. James Alexander Forbes, Jr. He
20 is the senior minister at the Riverside Church in New
21 York City, an interracial, interdenominational, and
22 international church with over 2,400 members.

23 I recall as a law student, meeting at Riverside
24 on many important subjects of that day. I remember
25 vividly a wonderful conference that took place there
26 in 1981 on Apartheid. In those days, when the
27 struggle was quite tough and when no one would have

1 seen that Nelson Mandela would be the president of
2 that country, a multi-racial, multi-ethnic democracy.

3 Riverside Church is a special place, and Dr.
4 Forbes is a special person, the first African American
5 to serve as the senior minister of one of the largest
6 multi-cultural denominations anywhere on God's earth.
7 He is an educator, an administrator, an inter-faith
8 leader, and a community activist.

9 Newsweek has recognized him as one of the 12
10 most effective preachers anywhere in the English-
11 speaking world. He's an adjunct professor at Union
12 Theological Seminary in the Big Apple. He serves on
13 the core teaching staff at Auburn Theological Seminary
14 in New York.

15 He spent a semester this year at Harvard
16 Divinity School, a distinguished theological
17 institution, as the inaugural Loos [phonetic]
18 Lecturer, and he is known as a preacher's preacher
19 because of his extensive preaching career, and he
20 isn't boring. He's charismatic.

21 Ladies and gentlemen, we're very honored to have
22 with us today the Rev. James Alexander Forbes, Jr.
23 Please greet him.

24 (Applause.)

25 MAYOR MORIAL: As he comes, I beg for your
26 indulgence, because I'm going to have to leave again.
27 I've got a city council meeting going on today, and

1 I've got to take care of the affairs of state, so I
2 want to just say, because this will be the last time
3 I see many of you, thank you for doing this in New
4 Orleans. I know there are many visitors here, and we
5 appreciate all of the distinguished people who've been
6 here with us today.

7 Rev. Forbes, the mike is yours.

8 REV. DR. FORBES: I want to express my gratitude
9 to the mayor for his generous introduction and for his
10 presence here to get met started this afternoon.

11 I would like also to express gratitude to Dr.
12 Suzan Johnson Cook for allowing me to be on her
13 program. I'm always happy to be associated with her,
14 because she has always distinguished herself as being
15 on the frontier: first African American pastor who was
16 a woman in my denomination, and she took the work by
17 storm and has moved from strength to strength.
18 Wherever she goes, I'm able to come.

19 She was at the White House as a White House
20 fellow; then I was able to come. She was at Harvard
21 Divinity School as a special sabbatical leader there
22 in a special program there; this year, I was able to
23 go.

24 Where are you going next, so I'll know where I'm
25 going to get a chance to go? We're honored to be with
26 you, Dr. Cook.

27 Now, I am very, very much excited about being

1 here with you, but you should know that throughout my
2 seminary career as a teacher, I always avoided classes
3 that were scheduled at 1:10. That's because lunch has
4 its way of demanding attention in the visceral region,
5 which takes something away from the cranium and makes
6 it less alert than it would normally have been, which
7 is why if I seem animated, it is not only my interest
8 in the topic, but my sense of the urgency to get on
9 with what I got to say if I want to have your
10 attention.

11 I think what I'd like to do today is first of
12 all say thanks to the President of the United States
13 for putting this issue before us, before the nation.
14 I'm grateful for that.

15 We do have crises, and I will not even start
16 with the litany of all of the evidences of a kind of
17 relapse from some of the gains we have known in years
18 past. I will not take time to talk about the signs
19 that people are now circling their wagons in their own
20 individual areas and finding less investment, less
21 energy often in the things that we do across lines of
22 race and religion.

23 But I do think that the nation had tended to be
24 less attentive to these issues of race and that the
25 President has done a wonderful thing by arranging for
26 us to talk about these things, hopefully so that we
27 can together towards a new society in which there is,

1 indeed, one America.

2 Now, let me begin by saying I think in the
3 manner in which I will communicate with you, it would
4 be helpful for you to know what has informed the
5 spirit of my presentation.

6 The first thing I want to read comes from Racism
7 and the Christian Understanding of Man, by George D.
8 Kelsey who passed a year or so ago, but so far as I am
9 concerned, although this book is likely to be out of
10 print, it is as good as anything I have read to
11 address the issues which have gathered us here today.

12 I'm going to read one paragraph from this book,
13 the way he opens up the preface of this book. He
14 says, "Racism is a faith. It is a form of idolatry.
15 It is an abortive search for meaning. In its early
16 modern beginning, racism was a justificatory device.
17 It did not emerge as a faith. It arose as an
18 ideological justification for the constellations of
19 political and economic power which were expressed in
20 colonialism and slavery, but gradually, the idea of
21 the superior race was heightened and deepened in
22 meaning and value, so that it pointed beyond the
23 historical structures of relation in which it emerged
24 to human existence itself. The alleged superior race
25 became and now persists as a center of value and an
26 object of devotion. Multitudes of men" -- and now
27 I'll add, and women -- "gained their sense of the

1 power of being from their membership in the superior
2 race."

3 I just -- I've been -- and that's how he starts.
4 If you get a chance to find it in an old bookstore
5 somewhere, you might find illumination in what Dr.
6 Kelsey had to say about racism and the Christian
7 understanding of humans, of human beings, I'll add.
8 It's called, Christian Understanding of Man.

9 Now, another reading and then I'm going to
10 preach. I'm going to give a little sermonette. She
11 knows I can't preach in 25 minutes; she knows, but I'm
12 going to give a little sermonette.

13 In Erich Fromm's interesting book, On Being
14 Human, I read -- well, let me -- there are two things
15 I want to read. First, what he says about tribalism,
16 which is a better term than racism, because folks get
17 nervous when you start talking about racism; you know,
18 they get defensive. So I like the alternative
19 reading.

20 This is what Erich Fromm says about tribalism.
21 By that time, we'll see if we can move along. He
22 says, "The question, indeed, is this: Is modern man,
23 the man of the 20th Century, really prepared to live
24 in one world? Or is it that we are intellectually
25 living in the 20th Century and emotionally living in
26 the Stone Age?

27 "Is it that while we are preparing this one

1 world, our feelings and goals are still those of
2 tribalism, and by tribalism, I mean, in fact, an
3 attitude that we find in most all primitive tribes.
4 One has confidence only in the members of one's own
5 tribe. One feels a moral obligation only to the
6 members of one's own tribe, to the people" -- and this
7 is very essential, although it sounds trivial -- "an
8 obligation only to those who have eaten the same food,
9 sung the same songs, and spoken the same language.

10 "In this tribalism, the stranger is considered
11 with suspicion, and projection of all the evil in
12 oneself are made upon this stranger. Morality, in
13 fact, is tribalism. Morality, in fact, in tribalism
14 is always an interior morality, valid only for the
15 members of the same race, and it does not make the
16 slightest difference, humanly speaking, whether this
17 tribe is one of 100 people or of 1,000 people or 500
18 million people. It is always the same, that the
19 stranger, one who does not belong to this same tribe,
20 is not experienced as a fully human being."

21 Now, that's from Erich Fromm of -- Erich is of
22 the Jewish tradition, although humanistic and not
23 particularly in the religious dynamic. At least he
24 represents a different tradition.

25 And then, as long as I'm reading, I might as
26 well read something from this book which will be the
27 focus of what I'm going to talk about in just a

1 minute, and it is from Acts, Chapter 10, and the
2 people in the house who are familiar with my tradition
3 already have some sense of what I'm going to say, but
4 I may say something different, so hang in here and let
5 us see.

6 It is about Simon Peter on the housetop, just
7 enough to remind you that it happened that after
8 Cornelius, the centurion of the Italian cohort had
9 been urged to send for him, Cornelius sent for Simon
10 Peter. And the text says, "About noon the next day,
11 as they were on their journey and approached the city,
12 Peter went up on the roof to pray.

13 "He became hungry and wanted something to eat,
14 and while it was being prepared, he fell into a
15 trance. He saw the heaven open and something like a
16 large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground
17 by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-
18 footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air.

19 "Then he heard a voice saying, Get up, Peter;
20 kill and eat. But Peter said, By no means, Lord, for
21 I have never eaten anything that is profane or
22 unclean. The voice said to him again a second time,
23 What God has made clean, you must not call profane.
24 This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly
25 taken up to heaven.

26 "Now, while Peter was greatly puzzled about what
27 to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the

1 men sent by Cornelius appeared. They were asking for
2 Simon's house and were standing by the gate. They
3 called out to ask whether Simon, who was called Peter,
4 was staying there.

5 "While Peter was still thinking about the
6 vision, the Spirit said to him, Look, three men are
7 searching for you. Now, get up, go down, and go with
8 them without hesitation, for I have sent them."

9 That's a sermon in that right now: Get up, go
10 down, and go with them. That's a good three points
11 right there by itself, but anyway that's not where
12 we're going to be.

13 Now, I want to talk about this little text, this
14 text, and I want to talk about it in a fresh kind of
15 way. President Clinton has called the nation to a
16 serious discussion of race in America. There has been
17 a general recognition that racialism was, indeed, a
18 serious defect from the very inception of these United
19 States of America.

20 Although we have been through seasons of greater
21 or lesser crisis, the virus of tribalism is an ever-
22 present microbe, coursing through the veins of the
23 body politic. It does not take very much provocation
24 to activate the virus into a full-scale influenza of
25 the attitudes and actions of our fellow citizens.

26 The public discussions that the President has
27 called for, the town hall meetings and regional

1 conferences, such as this, have received mixed
2 reviews. One criticism which stands out is that it is
3 so difficult to get beneath the surface of
4 generalizations and platitudes, to really have genuine
5 exchange at a level of substantive concern.

6 Interracial, in-depth conversation is not an
7 easy dialogue to arrange. Defenses are high or thick
8 as the old Berlin Wall or the Great Walls of China.
9 But it occurred to me in the light of my invitation to
10 come and talk to you about some spiritual matters
11 that, you know, it is right, mete and right, that
12 religious leaders should finally be called together,
13 because within our various traditions, all of them,
14 there is some form of call to love, proclaimed as a
15 prophetic call to justice and compassion, and that at
16 least if other people find it difficult to act or to
17 think or to discuss, it is likely that religious
18 communities should have a head start on the kind of
19 dialogue to which the President has called us.

20 But then I thought again. The latest statistics
21 suggest that most places of worship are in homogeneous
22 settings. Isn't that interesting? Blacks and whites
23 and Asians and Latins and rich and poor and middle
24 class and Muslims and Jews -- there is usually
25 extraordinary evidence of the old adage, birds of a
26 feather flock together.

27 To get the interracial communication going on a

1 large scale, that is, really have widespread dialogue,
2 would actually require most religious organizations to
3 arrange with the school boards of their community to
4 let them use their buses on Friday night and on
5 Sunday, to bus in to the place of worship people that
6 would make possible a multi-cultural arrangement.

7 I mean, you really couldn't have embodied
8 interracial conversation at most of our places of
9 worship, whether it's the mosque or the temple or the
10 Roman Catholic parish or the Protestant church, unless
11 we did a whole lot of busing, because generally
12 speaking, we live apart; we worship apart; and we
13 rarely get around to having these conversations about
14 what we are together as human beings.

15 Even at my church on Martin Luther King's
16 birthday, I had to urge my members -- and I have a
17 fairly evenly mixed congregation. When you worship at
18 Riverside, you can't tell whether it's black or white,
19 because we are all mixed up together. But I had to
20 ask some of them to invite something other than
21 yourself, because we meet at church but I don't know
22 what they do when the service is over, whether they go
23 back to their separate corners and their isolated
24 communities.

25 So here is what I wanted to do. I wanted to use
26 this occasion to ask if those who are in conversation
27 with the President could -- I want to test an idea.

1 I want to propose that the President form a special
2 invitation. Maybe we would be the ones to issue it,
3 since Presidents are not to speak too much about what
4 happens if individual houses of worship.

5 Maybe we ought to add something that I used to
6 remember years ago in North Carolina, a special
7 weekend where not an afternoon worship service, but
8 somewhere at the temple, at the mosque, and at the
9 church, that there would be, if it's possible to
10 arrange -- and it's not always possible to arrange, in
11 the midst of the worship service, a very brief worship
12 that justifies that you've done what you have to do
13 and spend the hour that we preachers would spend
14 preaching with folks from different racial and
15 religious groups, talking to each other, and let that
16 be the sermon.

17 And I wanted to propose that that become -- and
18 I don't know. Martin Luther King is already filled
19 with everybody else's tradition, so we might have to
20 find his death date, maybe his death date, the Sunday
21 closest, the Saturday closest, the Friday night
22 closest, the Thursday night closest, to sit and say,
23 For this service, everybody's going to be asked, as
24 best you can, to scare up somebody from some tradition
25 that is not regularly meeting in that place, to have
26 conversation about the issue of race. That would
27 advance us very much.

1 But I promised you that I had come here today,
2 that I was going to talk about race in a sermonic
3 form, and so I hope to do. But I want to make a few
4 preliminary comments before I get to the germ of the
5 sermonic moment that I want to share with you.

6 My thesis here today is that all of us,
7 generally speaking, would agree that religion in
8 general, which is supposed to bind us together, also
9 functions on two levels. Religion binds us together
10 in our mutual religious traditions, helps us to come
11 together. The Spirit brings us together, brings
12 people into my Christian congregation and helps us to
13 get together.

14 The Spirit brings the Jewish community together,
15 helps it get together; the Muslim community, helps it
16 get together; the Baha'i tradition, the Native
17 American tradition, the Sikhs, the Buddhists, the --
18 well, I'm not going to make the whole sermon going the
19 whole length. Maya Angelou makes the whole list. I'm
20 not going to go that far.

21 But religion does two things. The same Spirit
22 that gathers us disperses us beyond the comforts of
23 the enclosures in which we are nourished, in order to
24 help us to become not just a particular thing we are,
25 but to become a part of the human race. And the
26 thesis of my presentation, if I had to give it a
27 title, my subject is the recruitment of human race

1 activists.

2 The Spirit gets me and my crowd together, and
3 that same Spirit comes back when we have reached
4 maturity in the protection of the unique enclosure and
5 says, Wonderful; you have been in the cradle of
6 becoming; now let me use the enrichment of your
7 particular experience to call you forth now to become
8 a part of what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called the
9 world house together.

10 Now, my assumption is that most of you all would
11 agree that that's generally the case. If you don't,
12 you are in contradiction to Maya Angelou. Let me read
13 one of her poems called, "The Human Family."

14 She said, "I note the obvious differences in the
15 human family. Some of us are serious; some thrive on
16 comedy. Some declare their lives are lived as true
17 profundity, and others claim they really live the real
18 reality. The variety of our skin tones can confuse,
19 bemuse, delight, brown and pink and beige and purple,
20 tan and blue and white.

21 "I've sailed upon the Seven Seas and stopped in
22 every land. I've seen the wonders of the world, not
23 yet one common man. I know 10,000 women called Jane
24 and Mary Jane, but I've not seen any two who really
25 were the same. Mirror twins are different, although
26 their features jibe, and lovers think quite different
27 thoughts while lying side by side.

1 "We love and lose in China. We weep on
2 England's shores, and laugh and moan in Guinea, and
3 thrive on Spanish shores. We seek success in Finland,
4 are born and die in Maine. In minor ways we differ;
5 in major, we're the same.

6 "I note the obvious differences between each
7 sought and type, but we are more alike, my friends,
8 than we are unlike. We are more alike, my friends,
9 than we are unlike. We are more alike, my friends,
10 than we are unlike." That's what Maya Angelou said.

11 Now, Martin Luther King, Jr., who is quoted on
12 many things, did not have a very extensively developed
13 pneumatology, theory of the spirit. I searched his
14 writings. Dr. Franklin here has done extensive
15 analysis on these prophets' prophetic visions, but
16 King didn't say much about Holy Spirit.

17 But I did find in Stride Towards Freedom this
18 one sentence which was enough for me. Dr. King says,
19 in Stride Towards Freedom, "The Holy Spirit is the
20 continuing community-creating reality that moves
21 through history, and one who works against community
22 is working against the whole of creation."

23 The point I wanted to get -- and all of this is
24 preliminary; this won't take me long when I get to it,
25 because you'll recognize it when I get to it -- is
26 that the Holy Spirit is the continuing community-
27 creating reality that moves through history.

1 And here today, so that -- I'll try to sort of
2 get you started; then I'm going home. But the whole
3 question I want to ask you is: From whatever
4 tradition you have come from, do you believe that the
5 primary effort of the Holy Spirit is to create the
6 community of your own racial or ethnic or religious
7 particularity?

8 Or does the Spirit do some of that and after
9 that's well underway, does the Spirit come back, and
10 say, I built you up into the gated community signaled
11 by the particularity of your religious tradition; now
12 I'm coming back to get you outside the gate, so that
13 you can participate in a broader reality than the
14 particular religious tradition or the racialistic
15 group or the cultural pattern or the ecclesiastical
16 understanding. That's the fundamental question.

17 And I am here to suggest that the Spirit in
18 these times, using the President of the United States,
19 comes back and says to us, I want you now, from
20 wherever you have come, whatever your hue, whatever
21 your tradition, I want you to know that you are only
22 one franchise in the cosmic business that the Lord's
23 got going.

24 Now, I don't know --

25 (Applause.)

26 REV. DR. FORBES: Now I'm really ready to get
27 started on the sermon, but there's one more thing I

1 need to say before I get started. I have to quote my
2 predecessor, Harry Emerson Fosdick, who so far as I
3 can tell -- they say I'm the first African American
4 pastor at Riverside, but in terms of Fosdick's
5 methodology, I don't know whether he influenced Black
6 preaching or whether he was influenced by Black
7 preaching. I mean, the brother knows how to work an
8 image.

9 Do you remember the sermon that he did, a sermon
10 about catching the wrong bus? Now a man lighted was
11 on his way to Kansas City, and when he arrived, he
12 asked for Harmon Street, and they said, There is no
13 Harmon Street here. He says, I know there is a Harmon
14 Street; I know my Kansas City. But upon further
15 inquiry, it was discovered that he was in Detroit.
16 Fosdick said he had caught the wrong bus.

17 Then he goes on to say, now that kind of thing
18 happens all the time. Couples come before me and I
19 marry them, only six months to have them come back,
20 tattered and torn and broken. Only too late did they
21 discover they had caught the wrong bus. At any rate,
22 that's the kind of way he preached.

23 But I like this one, too. Fosdick says -- the
24 sermon was, Mankind's Deepest Need: The Sense of
25 Community. He says a single look at the world reveals
26 how deplorably we are split up into fragmentaries and
27 conflicting individuals and groups. We often say that

1 this is a crazy world and the French "ecrase" means
2 broken and shattered. We are torn. He says we even
3 pray, Our Father, but then we move on and act like
4 "our" has no value.

5 Then here's where he sounds like a Black
6 preacher. He said the most desirable things in the
7 world, the most desirable blessings in human life come
8 from fellowship, from beautiful things being put
9 together, a right sense of their community.

10 Now, listen to this Black preacher. God cried
11 out to a hydrogen and cried out to oxygen, saying, Say
12 "our." It's not my oxygen; it's not my hydrogen.
13 Say, "Our." And he said, when hydrogen and oxygen
14 learn how to say "our," then you had the beautiful
15 trickling brook and you had the rain and the mist, and
16 you had the vibrant brook. Now, he sounds like a
17 Black preacher to me.

18 (Applause.)

19 REV. DR. FORBES: Well, enough of that general
20 stuff. Let's get down to the text. I want to talk
21 about Peter on the housetop, and as I talk about this,
22 I really have race in mind. It is interesting that
23 with what George Kelsey said, I now always speak of
24 race as religion, because in the United States of
25 America, race is religion. It is a competitive
26 religion, but nevertheless, in some situations, it is
27 a coordinated religion.

1 People can love Christ and still race becomes
2 the God with the altar at which they kneel. Some
3 folks can be Jewish, and they kneel at the God of
4 their faith, but then race has also an altar set up,
5 if only on the side; whether you're Muslim or Buddhist
6 or Hindu doesn't matter. All of us in this country
7 are influenced by race.

8 It always offers itself as another god. It
9 doesn't ask all the time for full-time service. It'll
10 let you off to go to church on Sunday or Saturday or
11 Friday night, as long as you come on out and act like
12 you are supposed to according to the place where
13 you're supposed to be.

14 Well, let's go with Peter on the housetop. What
15 I see there is on the housetop, we have a man who has
16 the particularity of his religious tradition, but it
17 functions also in a way that builds him up but has the
18 tendency to create a kind of an exclusive motif.

19 And let me stop right here and say to the rabbi.
20 Rabbi, I have been wrestling with the issue of kosher.
21 Let me confess publicly here. I want to confess
22 publicly. Most of the time, when there ain't nobody
23 looking, we Christian preachers use this as saying,
24 This was a pattern which he had to overcome, because
25 there wasn't any need of him being kosher; he should
26 open up and eat whatever the Lord provided, and we get
27 him Christianized fully and then he's no longer

1 kosher.

2 Today I want to say, I think I understand it
3 differently. I think that whatever kosher means
4 within the Jewish tradition, every tradition has its
5 kosher-izing dynamic. Every tradition that is
6 nurtured has things you do and things you don't do,
7 and the way I want to move on this sermon is to say,
8 if you observe what happens to Simon Peter on the
9 housetop, you will observe what I believe is necessary
10 to deliver this nation from its racism, so that we can
11 get on with being one people under God.

12 So now I'm looking here, let me just say what
13 happened. Peter's up on the housetop. And God wants
14 to call him to be a human race activist. God, who has
15 nurtured him in the particularity of his own
16 tradition, wants now to move him on, not to the
17 abandonment of that which was rich and vital in his
18 tradition, but not to let him get stuck in the kind of
19 narrowness that is always quarantined behind the gate.

20 So what God does is deals with what already is
21 working in him. He's sleepy, and he's hungry. So the
22 Lord -- I like the way the Lord does. The Lord knows
23 how to get our attention. The Lord comes to us in a
24 form that is congenial with what is required to get us
25 at the place where we have a crisis that makes it
26 necessary for us to say yes or no.

27 So the Lord puts him to sleep. What happens

1 while he's asleep? Do you know why you've got to
2 do -- let me offer to the President: Many people have
3 to do their racial justice conversations in a daze.
4 If they're wide awake, they have their defense
5 mechanisms operating, so you have to slip in under the
6 level of most people's awareness to get this thing
7 done.

8 Get them half asleep -- I didn't say half drunk;
9 I said half asleep -- and then you really get to the
10 heart of what the issue. So the Lord let down this
11 great sheet with all these strange things in it that
12 were off limits in terms of his dietary restrictions,
13 and while this happened, the Lord said to him, Rise,
14 Peter; kill and eat. And Peter said, No; nothing
15 common or unclean has ever gone into my mouth.

16 And the Lord does this three times. For those
17 of you who are Trinitarians, this is helpful, because
18 three times means, I really mean it, y'all. That's
19 what three times means. I really mean it.

20 So Peter has to deal with this fact, that his
21 conditioning -- I think I'm on the case now -- his
22 conditioning within his own context of nurture has
23 brought him to the place where he is locked into that
24 pattern of his upbringing.

25 Now, the point I'm really trying to make is that
26 in times past, we have said he needed to overcome his
27 Jewishness in order to become fully Christian, in

1 order that as Christian, he could embrace the
2 Gentiles.

3 But I just want to look at it more broadly,
4 since we're talking about race; namely, the way we are
5 nourished, the ideologies we buy, the myths we are
6 exposed to, leads some folks to be locked into a
7 pattern that they find difficult to get beyond.

8 If you were nourished in a context that said, Us
9 folks are the apple of God's eye, then it becomes a
10 matter of the way your nerve endings fit in your
11 stomach and attach to your spinal cord and react in
12 your brain that tells you, I can't do that. That's
13 how deep race factors are in us.

14 (Applause.)

15 REV. DR. FORBES: That's how deep it is, so
16 don't you think that some seminar is going to get you
17 over it here. Don't you just think that one dream is
18 going to get you over it. It requires the delicate
19 weaning process of the Holy Spirit that gets us beyond
20 what the Spirit has already brought us to, which
21 raises two questions for me.

22 You all will debate it this afternoon. I'm
23 interested in this thing called race. I've got some
24 questions about it. I want to ask you this. Is race
25 real? Is it real? I mean, is there any ontological
26 significance to the distinctions we make about it? Is
27 it the conveyor of solid biological and physiological

1 data that can really stand for something that looks
2 like scientific scrutiny?

3 Or are there minor truths surrounding racial
4 understanding? Isn't it so mixed with self-serving
5 and self-deprecating myths, that anytime you use this
6 kind of language, you're already doomed to distorting
7 and destructive possibilities? Does Bell curve
8 research begin with an ideological research which
9 ensures that no matter what they say, it ain't going
10 to make no heavenly sense?

11 I want to raise this question, and I would like
12 for any of you as religious leaders, since I don't
13 have time to develop a sermon, may I give you this
14 outline to work on? I want each of you, sometime when
15 you get a chance, to ask about race. What is it good
16 for? Write that down and ponder it.

17 What is this thing called "race," which
18 obviously is an artificial concept, what's it good
19 for? And then on the other side of the paper, turn it
20 over, other side of the paper, and ask: What's it bad
21 for? May I start the list for you, and then I'm going
22 to tell you what happened to Peter and then I should
23 be through.

24 Let me tell you what I think race is good for.
25 By the way, I'm not here to knock race, except that it
26 is an artificial construct, as long as we understand
27 it ain't real. I mean, you line us all up here, you

1 wouldn't know exactly where to put the line of
2 demarcation, would you? You could measure my cephalic
3 index, and some of you all got noses just like me, so,
4 I mean, it's not real, not really real, but only real
5 in terms of what is perceived as its own reality
6 constructed.

7 But let me talk about what I think race is good
8 for, and, everybody, don't feel discriminated against.
9 Everybody in here's got one, if you buy into these
10 kind of categories. Race is good for reflecting the
11 beauty and diversity of God's continuing creation.

12 Isn't that something, that God is not one kind
13 of ice cream, that God was always part -- there ain't
14 no more Howard Johnson's anymore. Which one has all
15 these -- Baskin Robbins. How many flavors have they
16 got? God was in this business long before Baskin
17 Robbins came along. I mean, they've got all sorts of
18 things. And isn't that wonderful.

19 You almost start salivating when you go into the
20 ice cream shop of humankind and see the beauty and
21 variety, so that's what -- one thing race is good for,
22 just wonderful.

23 It's also good for affirmative action. By the
24 way, that's what race is for. Race is for affirmative
25 action. That means it is for helping people to have
26 a predisposition to act affirmatively towards those
27 who are similar to themselves, similar hair color,

1 similar nasal apparatus, similar hue, similar texture.

2 I mean, folks like me -- I mean, the mirror
3 image of folks like me reinforces that. Because we
4 are similar, we will look out for each other, because
5 we're kind of together. I mean, the truth is, it's
6 obvious that me and my folks, that we were cut from
7 the same cloth, and it should be obvious that you and
8 your folks were cut from the same cloth.

9 And there's a natural tendency to provide
10 affirmative action for that which is clearly part of
11 you. And what happens is affirmative action means
12 that I will do whatever is necessary to help out the
13 folks that are kind of like me, have common interests,
14 as Erich Fromm talks about, eat the same food, dig the
15 same music, take the same approach to things. We'll
16 look out for each other. That's what I call
17 affirmative action.

18 Nobody in here ever made it without some
19 community. When you had whooping cough and measles
20 and childhood diseases and bad cold and mumps and flu
21 and all that stuff, people stopped their jobs. I
22 mean, they inconvenienced themselves to provide
23 affirmative action for you, to get you up and moving
24 along. That's what race is for, to kind of make you
25 feel like you want to be nice to these people because
26 they are my people. That's what it's good for.

27 And, furthermore, it's also good for providing

1 the opportunity to cultivate respect for others, so
2 that there's some folks that don't look like you; your
3 parents can say, Now, they are different, but they are
4 human beings, too, so it gives you a kind of
5 difference over against which to develop a kind of
6 respect for other.

7 It happens with boys and girls. This is a girl
8 over here; see how she is. This is a boy. You all
9 must respect each other. This is a black one; this is
10 a white one. You all must respect each other.

11 Race is good to give you a preliminary head
12 start into a sophistication of relatedness to the
13 other. Race is good for that.

14 It is also good help people to cultivate such a
15 sense of self-affirmation that they are now free and
16 mature enough to be able to affirm the other.

17 Now, I want to shift to my other side of my
18 ledger now. That's what race is good for, and thank
19 God for it. By the way, one of the major racial
20 problems in the United States of America is that
21 because of the history and because of the obvious
22 hidden and denied shame of racial discrimination and
23 prejudices and forms of white supremacy, white people
24 in America don't know how to affirm themselves like
25 they ought to, and I have dedicated myself to creating
26 a society where white folks can do whatever they need
27 to do, so they can affirm themselves.

1 It's a burden on me for you not to be able to
2 affirm yourself. It's a problem to me that you can't
3 affirm yourself, because you project on me the
4 unresolved energy that ought to be spent on
5 celebrating yourself, and then you end up denigrating
6 me. That's a problem; we got to help white folks in
7 America to feel good about themselves, whatever they
8 need to do.

9 If there's got to be some repenting, repent. If
10 there's got to be some sanctifying, get sanctified.
11 If you've got have a tarry service, tarry. Get
12 through with it, and come on, and let's work together.

13 Well, what's race bad for? Race is bad when you
14 use it as a source of protection against other human
15 beings. That's a bad thing. Race is bad when you use
16 it to cultivate a sense of superiority over against
17 other people of different races. That's bad.

18 Race is a bad thing when it is used as a
19 justification of special privileges, possessions and
20 prerogatives. That's bad. Race is a bad thing when
21 you use it to convene a kind of unofficial committee
22 meeting to discover who is the scapegoat that you can
23 pin all of your internal conflicts on. That's bad.

24 It's bad to use race as a benchmark against
25 which to measure yourself as the apple of God's eye,
26 like you're the teacher's pet. That's bad. It's bad
27 when race is used to develop theories of supremacy and

1 to claim inordinate power and control. It's really
2 bad when race is chosen to create one's own ethnicity
3 into an idolatrous status and to actually compete with
4 God in assigning value to everybody else. That's bad.

5 And the problem with badness in race is it
6 reveals that now in the age of the turnback of
7 affirmative action, most people are for AAS, and they
8 problem is they are not for AAO. AAS is everybody
9 wants affirmative action for themselves, but they
10 ain't mature enough to seek affirmative action for
11 others, and the Holy Ghost is interested in creating
12 a society where there is human relatedness and
13 affirmative action for all.

14 So, anyway, why don't I act like I'm ending by
15 closing up my notes. I'm going to act like I'm
16 getting through. I'll close up my notes.

17 So here's the way I want to come on in: Simon
18 Peter on the housetop. And this is what we religious
19 communities will have to do. We will have to help our
20 members have housetop experiences, where they can
21 first of all discover that growth which stops
22 prematurely becomes a burden to God who is ever onward
23 calling us to wholeness.

24 So Simon is up there, and he is one of the best,
25 because I know my Roman Catholic brothers and sisters
26 here are not going to let me mess over Simon Peter,
27 because he became the first Pope of Rome. I

1 understand that, so I ain't going to mess over him.

2 But the truth is he represents us all. Maybe
3 that's the pontifical reality we got to deal with,
4 that all of us, from the top to the bottom, have the
5 tendency to grow so much and then get comfortable in
6 the cradle of the context of our formation, get so we
7 want to stay right there, and furthermore, hold on to
8 our security blanket, and won't even share the
9 security blanket with anybody else, because this is my
10 security blanket. That's a bad thing.

11 Simon Peter up there and when the Lord reveals
12 to him. If you have not had it revealed it to you
13 what it is about your life that has stopped short of
14 the vision of the beloved community, then you need a
15 housetop experience, so the Lord gives him this
16 experience.

17 When he wakes up, you know what he's saying?
18 He's saying, No, no, no.

19 Am I talking a little too loud? Your hands are
20 in your ears. I want to be sensitive. Am I talking
21 a little bit too loud? You've got a bad ear. Okay.
22 All right, then. That's fine.

23 What I want you to know is that he wakes up
24 saying, No. This conference will not be an effective
25 conference unless somewhere along the line, we create
26 contexts in which people can discover at what points
27 their conditioned reflexes and their reasoned

1 ideologies are saying no to God.

2 All of us are from different religions, but all
3 religions that have grown up reach a stage of
4 encrustation where their fascination with the product
5 of their God's love becomes more meaningful to them
6 than following the mandates of the God who built up
7 the tradition. We all reach the point where something
8 inside says, no, when God says, Let's go.

9 And until we across America experience in
10 religious community what it is like to say no when God
11 says, Let's go, we're in trouble. And then what does
12 God do? Truth is God doesn't let go that easily. So
13 the Holy Spirit lets this thing down time and time and
14 time again, until it finally happens that Peter wakes
15 up.

16 Wake up, my people; wake up. All of you out
17 there talking about, I have a dream; well, it's time
18 to wake up. You ain't going to get much done while
19 you're still dreaming. Wake up to the reality of
20 racial polarization. Wake up to the remnants of
21 supremacist thinking. Wake up to the fact that even
22 sometimes we in our own negativity about ourselves
23 frustrate the plan of God.

24 The Lord kept working with him. It was the Holy
25 Spirit's job. That's why I'm glad I'm Pentecostal in
26 background. I'm Baptist now and UCC, but deep down in
27 my congenital being is the Holy Spirit just keep on

1 needling you, keeps on letting you see yourself, and
2 until you have seen yourself -- my wife says you can't
3 see yourself till you see yourself. I think she's
4 right.

5 The Holy Spirit has to keep on helping you see
6 yourself, and then you find, Oh, my goodness, I am in
7 opposition to the God of creation; who do I think I
8 am? Then finally he has a conversion moment. And
9 maybe this is not primarily conversion to our vision
10 of Christianity; maybe a conversion to saying yes to
11 God. And when he said, yes, it began to happen.

12 First thing he had to do is meet people at his
13 gate and open his gate. Next thing he had to do,
14 after they stayed overnight, violating some of the
15 former rules -- it didn't feel easy; he probably
16 didn't sleep well that night with them Gentiles up in
17 there. But the next morning, he went outside his gate
18 and became a human race activist, went down to
19 Cornelius's house.

20 But don't get it one-sided. Not only is Peter
21 a human race activist, but Cornelius is too, because
22 he reaches across the particularity of his Italian
23 tradition, to receive from this Jewish brother, who
24 had been by way of a Christian tradition; he opens up
25 to them. And that's where I want to leave you here
26 today.

27 I want to say to you that my message is that

1 this kind of meeting actually functions best if we
2 understand that there's a Spirit in here. And the
3 Spirit's purpose is to take you with all of the
4 richness of what you have already developed as a
5 tradition and then take the cold flame and blow you
6 away until your "no" becomes a "yes."

7 And until your "yes" becomes an exclamation --
8 yes, I'll do it; I'll do it -- and if you and I as
9 religious leaders are recruited into the human race
10 activist game, we will go back to our people and first
11 of all make them sensitive to the Spirit; have a
12 revival; have a national revival.

13 On the eve of the new millennium, we need a
14 spiritual revival, where it's not just feeling good
15 and hallelujah, but where we can discover what was it
16 in the first 2,000 years of our Christian experience,
17 and 5,700 -- I don't know what year it is, whatever
18 that year is, within our Abrahamic faith, because
19 millennium is about the Christian thing, and we need
20 to understand that if it's not a holy thing that's
21 inclusive, then ever the millennium becomes a mockery
22 of the love of God, if it's only Christ's dates that
23 did not include the human family.

24 And so I close with a song. I'm going to sing
25 my way through here. And I'm through. Brothers and
26 sisters, when you go back, if your people get the Holy
27 Spirit alive in them and they understand that religion

1 is not about saying, yes; it's about discovering where
2 you're saying, no, and so that you can then hear God's
3 yes, it may be that before the millennium comes
4 around, what the President has started might find us
5 as allies rather than adversaries by the virtue of our
6 indifference and denial.

7 So here's the way I want to close my sermon.

8 (Singing) I looked around the other day and
9 saw, how truly blessed this life of mine has been. I
10 have health, strength, and comfort, peace and joy
11 within, special care in times of desperation, a
12 helping hand when friends are few. So I ask, Dear
13 Lord, what can I do, to turn some thanks to you. I
14 expected mission impossible, a call to service far
15 away.

16 But, instead, this gentle assignment God sends
17 to us each day: Love my children; that's all I ask of
18 you. Love my children; it's the least that you can
19 do. If you love them as I love them, we shall see
20 them safely through. Love yourself; love me, too; but
21 whatever else you do, love my children.

22 (Applause.)

23 REV. DR. COOK: Won't you join me in saying,
24 Wow, with an exclamation. Wow! Let's put our hands
25 together back and forth for a wonderful message.

26 (Applause.)

27 REV. DR. COOK: From a "no" to a God's, "Let's

1 go," hello somebody. What a wonderful message, and we
2 thank you for sharing and taking us to a new place.
3 And we hope this afternoon that we will wrestle with
4 where our "no" is and see ourselves.

5 And to lead us in our discussion this afternoon,
6 as we prepare for the second half, we're going to have
7 our second panel, moderated by Rabbi Edward Cohn from
8 Temple Sinai of New Orleans. We're going to ask that
9 you might join us on the stage.

10 Rabbi Kaplan, Executive Director of the National
11 Conference of Community and Justice, Tampa, Florida;
12 Ms. Barbara Major Crossroads Ministries of New
13 Orleans; Lilia Valdez, Day of Healing of New Orleans;
14 and Rev. Marshall Truehill, the Jeremiah Group in New
15 Orleans.

16 God bless you all. Thank you so much. This is
17 wonderful.

18 I'm going to ask your excusing me. I have two
19 little boys that have not seen me this year, and
20 they're waiting at the airport to take mommy on
21 vacation, and so we pray that it will be a blessed day
22 for you. Thank you so much for having me, and thank
23 you for being a part of it.

24 Pray for the Initiative; pray for the President.
25 Whatever faith you have, pray and hope that some
26 barriers will be removed, and some of our "no"s will
27 be God's "yes." Thank you.

1 (Applause.)

2 RABBI COHN: I think the members of the panel
3 that have just assembled would all agree that this is
4 probably the most miserable position to find oneself
5 in, to follow Dr. Forbes. Quite something.

6 This morning our mayor, Marc Morial, underscored
7 that this is conversation. He said, We're not here to
8 be quiet. I think we need to take home some ideas and
9 some strategies, some successful initiatives toward
10 racial reconciliation and healing.

11 It's long since time to venture out from the
12 comfortable and the known and to bring to our
13 community and to our individual organizations those
14 key elements of success which have been proven to
15 engender understanding, understanding of our diversity
16 as a faith community, as races, and promising elements
17 toward racial and faith healing which are, as has been
18 said already, replicable in our own settings.

19 A story's told -- I love this story. You
20 probably know it, but it helps to repeat it and to
21 think about it. The two old, old friends who took
22 refuge on one dark and snowy evening in a tavern in
23 rural Poland; couldn't have been worse weather
24 outside, and these two old friends had a few tastes of
25 the schnapps and perhaps those powerful liquid spirits
26 loosened their inhibitions and their tongues.

27 And suddenly the one leaned over to the other,

1 and he asked him, So do you really love me. And the
2 other, quite taken aback by the abrupt question,
3 responded, What do you mean; we've known one another
4 all our lives; we've been inseparable; we've been
5 devoted friends from boyhood; our families are as one.

6 The first man then, looking his friend squarely
7 in the eye, asked, Well, then do you know what hurts
8 me. But the second man dismissed the question with a
9 lightly considered reply, I have no idea, to which the
10 first friend got to the point, observing in the most
11 soulful and serious manner, looking his friend
12 squarely in the eye, Until you know what hurts me, you
13 can't possibly love me.

14 We seek today to know and to learn. We dare
15 today to share and to divulge what really hurts us, so
16 that we may learn to genuinely, genuinely love one
17 another.

18 What our panel is asked to do this afternoon is
19 to highlight and to identify for us the key elements
20 of programs in which they have been involved, which
21 have proven to make for success. If you had an
22 imaginary canvas bag, the end of this discussion, it
23 should be full of strategies and thoughts and elements
24 which make for success in healing, in exploration, in
25 dialogue, in love.

26 And we want the members of our panel to share
27 not the details of their various organizations or of

1 their programs or of the symposia of which they are
2 justifiably proud, all of them, but rather, to lay out
3 for us as specifically as possible just what are the
4 elements that lead one to produce a solid program of
5 racial reconciliation within the faith community.

6 How have these panel members succeeded in
7 commingling these ingredients which lead us to
8 understand what hurts us and to finally know what it
9 is to love?

10 Our panel members are:

11 Mr. Roy Kaplan, the executive director, National
12 Conference of Community and Justice, for Tampa Bay,
13 Florida. He has received a number of awards in
14 Florida for his work in civil rights and in race
15 relations, including developing multi-cultural
16 programs for the school systems there.

17 Barbara Major, a native of New Orleans, she is
18 the executive director of the St. Thomas Health
19 Clinic, a nonprofit health clinic providing services
20 to the under-served and uninsured population of the
21 St. Thomas/Irish Channel community. She is a core
22 trainer for Crossroads Ministries, where she connects
23 her local organizing to teaching anti-racism to people
24 and institutions that live in or work with struggling
25 communities.

26 Dr. Marshall Truehill, also a native New
27 Orleanian, is currently a doctoral fellow at the

1 University of New Orleans in the Department of Urban
2 Studies where his doctoral dissertation will be
3 entitled, The Role of the Church in Ameliorating
4 Societal Ills. He is pastor of the First United
5 Baptist Church and known for his expertise in ministry
6 in public housing projects.

7 Lilia Valdez, associate professor and assistant
8 dean of students in alumni affairs at the Tulane
9 School of Social Work, she is an active member of the
10 community, serving on a number of important boards,
11 including our absolutely fantastic, remarkable, ever-
12 so-effective New Orleans Human Relations Committee,
13 and the Affirmative Action Committee of the National
14 Association of Social Workers, Louisiana Chapter. She
15 has also served as an elder of the First Presbyterian
16 Church here in New Orleans.

17 I think we'll start with our presentations,
18 starting with you, Lilia, just to confuse everybody
19 and start from this direction.

20 MS. VALDEZ: Okay. We'll confuse everybody.
21 But first a disclaimer: I appreciate the honor of the
22 title, but I don't believe in claiming anything that
23 does not belong to me. I am not a doctor, but -- I
24 want to be real clear with that.

25 And I was asked today to talk about the Day of
26 Healing, which was a project that we at the Human
27 Relations Committee wanted to put together. We were

1 working to tory to improve the relations in the city
2 over a period of time by taking complaints from
3 various members of the community or cases that were
4 seen as being discriminatory.

5 But we also wanted to be able to do something
6 concrete, so we decided to pull together people in the
7 community who had already been working in the area of
8 race relations, to come together as a group for a Day
9 of Healing, not unlike what we're doing today.

10 So we had the participation of Eracism, which
11 began with the efforts of Rhoda Faust and Brenda
12 Johnson after the series of articles in the Times-
13 Picayune of "Together Apart," which highlighted the
14 tensions that existed in the city with race relations.

15 And I had participated in some of the
16 discussions and seen what an incredible experience, to
17 have people coming together who had never probably
18 ever crossed paths before, and to discuss in a very
19 respectful manner issues of great concern and
20 discomfort and pain, so that was one of the
21 beginnings, because of the way they do -- they are
22 able to talk to each other and the model of Eracism is
23 to treat others with love and respect, and I think
24 that is what we are all about in terms of bringing
25 forth what the Spirit has brought us to do together.

26 I worked with Lance Hill, who has also done a
27 lot of work in the community, finding Common Ground,

1 and also established ways of getting us to talk
2 together on difficult subjects. He's brought his
3 Common Ground training throughout the community and
4 the state and nationwide, and he and Rhoda are members
5 from the MAC, Metropolitan Area Committee, who are
6 also interested in human relations, came together,
7 along with the Toomey Center for Justice, and Pace
8 Through Justice, from Loyola University.

9 And these groups had all been working together.
10 We had hoped that we could get Barbara, but Barbara's
11 going to be working on other things. So this has been
12 a wonderful opportunity for me, because it's also
13 given me ideas, in talking to Ray Kaplan.

14 So we had these two Days of Healing, one in
15 November where people came together, and at the end of
16 the day, one of the participants told me that she
17 wasn't sure if we had accomplished what our goals had
18 been, but that she talked to people that she never
19 otherwise would have had the opportunity to come
20 together with, and from there grew other ideas. And
21 I thought that it was successful. This is exactly
22 what the goals are. One to one, we're going to be
23 able to change the dynamics of this city.

24 We had a second Day of Healing from the ideas
25 that were generated that day. What are the common
26 concerns that the city holds, that need to be
27 addressed on a level that is not being blocked by

1 racial divisions? So we talked about crime and
2 violence and education at that time.

3 This meeting today has certainly reignited and
4 re-energized me, and I hope to be able to continue to
5 work with the Human Relations Commission in some
6 capacity, because we do need to bring this program,
7 this Day of Healing, to the communities, which was our
8 next step. We decided to bring it to the communities,
9 rather than have the people come to one area. We
10 would have several meetings, and from talking to Dr.
11 Kaplan, I think that we need to work more with our
12 youth, which is one of the charges that the mayor had
13 given us.

14 So I think that when we work with people with
15 deep commitments and profound beliefs about justice
16 and faith, we can make this difference, and I think
17 the Day of Healing was a beginning, and we're now, I
18 think, ready to move forward with some more action.

19 Thank you.

20 REV. TRUEHILL: I'm Rev. Marshall Truehill, and
21 I'm pastor of First United Baptist Church in New
22 Orleans; also executive director of Faith in Action
23 Evangelistic Team, which has focused its ministry
24 primarily on public housing.

25 There are two experiments I want to tell you
26 about. One has been very successful and is continuing
27 to be a success, and the other was a learning

1 experience that had some degree of success and then
2 failed. And I think a part of what we are here today
3 to do is not only to learn what is successful, but we
4 near to learn from what is not successful as well.

5 But I want to set a context for it, as I begin.
6 First of all, I want to remind us that our focus today
7 is on race and not on religion. Religion is a medium
8 by which we can ameliorate the negative effects of
9 racism, and I think sometimes I tend to see some of us
10 leaning more toward religion, which I think is a means
11 of our escaping the real issue which is race.

12 As a faith community, God has called us to be in
13 partnership with him and leading the world to himself.
14 And we are called from and out of the old order, into
15 his new order. And in the new order, none is
16 excluded; all are included. And the superficial
17 devices which separated and fragmented us are torn
18 down, so that race, ethnicity, socioeconomics, and
19 gender don't matter.

20 The problem has been and yet is that the world
21 cannot readily receive our witness because of glaring
22 inconsistencies with the character of God and what the
23 church has been called out to be, so before we can
24 effectively and thoroughly deal with the soul of the
25 community, we must deal with the soul of the church.

26 We've tended to be racists, classists, and
27 sexist in our stewardship of the Gospel. It is past

1 time that we work through these inconsistencies and
2 ideologies which oppose the purpose of God, that we
3 might get on with the ministry at hand.

4 Unfortunately, and to our shame, there is need
5 for us in the church to be reconciled to each other,
6 and we've heard much of that today. Somehow we didn't
7 understand that reconciliation to God of necessity
8 meant to be reconciled to one another; hence, the
9 barriers of race, ethnicity, socioeconomics and gender
10 are disregarded in God's order.

11 Back in 1995, I was part of an experiment, I'm
12 calling it now, where Faith in Action Baptist Mission
13 Church and Central Baptist Church, one predominantly
14 Black, one predominantly white, merged together with
15 two pastors, one Black, one white. Prior to 1995, we
16 spent 18 months in combined services, and for those 18
17 months, things worked like clockwork, smooth as glass
18 practically.

19 Then we merged in '95, and that merger lasted
20 for a little bit over a year, and things kind of fell
21 apart. We learned some things out of that experiment.
22 We learned what it takes to bring such a merger
23 together, and we learned, if by no other way than by
24 default, what will destroy such a merger.

25 And before I finish today, I want to give you
26 quickly eight principles of reconciliation that I
27 think will help ameliorate race between us, the

1 problems of race between us.

2 I want us to understand, though, that there can
3 be no genuine repentance and forgiveness until there
4 has first been confession or conversation, in order to
5 understand the magnitude of the hurt, the depth of the
6 pain, the intensity of the anger, and the weight of
7 the guilt that is repressed rather than expressed.

8 The biggest problem I think we have is that we
9 cannot talk about race. We'd rather talk about
10 religion. We'd rather talk about diversity. Those
11 terms are palatable to us. But when the subject
12 becomes race or racism, we can't even say it.

13 One author said race is like a pile of pooh in
14 the middle of the floor, and we all walk around it
15 like it's not there, but we all smell it, and we know
16 it's there, but we act like it's not there. And some
17 of us are doing that here today, that we're not really
18 facing the issue that has torn this nation apart and
19 still has the potential to tear this nation and every
20 other entity that we're involved in where people cross
21 the racial line apart.

22 White people as well as Blacks have tremendous
23 burdens in their chests that need to be unloaded, so
24 that our souls can rest easier, and so if any
25 enterprise where people of other races are going to
26 come together and work, there must be dialogue and
27 listening. And for there to be dialogue and

1 listening, there must be some ground rules laid, and
2 I have three here that we used.

3 One, all must be considered equal. I cannot
4 assume that because I have a doctorate and you only
5 have a high school education, that you have nothing to
6 teach me. All must listen to learn what the speaker
7 has to teach, not simply to say, and there must be a
8 climate where none should fear being labeled or
9 otherwise receive reprisals for what they have to say.
10 There must be that kind of climate.

11 There must also be a common understanding of
12 terminology, because what whites call racism, Blacks
13 think of it as something else. What Blacks call
14 racism, whites think of it as something different.
15 And I think the most critical issues must be talked
16 through.

17 One of the problems we had in our merger:
18 Things were going very, very well, and I should tell
19 you that the merger was comprised of predominantly
20 young Blacks and older whites. When all the tough
21 issues came up -- and we merged this church at the
22 height of the O.J. trial, with the demise of
23 Affirmative Action, the governor's race where Cleo
24 Fields was a candidate.

25 None of those issues did the members want to
26 talk about. I said, Look, these things have the
27 potential to destroy this church; we need to talk

1 about these things. They said, Don't rock the boat.
2 I said, If God's on board, let the boat rock; it won't
3 sink.

4 But we didn't talk about those things. We did
5 not have conversation around those things, and
6 eventually, the lack of conversation, the lack of
7 dialogue, lack of listening tore at the fabric of the
8 merger.

9 Got to talk through the critical issues and time
10 must be intentionally, deliberately made for such
11 dialogue to take place. Let me give you the
12 principles by which we attempted to do this.

13 One, we had to make a commitment to the
14 relationship, that it was a marriage of sort, and that
15 divorce was not an option. That commitment needs to
16 be made, so that when the time gets tough, we stay at
17 the table. When I get angry with you or you get angry
18 with me, and our differences are glaring to the point
19 that they're getting on our nerves, we have a
20 commitment made in advance that will keep us at the
21 table.

22 My wife and I made some decisions before we were
23 married that has helped to keep our marriage together
24 through the tough times.

25 Secondly, there must be intentionality. And
26 these eight principles, I should say, are not mine.
27 They're not original.

1 There must be purposeful, positive, planned
2 activities that facilitate reconciliation. You have
3 to do it on purpose. It's not going to just happen,
4 from both perspectives. That has to happen.

5 There must be sincerity, which is a willingness
6 to be vulnerable, to let the guard down, to let the
7 walls down, willingness to self-disclose your own
8 prejudices, to say what it has been that you thought
9 about the other in your formative years and years of
10 interaction with people, and that must be done with a
11 goal of resolution and building trust.

12 Here's something we picked up. Our members
13 attempted and did practice for a time avoiding WWB and
14 BBW, which is to avoid white people talking to white
15 people about Black people, and Black people talking to
16 Black people about white people.

17 Now, in mixed company, we say all the
18 politically correct things. When Blacks get together,
19 we talk about whites like we talked about them before
20 we attempted to come together, and whites do the same
21 thing. When whites get together with whites, they
22 talk about Blacks as some nasty thing. We have to
23 intentionally and on purpose avoid that kind of
24 conversation.

25 The sensitivity has to be intentional, the
26 intentional acquisition of knowledge, in order to
27 relate empathetically to other people -- to people of

1 other races.

2 There must be, number five, interdependence;
3 that is, a recognition of difference, a recognition of
4 diversity, but also a realization that each offers
5 what the other needs, resulting in equality of
6 relationships. You have something I need, and I have
7 something you need.

8 And the other experiment with Faith in Action,
9 we're a small organization that has focused primarily
10 on public housing for nearly 25 years. My time's up,
11 but let me just quickly say this. We were successful
12 in getting white suburbanites to come to public
13 housing communities, to make a 15- -- minimum 15-year
14 commitment to work in that community and help reach
15 people, to bridge a gap, to have a cross-cultural
16 experience, so that some young kids that we've worked
17 with actually grew up, being exposed to white culture,
18 and those white kids who came grew up being exposed to
19 Black culture, and there was some good things that
20 came out of that.

21 So I'm out of time and draw to a close.

22 RABBI COHN: You're on.

23 MS. MAJOR: There's no preference up here to
24 preachers that they get more time than anybody else.
25 I already consider myself equal, so I'll consider as
26 much time as Marshall, who's a good friend of mine.

27 One of the things that I -- I work with

1 Crossroads Ministry. I also am a core trainer with a
2 group called the People's Institute for Survival and
3 Beyond, and I think when I look at what works and what
4 doesn't work, I think first and foremost about both of
5 those organizations, what has worked is that we tell
6 the truth.

7 What concerns me a great deal and what I see at
8 places like this is what I call a conspiracy of
9 politeness, that we don't tell the truth because we
10 don't want to hurt each other, and the fact is we hurt
11 each other every day.

12 We look at racism as a sin, point blank. It is
13 sinful; it was created to divide the human family, and
14 it has. We also want -- we don't want to talk about
15 racism, so let me say it at least three times so we
16 can get over it: Racism, racism, racism. We can say
17 it in this room, because we sit down, be quiet, don't
18 want to talk about it, don't want to put the real deal
19 out there.

20 You also cannot separate the church -- my
21 biggest struggle working with Crossroads is why would
22 I want to go work in the church, because I had my
23 struggles with the church, and Joe Barret, who has
24 been a mentor to me, white Lutheran minister who,
25 thank God, the church may not have called him to tell
26 the truth, but God did, started dealing with racism a
27 long time ago, and started based on the fact that a

1 Black man, some of you might know as Stokely
2 Carmichael, told Joe who was out in Chicago at the
3 time, saving Black people, to go home and free his own
4 people.

5 See, we got to get over the myth that it's just
6 not people of color who are captive by what racism is.
7 We spend all of our time studying racism, even in the
8 church, what it does to people of color. We've got to
9 deal with racism, what it also does for white people,
10 and ultimately how it encases and imprisons all of us,
11 based on the internalization of racial inferiority and
12 the internalization of racial superiority, that we
13 can't break the chains of this evil that destroys us
14 and is destroying the nation and always has.

15 Crossroads has developed, along with other
16 congregations, an assessment tool. One of the things
17 that's been real interesting, also, when I think about
18 church -- and I had to come back to the church,
19 because that's where I started. I come out of
20 sanctified and Baptist. I am Baptist. I don't know
21 if the Baptists always claim me, but I don't know
22 there's one minister back there who would claim me and
23 a couple more, but I come out of Baptist tradition.

24 You put it out there on the floor, because my
25 thing is if it's not on the table, it's under the
26 table. We had these conversations, and I think they
27 are so wishy-washy, it sickens me, because I have to

1 go back to the community where people are dying every
2 day, so I don't have time just to kind of glaze over
3 what the deal is.

4 Racism in and of itself wasn't created just to
5 hurt people of color. We all work on our own
6 definitions of what racism is, and historically it has
7 been white people who have told those of us who were
8 oppressed by racism what the definition of our
9 oppression is.

10 Now, we need to struggle around what racism is
11 and what it really does. As it oppresses me, it's
12 given some privileges to white people. That's
13 something else that folk don't even want to be
14 identified. I think there are some people called
15 white people; I think there's some called white
16 dominant culture, and we deal with a program that
17 looks institutionally --

18 See, it's beyond just touchy-feely, individual,
19 I love you, Rabbi, and you love me back, but the
20 bottom line is racism continuously kills my community
21 and kills yours as well, because there's no way, with
22 the interconnectedness of us as human beings, it can't
23 destroy one set of people and not destroy the other.

24 We got to talk about power, institutional,
25 systemic power, and what it does. There is no system
26 in America that was not created for white people, and
27 we got some institutions of color that mimic white

1 institutions, basically set up to serve white people,
2 even some of our Black churches, even some of them.

3 Out of our oppressed confusion, we allow the
4 oppression to continue by not calling the truth.
5 White-skin privilege and power got to be dealt with in
6 the church. See, I like to push people to their
7 growing edge, because then I can talk to you. Then we
8 don't have to play with each other.

9 You're going to know just where I'm coming from,
10 and we can lay it out on the table. We've been lying
11 to each other too long, and we look at events as those
12 things that divide us. We have been a divided nation.

13 I learned a long time ago with my own struggle
14 and relationship with the Creator -- see, I come out
15 of a movement that said I didn't know why God created
16 white people; I grew up under apartheid in this United
17 States. Folk give it colorful names, but that's what
18 it was.

19 And I had to get in touch with my humanity,
20 because one of my mentors said to me, To the degree
21 that you see any human being as less than a human
22 being, you are to that same degree out of touch with
23 what it means to be a human being.

24 We live in a nation from its inception has been
25 out of touch with what it means to be human, because
26 in its very founding documents, it labeled certain
27 sectors of this society as less than human, and every

1 institution carries that definition of us out, and
2 until we can look, as Crossroads does, we're talking
3 about 30-year plans in an institution, to first
4 examine, where's racism imbedded within my
5 institution; then to train teams --

6 If racism has been institutionalized -- and
7 maybe some of you don't believe that it has, but we
8 do. That's the analysis that we work off. If racism
9 has been institutionalized, then anti-racism can be
10 institutionalized as well.

11 This stuff we didn't create in this room. We
12 helped to perpetuate it, people of color as well as
13 people now called white. We helped to perpetuate it,
14 but you've got to believe -- because what racism does
15 as well is it destroys our ability to believe that
16 there can be a world absence of oppression. It has
17 destroyed our ability to even dream of such a world.

18 We don't see racism -- some of us, we get into
19 the discussion of, well, is it racism or capitalism.
20 See, we waste a lot of time debating the mama-ism that
21 destroys us as a nation. We cannot build a movement
22 to take on oppression in this nation across race and
23 cultural lines, because racism always divides us. It
24 always has, and until we're willing to deal with what
25 it really is --

26 See, I love to come to Days of Healing, but,
27 see, a Day of Healing, when you're not helping me

1 dismantle the institutions which take away the
2 humanity of me and mine, I got some problems with
3 that. It is dangerous to be sincere with the
4 insincere.

5 Genocide happens every day in this country, and
6 we sit here, those of us who call ourselves religious.
7 I am not a theologian. I'm a grassroots community
8 organizer who knows that God I see every day in the
9 faces of the people who are oppressed, who don't have
10 housing, who can't buy medicine.

11 That's where I found and hooked up with my God,
12 and God says to me that I called you to do justice,
13 and when I was baptized, I gave you another name, and
14 you act out that name, and that is to take on evil any
15 way you see it, any time, any place, and if folk ain't
16 comfortable, guess what. Too bad.

17 (Applause.)

18 MS. MAJOR: We don't have the right to jump to
19 the defense of the structure that destroys people's
20 humanity. We just don't have that right. We were
21 given life, and that life was given to us to ensure
22 that life is protected.

23 We were given an earth to have a relationship to
24 and be stewards of, not to own, to dominate, to
25 control. Every person born -- and if you're a
26 Christian, I can't -- there's no relationship to me
27 with Christianity and racist. You can't not take on

1 racist structures. And what I'm saying to folk here
2 who belong to churches and denominations: You ain't
3 got to go outside to find racism; look in your own
4 institution.

5 And I guarantee you it's so bedded so deep
6 there, it's going to take a lot of digging to get it
7 out, but it can happen. And there are programs that
8 assist people. We have a plan no shorter than 30
9 years, so that means some of us might not be here, but
10 if we institutionalize it, we'll know that work will
11 continue.

12 (Applause.)

13 DR. KAPLAN: One of the advantages of going last
14 is to be able to reflect on the people who spoke
15 before, but it's also a disadvantage in being compared
16 to them, and some of the things that I had planned to
17 say, I'm not sure I need to repeat.

18 First of all, I want to bring you greetings from
19 the National Conference for Community and Justice,
20 which was founded in 1927 as the National Conference
21 of Christians and Jews. We changed our name a few
22 weeks ago, so that we represent an organization that's
23 a human relations organization that is inclusive. We
24 don't exclude anybody; we don't want anybody to think
25 that they're not welcome.

26 Our mission is to fight bias, bigotry, and
27 racism, and we do it through educational programs and

1 conflict resolution and advocacy. I'm the director of
2 the chapter for the Tampa Bay area. We have 65
3 chapters around the United States, including one here
4 in New Orleans. Our director here is very pregnant,
5 and that's why she can't be here today, so I send
6 greetings from Stephanie Bridges as well.

7 I have a lot to say. You know, I'm not a rabbi.
8 My parents might like to think that, but I am a Ph.D.
9 in sociology. I've been in this position as the
10 director in Tampa Bay for nine years. I was a
11 professor for 20 years before that, and being in this
12 position allows me to actually work in areas that I
13 had written about or studied.

14 It's much different; it's applied, although I'm
15 still a teacher, and I'm learning more things every
16 day.

17 I think that one of the things we have to look
18 at is why the President asked the faith community to
19 get involved in this very important task, and that is
20 because the faith communities have traditionally been
21 looked at as the possessors of the moral high ground
22 in our society, the leaders, the people who are there
23 to demonstrate by their actions and their words to the
24 rest of the people in this country what America stands
25 for.

26 And unfortunately, it's very difficult to get
27 some of you to get involved in these very difficult

1 issues. We organized a religion and education summit
2 last fall, in September, and we had Secretary Riley
3 there and our governor and a number of other people.
4 And it took us five months of planning, and I think we
5 had probably about 150, a similar number, all together
6 about 400 people there that day.

7 But it's very, very difficult to get members of
8 the faith community, especially the clergy, involved
9 in these kinds of activities. I'll get into that in
10 a few minutes.

11 One thing I did want to point out, because Rev.
12 Forbes asked the question rhetorically, but I will
13 tell you that scientists have demonstrated that human
14 beings -- there is no race, that people are 99.8
15 percent identical genetically. There's only two-
16 hundredths of a percent difference, and of that two-
17 hundredths, six-hundredths of that two-hundredths
18 accounts for significant differences. It's
19 infinitesimal. This has been demonstrated
20 conclusively.

21 Scientists are no longer using the term "race,"
22 because it's an invalid, meaningless construct. There
23 are more differences within a particular ethnic group
24 than there are between, so, you know, the Bell curve
25 notwithstanding, these other people who try to
26 artificially create these differences, this is a fact,
27 and yet all of the rest, these insignificant

1 differences account for a tremendous amount of grief
2 and pain and suffering in our society and, indeed,
3 throughout the world.

4 All of that is learned behavior. Children do
5 not know racial differences; they are taught. We have
6 a saying in the National Conference: Nobody's born a
7 bigot. You have to be taught these things, just like
8 that song from South Pacific. You have to be
9 carefully taught to hate and to fear; it has to be
10 whispered in your dear little ear. I'm not going to
11 sing it for you; I won't inflict that on you right
12 now.

13 But I want you to know that there are no
14 significant differences, so if we can only learn that
15 and teach it to our congregants and share it, then
16 maybe people will start to unlearn all of the
17 negativity that exists in our society, so that we have
18 to work together to help break down the barriers among
19 the different racial, religious, and ethnic groups,
20 and we have to demonstrate together the values of
21 peace and love, understanding and acceptance, and
22 these are value that all religions espouse, regardless
23 of your training.

24 All of them have similar core values, but
25 unfortunately either they're not being effectively
26 taught or they're being rejected by some or ignored,
27 so the challenge is to help clergy come to grips with

1 the past and present of racism and all the other isms
2 that afflict our society, so that they can lead their
3 congregants into the future.

4 We have to do this -- and it's been said over
5 and over again, and the National Conference believes
6 very strongly in this. We have to do it through
7 dialogue; that's the earliest, easiest, first step,
8 but it's not that easy for many people, because a lot
9 of people are afraid; a lot of people are very
10 fearful, reluctant.

11 White folks have to be brought to the table, but
12 you can't hammer them. Now, I have not found too
13 objectionable most of the things said today. In other
14 words, I do hundreds of these dialogues. I do them in
15 corporations; I do them in schools on a daily basis.
16 I do them with community service groups.

17 If you can get white folks to the table and
18 create an atmosphere along the lines of what Rev.
19 Truehill was giving us in the guideline for creating
20 dialogues -- I mean, this is one of the things that
21 you can get from Study Skills Research Center up in
22 Pomfret, Connecticut, or the Kettering Foundation or
23 the National Conference, and the President's
24 Initiative just came out with a real thick compendium
25 of how to do dialogue.

26 It's not real difficult. Just be open and
27 honest and respect each other and listen and try to

1 understand, and don't hammer the other people, because
2 you will not see them again. It's painful for some
3 people. Many white people do not understand the
4 concept of white privilege; they do not recognize that
5 it exists. They reject it when you hit them with
6 this. They have to be led very carefully to
7 understand what this means.

8 I'll run some of these other things. We need to
9 do interfaith dialogues that focus not just on
10 religious differences but on racial differences,
11 through study circles. We need to tour; we have to
12 have visitations; we have to get our youth involved;
13 we need pulpit exchanges.

14 We need to have more student and adult education
15 programs, to break down the myths and the stereotypes
16 that exist. We have to work with the school systems,
17 to help them understand that you can teach about
18 religion. You don't teach religion, but you can teach
19 about the culture and the values that religions have
20 to offer, because most of the people in this society
21 are unaffiliated, and many of the kids don't have a
22 clue, and if they do have a clue about religion, it's
23 frequently misinformation.

24 The things that I have heard from children when
25 they share their religious values with one another
26 would make their clergy, I would assume, make them
27 faint dead away. It's unbelievable.

1 We also have to have forums where we can discuss
2 issues and problems and give different perceptions of
3 the situation. We have to -- one thing I would say is
4 very successful: interfaith music festivals, where
5 you can bring people from different faith traditions.
6 not all of them have a big tradition in music, but
7 they can participate at different levels in these
8 things by reading some of their psalms or their
9 scriptures or what have you, but bringing them
10 together.

11 And if you get children's choirs involved, then,
12 of course, the parents and the relatives come, so you
13 can get very large turnouts. We get 1,000, 1,500
14 people sometimes at these things, and that's a great
15 chance to bring people together, and then maybe set up
16 dialogue after that.

17 You have to bring everybody to the table, and
18 you don't quit, because you'll be turned down; people
19 won't show. I had a meeting yesterday to plan
20 something. Two of us were there. We went ahead with
21 the plans; we're not going to quit, because if you
22 quit, you won't get anywhere. And I seemed a little
23 frustrated, and Rev. Free was sitting there, and she
24 said, Look, Mother Theresa said, You don't have to be
25 successful, just faithful. Don't quit.

26 Just a couple other things and I'll be done. We
27 have to form channels of communication among clergy,

1 clergy associations. We have to reinvigorate them.
2 We have to give the clergy a great deal of opportunity
3 to get together and talk. Many of them are burned
4 out; they're tired. You know this. You have to have
5 people there that can share similar experiences and
6 find out you're not alone. You need to have mutual
7 support; you have to bring in --

8 Sometimes if you can't get the clergy to come to
9 some of these events, ask them for their youth
10 minister or their outreach person or their education
11 person, and they'll represent the clergy.

12 So I'll be here to help lead one of the
13 dialogues, and I'll share what I can with you.
14 Hopefully you'll share this with us. And I want to
15 just end by saying, we have to be proactive. We must
16 fight the complacency and the apathy and the
17 ignorance, and we must teach and help one another to
18 value diversity, not tolerate one another but
19 appreciate and understand each other.

20 (Applause.)

21 RABBI COHN: I'm waiting for some kind of signal
22 from those who are keeping time on this. Do we have
23 a little while that we could talk among ourselves on
24 this issue, before we go into the breakout? Okay.
25 You'll let me know. All right?

26 I'd like to ask -- I'd like to just start it off
27 with asking a question, if I may, and if someone in

1 the audience has an answer to this that's beyond the
2 panel members, great. Come up and share your
3 thoughts, too.

4 And that is: Sometimes we do such wonderful
5 programs; we do some of the things that you have
6 mentioned, Roy, particularly. We've had tours; we've
7 done interfaith music celebrations; we have had pulpit
8 exchanges; we've done many things that have been
9 guaranteed to bring people of different races and
10 faiths together. And it's taken a lot of work, and
11 they've been successful.

12 The question is: How do you build relationships
13 that are beyond the one-time big event? Then
14 everybody goes home, and everyone is, Yes, it was
15 nice; oh, we liked the food, and we enjoyed it and
16 everything. And they go back to their respective
17 corners, and in the end, what have we really
18 accomplished except for that one success.

19 How do you build a relationship that continues
20 and that helps us get to the kind of candor that,
21 Barbara, you spoke of us as being essential for real
22 genuine, abiding growth and change in people's minds,
23 and the anti-racism, instituting anti-racism? How can
24 you do that when so often these are one-time events?
25 Anybody --

26 DR. KAPLAN: I'd like to respond, because I
27 think that's an excellent question. It's one that I

1 know Barbara and I talked about earlier, and that's
2 why she wasn't thrilled with something like this
3 because it's a one-shot deal and many people talk
4 about it, Rev. Forbes and others.

5 Very quickly, let me just say that that should
6 serve only as a catalyst. That's just a beginning.
7 If you noted, I mentioned that if you get them to the
8 music festival, you've got 1,000 people or 500 people
9 or whatever, and then you don't let them leave there
10 until you ask them to sign up on the dotted line.

11 You know, one week from today, we're coming back
12 and we're going to have a dialogue about -- in other
13 words, you provide food; you know, you do everything
14 you can to lure people there, but you don't trick
15 them. You say, We're going to talk about some heavy-
16 duty issues. If you have an interest in this, come.
17 A lot of people say, Well, you're preaching to the
18 choir, but it's a starting point.

19 But you don't just have a one-shot deal and say
20 then, We're done, and we all feel good, and we go home
21 and we solve the problem. It's just the catalyst for
22 further action.

23 MS. MAJOR: I think the one-shot deals work only
24 when there is a strategy in place to move beyond the
25 one-shot deal. Usually it is not. It is usually the
26 strategy that we put all our energy into creating the
27 event, and we don't move any further than that.

1 There are mechanisms around in terms of how you
2 create the one-shot event with a strategy and a plan
3 to go forward. See, the other thing is that the
4 expectation that everybody's going to be moved. Folk
5 aren't ready to move; people -- some folk are ready
6 where they are, and some folk need to stay there with
7 them and struggle with them.

8 But some of us don't have the privilege to be
9 stuck where we are. We've got to move, because our
10 lives depend on us moving this dialogue for more than
11 a dialogue. Crossroads Ministries will get -- it's
12 almost -- I tel Joe, I say, Joe, you go in there
13 quick, straight out; put it out there. Racism is race
14 prejudice plus power. Folk who can't hang, leave;
15 folk who are ready to move on it, move on it. See
16 what I'm saying?

17 Not a folk who can't hang and want a little bit
18 more of your stuff to get them ready and all of that,
19 but, see, even that is a privilege. See how we even
20 got to talk about others of privilege. I don't have
21 that privilege. You know, I just can't sit there
22 sometimes and try to make everybody comfortable and
23 feel good, when I got to look in the faces every day
24 with the real deal stuff.

25 So it's like, We got to picture people. You
26 know, like I don't beat people over the whole,
27 because I said, I ain't got time to beat white people

1 over the head. I travel all over this country. If I
2 wanted to beat white folk over the head, I'd stay in
3 New Orleans. I've got plenty I could deal with here.

4 But white people got to learn how to talk to
5 white people for real, and they got to stop depending
6 on people of color being there as part of the
7 conversation to tell the truth. See what I'm saying?
8 And people of color, we got to deal with our
9 internalization as well, so there must be spaces
10 created for white people to talk about, What does it
11 mean to be white in America.

12 How many white people even just had that
13 conversation? What does it mean for me? The question
14 is usually: What does it mean for me to be an African
15 American? I want to put the question back: What does
16 it mean to be a white Christian? See, because you
17 just can't claim that Christian no more, because that
18 white been put there. You got struggle with these
19 identity issues in the midst of our church and our
20 spirituality, because it has tainted our spirituality.

21 That identity question is a question that must
22 be answered, and I want to get to one day, yes, we're
23 all Americans, but we know in reality right now, some
24 of us still got to hyphenate our names and our
25 relationship to this country, because our rights are
26 hyphenated in this nation.

27 And if we can't struggle with that, then we

1 still got a long way to go, and I don't expect to get
2 there soon. I'm saying 30 years just to do a lot of
3 work. And then I'm going to rest for another 30, and
4 then another 30 years. See it won't happen overnight,
5 but then you never know, because nobody knows what God
6 have in the plan.

7 Berlin Wall fell overnight. Nelson Mandela
8 became president; racism could be eliminated in this
9 country, but I'm also a firm believer -- and some of
10 my friends out there who are Christian or whatever:
11 I don't believe you can just pray it away. You've got
12 to work.

13 (Applause.)

14 RABBI COHN: If there's someone in the audience
15 that has a response or some thoughts, some
16 suggestions, please come up to the mike and share them
17 with us. Identify yourself, but, remember, though,
18 please, we're not going to have a major address. We
19 just want to hear from as many people as possible in
20 the time we have.

21 MR. MOSOSATI: My name is Amad Mososati
22 [phonetic]. I'm a professor at University of New
23 Orleans, and I'm presenting here as the
24 [indiscernible] Society of North America.

25 To be honest, throughout the times I felt out of
26 place, because to me, I don't understand racism. It's
27 an insult to human being. On the worksheet we have,

1 it says, State your race, and so I looked for Black
2 and so on. I don't know where do I belong to. And if
3 you force me to belong somewhere, I don't belong to
4 this. I mean, that's not me.

5 Am I different? Definitely, yes. Look at me.
6 I mean, am I different? Genetically, am I different?
7 Yes. I'm bald. You see, I belong to the bald race,
8 and we are more beautiful than anybody else, more --
9 I mean, come on. This is a joke. And if you want to
10 find the solution for it, well, look around you; look
11 at the nations before you and look at their
12 experience.

13 I mean, I'm not trying to preach Islam here, but
14 go to Mecca and look at the Muslims. They don't have
15 this idiocy. I mean, I go to pray five times a day.
16 I can't look at my fellow man. I say that you are
17 different. Five times a day, I have to stand next to
18 that person and pray. I can't see myself as
19 different.

20 You want the solution. Well, let's look at some
21 others. How did they solve the problems? Islam
22 solved it by the pen, by education. Don't become a
23 Muslim if you don't want to, but use the tool that God
24 gave us to become human beings, to become better human
25 beings, and that's education.

26 We are standing on this nation; we have most
27 powerful educational tool in the world called TV. We

1 don't see each other, but we sit in front of the TV
2 every day. Yet we have no control whatsoever on what
3 comes on the TV. Who is American woman that you see
4 on the TV? Does it represent you, any of you sitting
5 here? Who is American man that come on TV? That
6 represents you. Well, no.

7 The TV is a tool of communication. It's a pen.
8 If we try at least to get into it, try to get into the
9 occasion, try to teach our children who we are, look
10 at the simple -- I mean, not simply -- wonderful movie
11 that came on the media several years -- several months
12 ago, Amistad. What wonderful combination of bringing
13 the truth about mankind? It's not black and white;
14 it's just humanities. And I think the solution is in
15 our hands.

16 If we can just at least try to get ourselves to
17 use today's technology, use the TV, use the media, I
18 think we have a chance. We have a chance to eliminate
19 all of this madness that's called racism.

20 Thanks a lot.

21 RABBI COHN: Thank you.

22 We're going to continue this until ten minutes
23 to 3:00, so no one will take it personally and
24 recognize that, you know, we want to hear from just as
25 many as we possibly can.

26 MR. ABDULLA: My name is Glenn Abdulla, and I'd
27 like to say that, you know, white people are very

1 intimidated at these meetings. They don't really
2 speak frank. I'd like to hear them speak what's
3 really on their mind, how they view the situation in
4 America, and what their place is.

5 But what Black people do is they kill the debate
6 by telling them, You know what you did 100 years ago;
7 instead of saying -- and don't recognize at all what
8 has been done in the past 40 years, how America passed
9 laws so that we would have an equal opportunity,
10 passed laws so that the system was not racism.

11 You may have an individual in the system, but
12 the system is not racism. They passed laws that you
13 can put a mayor like Morial in office, where we
14 couldn't do it 40 or 50 years ago, where we couldn't
15 even vote.

16 Black people have to mature. Emotionally we're
17 not mature for these kind of meetings. We come here
18 charged with emotionalism, bringing up the past and
19 living in the past, instead of looking at the future.
20 It's much longer than the past.

21 RABBI COHN: Thank you.

22 We have --

23 MS. MAJOR: I'd like to respond to that, first
24 of all. You got to go back to come forward, and for
25 me to deny the existence and the pain of my ancestors
26 would be as sinful to me as to deny racism. It's not
27 about beating up on white people, but if we can't be

1 honest about the fact that the wealth and the resource
2 of this nation is held in very few hands, then we
3 can't go forward at saying, How do we be just?

4 We cannot talk about justice in America without
5 talking about access. For those of you who are
6 theologians, you think about Bonhoeffer and cheap
7 grace. It's almost how we talk about racial
8 reconciliation, as if we can just talk about racial
9 reconciliation, with holding the Black hand and the
10 white hand together, and not dealing with the facts,
11 that still very few folk who control the entire wealth
12 of a nation.

13 And I'm going to bring my compassion, and I'm
14 going to bring my passion, because I speak for my
15 people straight up, and it has nothing to do with
16 being charged. I'm going to tell the truth, and I
17 will never, ever apologize for doing that.

18 RABBI COHN: Okay. Thank you.

19 REV. BROWN: Thank you. My name is Rev. Raymond
20 Brown. I'm president of Coalition of Concerned
21 Clergy.

22 We want to have a race dialogue, and we want
23 peace among us. And like Rodney King said, Can we all
24 get along. Well, I think not, because the crowd came
25 back and said, There's -- started shouting, No
26 justice, no peace; no justice, no peace.

27 In my opinion, I feel and believe that in this

1 society, this racist society, you're not going to have
2 a coming together of white and Black and Jews and
3 Blacks, because of the level of racism that is
4 ingrained in the institutions.

5 Let's take, for example, I was looking at a
6 program the other night where a top law official
7 denied that there was racism in the police departments
8 across America. This is a top-level official who
9 repeatedly denied that Black folks in New Jersey, when
10 they make their turnpike in New Jersey were not being
11 stopped because of the color of their skin.

12 They showed him stacks of statistics. I don't
13 care what you show white folk. You can show them
14 statistics; you can show them pattern. I don't care
15 what. They're going to deny there's racism in
16 America. And then these lily white boys got together
17 during the Texaco thing, up there in New York City,
18 got around the table and called us black jelly beans
19 and all this. Nobody knew it was going on, until the
20 tape seeped out and the whole world went crazy.

21 Then the white man still don't want to listen --
22 don't want to understand. He just don't understand.
23 You take, for example, the Rodney King riot, Barbara.
24 We thought white folk would see all this, burning down
25 all our businesses and shooting at us through the
26 windows of our cars, and dumping, you know, fire
27 bombs, that we would all come together, and, hey,

1 can't we all just get along.

2 We haven't saw a change in LA yet. Black folks
3 are still in poverty. Latinos are still being
4 arrested and jailed and booked and beat by white cops.
5 Ain't nothing changed. Police brutality is still on
6 the rise. White racism is still in America. How can
7 you have a dialogue with me? You're sitting on that
8 side of the table with all the money; I'm on this side
9 of the table broke. If you're going to have a
10 dialogue, you're going to share the wealth.

11 And my last comments: Dr. King said, We have
12 come to recognize there won't be a change until
13 there's radical redistribution of wealth, economic and
14 political power. America won't change until white
15 folks get off their butts and say, Look, there's
16 racism here. Why should I go to college to get a
17 doctorate degree and a master's degree to turn
18 hamburgers in Burger King and work in McDonald's?

19 But yet you want me to take and buy from your
20 grocery store and clean you up in the hospitals. You
21 cannot get justice without -- peace without justice,
22 I don't care how many initiatives. We got to come
23 together and realize a radical redistribution of
24 wealth and power, and they call them communism,
25 Barbara, when they said that. When we fought against
26 the Vietnam War, they called them communism.

27 In my closing, I just want to say this. I can't

1 let this go. They talk about refurbishing Robert E.
2 Lee's statue. That's a slap in the face of the Black
3 people in this community and in this nation.
4 Something must be done about it, and you got the mayor
5 of this city who have hooked up with Pat Tell
6 [phonetic] -- I can't believe it -- to raise money to
7 refurbish Robert E. Lee. That's a slap in the face of
8 Black people.

9 How would you like me, Rabbi Cohn, if I go out
10 there and refurbish Hitler's statue somewhere in the
11 Black community? You would say I'm racist. It's time
12 that you go back to Morial and tell him, he cannot be
13 supporting white supremacy, confederacy and saying
14 he's Black. He can't be Black and white and at the
15 same time.

16 And I want to know from the panel what you think
17 about Morial refurbishing that statue. You will not
18 get away. I want to know your comments.

19 RABBI COHN: I tell you what. I'm going to
20 listen to at least one more person.

21 REV. BROWN: Okay. I want that question. What
22 would you do about that statute of Robert E. Lee? You
23 will not get around that question.

24 RABBI COHN: The next person, please.

25 REV. BROWN: I asked -- let me say it again.
26 I'm asking the panel, can they answer that question.

27 RABBI COHN: Thank you very much. We have

1 breakout sessions, and everyone's going to have a
2 chance to talk and discuss all these issues. People
3 have been standing in line. We have about three
4 minutes; go ahead.

5 MS. FREEMAN: I say amen to Rev. Brown. My
6 name's Marjorie Freeman. For the last 15 years, I've
7 been trying to work with some of the white churches
8 throughout the country, around doing child advocacy
9 work. The way in which I have been trying to do that
10 is to invite those church people to deal -- to start
11 talking about racism.

12 One of the things that I think those of us who
13 are not Americanos or white Anglo-Saxon Protestants
14 have found is that we do, in fact, set the standards
15 for what things are considered right and what things
16 are considered wrong in this country. And what I
17 would like to suggest that we do is that those of us
18 in our white churches, in our white parishes, where we
19 have the privileges of being able to decide whether
20 we're going to deal with race, we've got to figure out
21 a way of not being able --

22 We can no longer avoid this. We have got to be
23 able to have in-reach workers, as Ron Chisholm calls
24 them, in-reach workers, into our churches, so that we
25 do this whether there are Black people around, holding
26 us accountable or not. We've got to find ways of
27 becoming anti-racist churches.

1 If we don't become anti-racist churches, we
2 might as well shut our doors and go home. We can't do
3 this work until we have realized that we have
4 privileges. I'm not going to go around saying, My
5 grandpapa didn't own any slaves. That's true; he
6 didn't own any slaves.

7 But I have five, six generations of missionaries
8 who went out to do whatever we did, Christianize the
9 rest of the world, and I know that that was based on
10 race; I know that was based on white supremacy, and I
11 know that was a corruption of the Gospel, and I know
12 that was a corruption of the way God would have this
13 world.

14 I know that that's the way the churches are
15 formed. Our people drove the slave ships. We have to
16 come, just as Johnny Youngblood, Rev. Johnny
17 Youngblood, who's talked about the great mahafa
18 [phonetic] for African Americans is the way out is
19 back through. The way out for those of us who are
20 white is back through, and until we become anti-racist
21 white institutions, we might as well not have
22 ourselves called churches.

23 Thank you.

24 RABBI COHN: Mr. Kaplan has asked to reply, and
25 then we're going to continue with the breakout
26 sessions.

27 DR. KAPLAN: It's not as much a reply as I have

1 a question. How many people here have seen the video,
2 The Color of Fear? All right. You can get it. It's
3 Stirfry Productions. I have no interest in this. But
4 the point that I want to get at: If you want a
5 starting point, actually it is the most powerful video
6 I've ever seen on racism. It gets into white
7 privilege; it gets into interethnic racism.

8 I would not show it -- I would start your
9 dialogue and lead up to seeing that video. It's an
10 hour and a half long, and you need to have someone
11 there to process that who is qualified. But that
12 brings out many of the very issues that we've been
13 discussing and that your comments address. And I
14 think that if you have a chance, that is something I
15 would recommend, but not without a competent person
16 there to help facilitate the discussion.

17 RABBI COHN: It may be that a follow-up for what
18 we're doing today, that could be a part of something
19 that we do, and it may be that for Louisville, they
20 may want to consider that as a recommendation for
21 their own program, and then those of you from the
22 White House might take that for your own
23 consideration.

24 Who's got instructions in terms of the -- okay.
25 Thank you, all of you, very, very much.

26 SPEAKER: It is written: Though I speak with
27 the tongues of men and of angels and have not love,

1 I'm nothing. Though I give my body to be sold and
2 have not love, I am nothing.

3 Degrees, propositions, amendments, laws, ideas,
4 don't mean a thing if we don't have love.
5 Legislation, the mayor, the President don't mean a
6 thing if we don't have L-O-V-E, love.

7 I'm going to share a poem, and I'll be out of
8 your way. The name of the poem is called A New
9 Millennium.

10 "What's going to happen if we don't change our
11 minds, with war, destruction and strife trying to
12 dominate us all the time? What are we thinking, if
13 we're not thinking of creating peace? We've got to
14 sow divine love now, or greater abolishing will
15 increase.

16 "Friends of the sea, this is a cry out to you.
17 We ask for your wisdom, so God's love will come
18 shining through. Friends of earth, please wake up
19 quickly today. We don't have the luxury of waiting
20 another second, no way. Friends of the universe, your
21 thoughts of charity are respected to be, but thoughts
22 to lead us into a new millennium so we can show our
23 true humanity, that's what it's all about.

24 "Humanity, showing our divinity, for someone
25 else, not based on what we see, based on who we are.
26 We're spiritual beings first. We're not Black first
27 or white first. I may disagree. But before you

1 became flesh, you were spirit. Somebody blew the
2 breath of life into you. Don't lose your humanity."

3 My name is Annette Dubois, and I am the
4 spokesperson of Humanity-Divinity Initiative. It is
5 my job to go forth and speak life to children. We
6 have to sow the seeds of love now. We have to sow the
7 seeds of respect now. We have to sow the seeds of
8 loving thyself now. And we do that through knowledge.

9 I thank you for your time. God bless you.

10 (Applause.)

11 MR. WENGER: Let me thank the panel, and let me
12 also thank all the people in the audience for this
13 very enlightening discussion.

14 There's a favorite quote of mine which lead us
15 into the small groups. It's by Margaret Mead, a famed
16 anthropologist. She said, "Never doubt that a small
17 group of thoughtful and committed people can change
18 the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever
19 has."

20 And so as we go into our small groups, let me
21 reiterate how important these groups are. We need
22 your ideas; we want you to share your experiences and
23 your ideas with us, so that we can spread them as far
24 and as wide as possible.

25 Somebody talked about preaching to the choir.
26 Our biggest challenge, as Rabbi Cohn mentioned
27 earlier, is how to reach beyond the choir. But I also

1 want to say that it is not wasted energy to preach to
2 and talk to the choir, because all of us sing off-tune
3 a whole lot of the time, and so we all need to be
4 reinforced as we go forward.

5 In your packet is something entitled, A Working
6 Agreement, and those contain the ground rules and the
7 goals of the small groups. On your name tag should be
8 a number, which should guide you to the room in which
9 your small group will be held. The room numbers start
10 with 1; they start back this way and come around this
11 way.

12 Danielle Glosser and Maureen Shea are standing
13 there. They will direct you to your rooms, and if you
14 don't have a number on your name tag, they will tell
15 you where to go, lovingly.

16 You have one hour, and then we will meet back
17 here at exactly four o'clock. Let me please urge you
18 to stay in your small groups, participate, and then
19 come back here at four o'clock.

20 Let me also reiterate our desire to have you
21 give Anna Lopez your promising practices forms. We
22 desperately need those, and I'm sure I'm forgetting
23 something, which is why Maureen is standing right
24 here.

25 MS. SHEA: You actually have 45 minutes. Tulane
26 has been wonderfully generous, but we are to be
27 finished by four o'clock, and so --

1 MR. WENGER: In that case, we will meet back
2 here exactly at 3:45. It means, talk fast, and we'll
3 be back here at 3:45. Thank you very much.

4 (Whereupon, the forum was recessed for breakout
5 group meetings.)

6 MR. WENGER: My name is Mike Wenger. I'm deputy
7 director for outreach and program development for The
8 President's Initiative on Race.

9 On behalf of the President, on behalf of the
10 President's advisory board on race, on behalf of the
11 White House and the staff of the Initiative on race,
12 I want to thank each and every one of you for coming
13 here today, giving your time, your honesty and your
14 commitment to this effort.

15 I want to thank Mayor Morial and his staff for
16 their incredibly hard work and dedication. I want to
17 thank Tulane University for their hospitality. I want
18 to thank Rev. Suzan Johnson Cook for her inspiration,
19 Dr. James Forbes for his incredible inspiration, Maria
20 Echaveste and Maureen Shea from the White House,
21 Danielle Glosser, Lydia Sermons, Karen Bauchard, and
22 Anna Lopez from the staff of The President's
23 Initiative on Race.

24 But most of all, I want to thank you. Make no
25 mistake about it. This s very difficult, emotionally
26 draining work. But it is essential work, and I speak
27 from some experience. I am Jewish; I am married to a

1 born-again Christian who was raised as an Irish
2 Catholic. I was previously married to an African
3 American woman who is Baptist. I have three children
4 who are Baptist and have some American Indian blood in
5 them. And my son is dating a Muslim woman.

6 But this is difficult work. I just want to tell
7 you a brief, quick story to illustrate that, and I
8 know we need to get out of here. My son, who is now
9 25 years old, was a student at Morehouse College in
10 Atlanta, and when he was a junior or a senior, he and
11 two of his friends -- and he's kind of olive-skinned.

12 He and two of his friends were walking down the
13 street in downtown Atlanta, and they looked just like
14 any three middle-class college students in America,
15 looking for a place to spend their parents' money.

16 And coming toward them as they walked down the
17 street was a white woman, and when she saw them, she
18 crossed over to the other side of the street. And
19 when she passed them, she crossed back to the side of
20 the street.

21 Now, she did that probably not out of any
22 malice, probably out of fear, fear born out of
23 stereotypes that all of us carry in one way or
24 another. But the problem is that the impact of that
25 fear on public support for tougher criminal justice
26 policies or a whole host of other things affects us
27 dramatically.

1 And so it is important, it is vitally important,
2 that we reach out to people, all people of good will,
3 wherever they are, because we cannot allow those kinds
4 of stereotypes to endure. And that is why President
5 Clinton created The President's Initiative on Race,
6 and that is why we're here today, and that is why we
7 need you desperately.

8 The President's Initiative on Race is time-
9 limited, as were these sessions today, too short. We
10 can plant the seeds of racial reconciliation, but
11 that's all we can do. You, you, I, and everybody else
12 have to nurture and cultivate these seeds and continue
13 to plant new seeds. That's the idea of the promising
14 practices, and that's why it's so important that you
15 turn in your promising practices forms today.

16 That's the idea of dialogue guide which is in
17 your packet, which we hope you will use. That's the
18 idea of the promising practices compendium that will
19 be issued in conjunction with the President's report
20 to the American people.

21 And we hope that you will take advantage of all
22 of those things, that you will take away from here
23 ideas that you will use in your own lives, in your own
24 communities, in your own congregations, and we hope,
25 especially because these sessions were so short today,
26 we hope that you will convene again on your own. You
27 don't need us. You can convene on your own. We will

1 help; we will provide you with names of the people who
2 were here today, and we hope that you will, on your
3 own, get together and continue this important work.

4 Will we make it to One America? Well, we all
5 know how difficult this work is, but there's a book
6 written a couple of years ago by Dr. Andrew Hacker, a
7 professor of political science at my alma mater,
8 Queens College in New York City. And he asked in that
9 book, Are we one nation under God or two nations,
10 manacled by race?

11 Our experience here today and much of the
12 experience we have had with the Initiative during the
13 past year suggests that we may be moving every so
14 slowly toward one nation under God, but the continuing
15 instances of discrimination, the persistent disparity,
16 and the anger and frustration and hurt that we heard
17 here today make it clear that we remain manacled by
18 race.

19 So the ultimate answer to Dr. Hacker's question
20 depends on each of us. We all share common values; we
21 all possess common aspirations. We all feel the same
22 emotions. We all aspire to the President's vision of
23 One America, an America in which justice and equal
24 opportunity for all are constant reality, and in which
25 all of us can feel empowered to reach our full
26 potential.

27 There's a wonderful quote from Duke Ellington.

1 "Every piece of music is in the piano. It's up to us
2 to get it out." To get that music out, to ensure that
3 every American has the opportunity to get their music
4 out, to be the best that he or she can be, we must all
5 take responsibility.

6 As Rabbi Abraham Heschel has said, We may not
7 all be guilty, but we are all responsible, and the
8 future of our nation depends on us sharing that
9 responsibility. That's what building One America is
10 all about.

11 President Clinton has said that building One
12 America is our most important mission. Money cannot
13 buy it; power cannot compel it; technology cannot
14 create it. It can only come from the human spirit.

15 The President's Initiative on Race is about
16 touching the human spirit, and if we all take
17 responsibility, we can together build One America, not
18 with money, not with power, not with technology, but
19 with the spirit of hope and fairness, which has
20 brought us all together here today.

21 I thank you for coming and participating. I
22 wish you Godspeed, and I would like to introduce Dr.
23 George Duerson, the pastor of Rayne Memorial United
24 Methodist Church, for our closing benediction.

25 Thank you very much.

26 (Applause.)

27 DR. DUERSON: I stand before you this afternoon

1 as a privileged white American male. But I also stand
2 before you as a man of faith, who knows that privilege
3 is not the way God wants it to be.

4 And I think one of the things I've learned --
5 I've learned many things this day -- has been the
6 importance of all of us to come to terms with where we
7 are as persons in the necessary dialogue between the
8 races and among the religious communities.

9 Someone mentioned before the meeting began that
10 it was probably not a good idea to have one person of
11 one particular religious orientation to give the
12 benediction. It might be much better if we had a
13 group of people to share in the benediction. So what
14 I would like to do is to ask you to bow your heads,
15 and if there is anyone who would like to make a
16 sentence prayer of thanksgiving for this day, I wish
17 you would share that with all of us, and then I will
18 give the closing word.

19 Let us pray.

20 (Whereupon, various audience members voiced
21 prayers.)

22 DR. DUERSON: Gracious God, we're so grateful to
23 you for the blessings of this day and for the
24 opportunity that we've had to be together and to share
25 and to learn, to be challenged and to be energized by
26 the commitment and passion of others.

27 We pray now that your spirit will bless us as we

1 go our separate ways, that that spirit which unites
2 all humanity together might be the source of our
3 vision and the means by which that vision will become
4 a reality.

5 In your name we pray, Amen.

6 (Whereupon, at 4:09 p.m, the forum in the above-
7 entitled matter was concluded.)

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C E R T I F I C A T E

