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AMERICA: OUR PAST, PRESENT, AND POSSIBILITIES

SPEECH

*Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, Sr.**

Thank you so much. Professor Manheim, let me express my thanks to you for your support and friendship and our kinship across the years, to the Dean and to all of you who have made us feel so welcome here today. In part we're here because this coming Monday, February 23, El Niño notwithstanding, we're going to march from the Colosseum. We're going to meet at 8:00 a.m. Monday morning and march from the Colosseum to the Ronald Reagan building. This time, the lions will not eat the Christians. We're going to march Monday morning, and we'll gather at 8:00.

You're too young to have marched in Selma, or Birmingham, or Washington, but now your generation's time has come. You ought to march on this Monday to save the dream. Your being here today in this multiracial, multicultural setting is the dream. This dream is under attack. We marched August 28th across the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco—more than 10,000 people marched. Again in October in Sacramento, and now in Los Angeles, we march to save the dream.

I appeal to you today to march and to invest in, get involved with the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition because you cannot stand idly by as lawyers in training and be entertained by the critical issues of your time. You have to confront the issues of your day. Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability or because we're lucky; because people use their skills or their bodies as sacrifices to be change

* Rev. Jesse Jackson, President of Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, is one of America's foremost political figures. Over the past three decades he has played a major role in virtually every movement for empowerment, peace, civil rights, gender equality, and economic and social justice. Often called the "conscience of the nation," Reverend Jackson has tirelessly challenged America to establish just and humane priorities, and to bring people together on common ground across lines of race, class, gender, and belief.

agents. Lawyers at their best are sacrificing, cultural-challenging, change agents. Lawyers at their worst are slick—hustlers who complicate simple things to make money and to make matters worse.

When I grew up, our heroes and sheroes were basically lawyers. We did not look upon lawyers cynically. So oppressed by unjust law, most lawyers I knew handled people's cases because their backs were against the wall, not because they could pay them. They turned to lawyers when they were brutalized or oppressed. They expected lawyers to have the kind of moral compulsion to help because they couldn't help it. And so, Thurgood Marshall and Cassius Baker Martley, or Jill Row and Jack Greenberg were our heroes and our sheroes. Athletes like Jackie Robinson or Jim Brown or Joe DiMaggio or Ted Williams had their place, but they were entertainers. Lawyers were emancipators.

Rosa Parks was jailed for refusing to go to the back of the bus; she turned to Dr. King, a young minister, who said, "Better that we walk in dignity than ride in shame." And they turned to Fred Grey and the legal team to argue the case. The two sets of rules could not apply to who rode where on the bus paying the same fee.

In part I come to you and challenge you to march and make history—not just review it and guess at it—because in my own experience whenever young America comes alive, America's always made better.

In 1955 when Rosa Parks read a sign above the driver's head that read—the law, "People of color, African descendants, colored seat from the rear, whites seat from the front; those who violate will be punished by law"—that was the law. Dr. King, a 26-year-old grad student, said to her, "Better we walk in dignity than ride in shame." They challenged unjust law. In 1960 four students in Greensboro, North Carolina, challenged the law. They sat down at Woolworth's to get hamburgers; they got handcuffs. They were threatened with expulsion from school: You're not here to sit in, you're here to get your degree, and get your job, and get your house, and get your comfort zone! But they had a dignity fit, and they chose dignity over dollars and degrees. Change agents.

Blacks and Hispanics were denied the right to vote, but had to pay taxes, had to serve in war, that was the law. Medgar Evers was shot in the back in cold blood—it touched our consciousness. Schwerner, Goodman, and Chaney, two Jews and a black, were killed in cold blood, buried in a grave without a marker in Philadelphia, Mississippi. Reverend James Reed came south to help us. To kill

him—an “outside agitator”, they called him. Viola Liuzzo, an Italian-American mother, came south to help us. They called her “nigger-lover,” blew her brains out on Highway 80 at point-blank range.

But now we have a public accommodations bill because young America changed and challenged the law. The day Dr. King gave that speech is perhaps beyond your imagination, the conditions, the context of the speech. From as far southwest as Texas, across to Florida, up to Virginia and southern Maryland, blacks and Hispanics could not use a single public toilet. We could not take our high school senior pictures on the lawn of the State Capitol; it was against the law. Our money was counterfeited. Money and an appetite would not get you any hamburger—the law. We could only go to the movies on Saturdays, upstairs in the back, in the roof—the law. The day he gave that speech, we couldn’t use a single hotel, motel, or park across the country—the law. Veterans of foreign wars that day marched, some with medals on their chest, some with shrapnel in their bodies, citizens with fewer rights, the Nazis—the law. We marched to change the law, so today we have a public accommodations bill, we have the right to vote, we have open housing because young America chose sacrifice and suffering over greed. Because lawyers dared to be transforming agents and not conformists for convenience. There is that tradition of the law.

When I walked in with Professor Manheim and looked at these pictures of famous African American heroes and sheroes on the walls, for too long we’ve expected people to be non-violent without teaching them non-violence as a way of resolving conflict. We’ve expected people to live together who don’t know what each other has brought to the table. For those whom you don’t learn about in history, you tend to see them as parasites. Those you do learn about, you tend to see them as hosts. And hosts can never look upon parasites as co-partners. If we knew better, we would see each other as co-hosts, and none would be parasites. And what I find to be amazing is that one can go through four years of major university training, indeed three more years of law training, and still not know the missing pieces of the puzzle. So much about argument and our anxiety is rooted in ignorance of legal history of the legal impediments that separate Americans from Americans. It’s not enough to have an African American History Month, and the blacks—some famous people who made it against the odds, the blacks have become self-esteem,

the whites have become entertainment. At the end of the month, nothing has changed, except we've got some famous people too.

That is no real contribution. They've given us a greater appreciation of where the gaps are, where the breach is, where the crack in the Liberty Bell must be welded. You need to know this is the day that Roosevelt signed 9066 and sent Japanese Americans to camps from this state in this country. This ain't no ordinary day in American history. You need to know about the Chinese Exclusion Act, because this is a matter of law. Our Chinese were slaves in California—a matter of law! And the same hysteria that drove the Chinese Exclusion Act, the same hysteria in fact drove the Japanese internment camps! You need to kind of know that. You need to know just how distorted these Hollywood movies have made us about Native Americans. Seattle is a tribe, Chief Seattle. The Manhattan tribe, New York. Mississippi is an Indian tribal name. Ala-bama, an Indian tribal name. Indian-ana, Indian. Illinois, Illiani, Indian. Chief Kansas, Chief Arkansas, Indian tribal name. Columbus really did not discover the country. Found it, and found it peopled, and there's a legal history to how we put on the heads of those Native Americans whose land we wanted, and then scalped them and sold them as redskins; that's why it's offensive—the Washington Redskins. It's fun for somebody, it's humiliation for somebody else. People who know won't find it to be fun because it runs in conflict with your dignity. There's no race gap between black and white or brown; if a catastrophe visited us now, if there were an emergency, the emergency wagon would not drive up with some black blood, white blood, red blood, yellow blood, red blood, just one blood. Now, who got treated first, who was left in the room, who got a surgeon and who was left in the emergency room would be a matter of politics, not a matter of the natural law.

But then, what are these gaps? Why are some people doing so well and blacks seem not to be able to since—we're going to look at just this portion of it for this month's purposes? Because I'm convinced, Brother Manheim, that we really need to have a month every year to study Native American history, and Latino/Hispanic history, and Asian-American history because only by appreciating each other's struggles can we see each other in mutually respectful whole terms.

And we will not know that by reading history as we know history to be taught. What's the real black/white gap? For two hundred-fifty years, African descendants were listed as three-fifths of a human

being by law. We were commodities on the stock exchange, your basic southern shipping company's investment houses were owning ships, trading people, trading cotton and tobacco. The African slave trade subsidized America's development. And just as America sent for distressed Europeans to come to the land, and defended them in war, thus Africa subsidized America as America subsidized Europe. We need to know that. Two hundred-fifty years of work without wages is a subsidy. It takes effort to be given a hundred acres because of land and two people that work it who can't. Work without wages is a subsidy.

The choice raw materials out of Africa without below-market value, the gold, the diamonds, the minerals, the rubber plantations from Liberia—a subsidy. Now, some of you are looking so stern, I almost want to tell you to smile, but to know this is to think through different assumptions—that's my real point. For two hundred-fifty years, for African descendants of blacks, it was illegal to read or write. If a slave master had sex with an enslaved woman and had a baby by her, it was his right; she was his property. If he beat the man and worked the child, it was his right. He could do any of that, and by law not be punished, but if he were caught teaching either of them to read or write, he would be punished. It was prohibited to teach an African to read or write because they knew even then strong minds break strong chains. It was illegal—that's why you cannot ever compare the immigrant tradition with the slave tradition because the immigrants' ships did not meet on the shores chains and a market value. Struggles, but no comparative struggle. Blacks could not own land, couldn't buy it, couldn't have it bequeathed to them, could not own it as a matter of law. They couldn't borrow money from the bank, sweat equity could never turn into value—all sweat, no equity. Thus, there's a two hundred-fifty year gap, a trade gap, an access to capital gap, an educational gap, a development gap, an infrastructural gap driven by the law and accentuated by skin color. And then affirmative action began, for whites only. Something called the Homestead Act. Millions of acres of land given to whites only. Someone said since the blacks had helped to build the Southern economy—the wages, the cotton, tobacco, shipping companies—at least give them forty acres and a mule—a small plot of land and something to plow it with, so they can be repaired and work their way into America. Andrew Johnson vetoed that.

While forty acres and a mule was being vetoed for blacks who had built the country without wages, Europeans were being offered

100 acres and a slave as inducement to come to the country. That's 180 degrees apart in something called opportunity. If Europeans were to come and squat on some land and remove some Indians, it was their land. Affirmative action. All that oil-rich land in Texas was given away—not by SAT scores, not by effort, not by character—given away. The government doesn't own oil wells. In Oklahoma, when the Indians were removed it was given away. Mostly, they were removed by the government. Indians were removed by the government for the whites to have the free land on which the oil was found. All that mining in the hills of Utah and Colorado, all that mining was given away by the government to whites only—law. The Gold Rush of 1849—blacks could not come; they had been here from the very beginning to be a part of the Gold Rush. Now we can be a Forty-Niner with a football, but we could not be a forty-niner searching for gold, real gold! Illegal.

The railroad company—where did that come from? The National Railroad Trust Act, something like that. They gave away thousands of miles of land and six miles on both sides to whites only. Blacks and Chinese-Americans had to build the railroads, could not ride the trains. And once the railroads were built, then those ruthless private companies were given the land then began to develop the land along the railroad track, and they became wealthy—given by the government! Affirmative action. Those who inherit that great giveaway, they are debating inheritance taxes, while those who are locked out are debating affirmative action. One group is debating how to stay in, with the advantage of the other group trying to get in to get out of the hole. Two different traditions.

When I hear right-wingers say that they are against government involvement, who developed the radio research for that system? The government. No private company researched and financed the radio system. And once the government developed the system of radio, what amounted to the FCC at that time gave away all radio bands to whites only. By lottery, not by exams. Not by language, but by lottery. Those who got the radio stations, who learned that technology, their children went to law school and learned how to protect that which they had been given. Now what was the radio industry in the '20s became the TV industry in '48; in '48, once TV technology was perfected, then all channels were given away by the government. So you end up with a Viacom deal where whites who had been given radio and TV could get a tax break for *selling* to a black, a brown or a woman, but when the right wing made that illegal—how vicious!

How separated from history—legal history! Just things you take for granted—the Coca-Cola wealth. There's one Coca-Cola franchise for blacks. That's 'cause we picketed in 1980. There's one Pepsi franchise because there's one Coke franchise. The fact is, they let the territories across the country, so that if you were from L.A. and you got the Coca-Cola franchise area for a minimal fee because you're a friend, because you're a politician and had the right to vote, if you had a letter of intent for a Coke territory, the intent triggered a letter of credit, the bank then built the institution. Legal privileges might be called preferential treatment. Blacks and browns got quotas. What was the quota? Zero.

After three hundred years of legal not gaps but canyons, where we could not move by law to use a toilet, or to vote, or go to school, or live in a neighborhood. Our history is quantifiable—but the legal evolution is documented. This should not be left to Rush Limbaugh and Elders and some foolishness—you need to know better! The legal history is quantifiable. If you come out to here and learn how to argue a case and win a case and make some money, and don't know the legal history, you cannot serve the nation well. You cannot appreciate Native Americans and what it means when Wilson now imposes upon their sovereignty because they can run some games, finally something. It's not enough; when you look at those pictures, they don't quite tell you how America got the land west of the Mississippi. Napoleon and the French had ambitions to control America, to colonize it. When Napoleon got defeated by Toussaint L'Ouverture at Haiti twice—they couldn't defeat Haiti, they couldn't get to America, so they sold it at this bargain basement price and annexed the Hispanics—legal history, and had this makeshift war—the Spanish-American war—to take Texas and New Mexico. To know that roots us in some truths; it makes us a little more humble, a little less arrogant, and a little more cooperative, a little more appreciative of the fact that we are all co-hosts, and that we all have some burden to make crooked ways straight and to exalt valleys and to make room for all of us under the one big American tent.

Why is it that one side of L.A. is green with prosperity, and the other side is brown and looks like scorched earth, called Watts, called Compton? If you were flying ten miles high, and you look down and you saw this green area called the hills of Hollywood and Beverly Hills and you looked and you saw this brown area, and the brown area was not sand, it was actually topsoil—what made the green area green? Water. Access. Capital! What made the brown area brown?

The lack of access, lack of capital, asphyxiation of economic flow! Is the Hollywood side the greenest because it has the most talent, the most brains, the most character, the highest ethics? It's not about character and ethics and morality—those are great virtues—it's really about opportunity. Wherever capital flows, flowers bloom in the desert. When you redline capital—more than that, when you redline minds—you limit growth.

I'm going to South Korea next week with Brother Manheim; we're about to bail South Korea out for \$40 billion. The fact is, we're not about to bail out South Korea. We're about to bail out the speculative bankers and leave South Koreans in worse shape than they were before they got speculated on in the first place. But now someone suggested that maybe there was a market in South Korea worth investing in so the speculators used our pension fund moneys and they went dashing off to South Korea. And now it's in South Vietnam, or Thailand, or Indonesia, or wherever they think they can find some cheap labor. The reality is, the largest, fastest-growing markets in the world today are the black and brown markets in America—\$600 billion a year. The markets are close, the markets are wealthy, the markets are growing, but because of cultural blinders Wall Street can't see that market. Part of our job is to greenline red-lined America. When you include women, you grow. Why do we now have a WNBA? Because of the quota system. You can't give all the money to men in athletics any more; half to women, half to men, that's the quota, fifty-fifty. Affirmative action is not a quota, but Title IX is. Half the money must go to women athletics. Basketball, track, swimming—whatever women engage in athletics—so now young girls can become basketball players and get scholarships, whatever; and women become their coaches, their athletic directors, their sportscasters, and design clothes and sports medicine, and women become Olympic sheroes and then WNBA. The WNBA is run by the private sector made possible by the government, by the change in the law. When the law changed, women's options changed. And Title IX is affirmative action.

Affirmative action has been played by the right wing as black-white. The fact is, affirmative action is mostly white females plus women of other hues, plus people of color, plus the physically disabled. Affirmative action is a majority, not a minority, issue. If women and people of color were not being trained, two things would happen: either slow down production or import labor. Why put the burden of affirmative action on blacks or Hispanics?

Today we have a strange scene in California and I close. One, Silicon Valley is looking for 350,000 workers at \$50,000 to \$70,000 apiece. It's looking for them now. The economy is generating jobs that fast. Prop. 209 is cutting them off at the pass. So, since you cut the work force off with these artificial test barriers, then the economy slows down, our import labor brain-drains Third World countries that come running to Silicon Valley, and then you have this "glamor slammer" downtown, a \$400 million jail waiting for some customers who couldn't get in school. You have three extremes: 300,000 jobs looking for workers in the Silicon Valley. Youth being cut out of school to be trained to go to the Valley, and in the meantime we'd rather lock them up than lift them up. That is irrational and immoral, cost-inefficient.

And so we march for the American Dream on Monday. What is the American Dream? And, when I would get down on the Constitutional writers sometimes for their own aristocratic habits and being slaveholders and all of that, is that the good thing about the Constitutional writers is they dreamed bigger than their circumstances. And we should always be free to dream higher than our living. You may not live as high as you're dreaming, but dream anyhow. You all ought always have an ethical code higher than your capacity to live up to it; that doesn't make you hypocritical, it's the tension that makes you better. In other words, you should not reduce the Ten Commandments to a doormat because it's comfortable. Keep the Ten Commandments high whether you can reach them and not because unless you keep them high you'll call right wrong and wrong right for convenience. Don't lower ethical standards just because you can't reach them. Don't lower expectations just because you can't live them. At least the Constitutional writers—at least they dreamed. Slaveholders, the Constitution's dream was bigger than their living. Jefferson said, "Black women stink," but lived with Sally Hemmons for thirty years. He also said, "When I think about on the one hand the institution of slavery, on the other hand I think about God, a just God, I shudder for my country." At least there was that tension between his living and his dreaming.

What is the American Dream? A one big-tent America. We all live under one big tent. Many races, many faces, and many places. Quite a dream. Not limited by something called royal blood, where everybody's blood is royal. You can grow up from peanut planter to president. Rural Arkansas to the White House. It's a dream. Under that one big tent there are five basic assurances: Equal protection

under the law. For most Americans, for many Americans, that's still but a dream. Equal opportunity, equal access, fair share, a commitment to the least of these. And I suppose that last one, which is the least legal—this commitment to the least of these—is the character test. And at the end of the day, people of character change unjust laws. We must not allow unjust laws to reduce our character and say, "I did it because the law said it." People of character change and challenge to the point of death unjust laws.

I saw people when Karla Tucker was killed in Texas a few days ago who said, "It just didn't seem right, but that's what the law said." They let the law diminish them rather than they challenge the law. I asked Jerry Falwell on my television program, I said, "Since you're so much for capital punishment; why'd you come out for her?" He said, "Well, uh, uh, I got to know her through television and . . ." and he couldn't stop talking, "since she was Christian and she was white, and she was female." I said, "Ohhhh. You mean white and female and Christian got your attention in ways that if she'd been black and male wouldn't have." So Reverend: live with that contradiction.

To dream! Character! And how we treat the least of these. We should be so insulted with this English-only madness. America was not built on English as a language. We never locked folk out before based on speaking English, or being named Smith or Jones or one-syllable words. That's a new thing. One day you fight for fast-track and NAFTA, the next day you fight for English-only? Two-thirds of our hemisphere speak Spanish, and we fight for the right to speak the minority language and brag about it. Should not the best public system in the world be urging us to be bilingual rather than punishing folk who speak one language and are trying to learn another? Should language be used as a barrier? Should we make English a religious conduit? It's a great language, but Jesus didn't speak it! Mohammed didn't speak it! The prophets didn't speak it! Why make of a language a religion?

Prop. 226—take labor from the table! Let the corporations have it all to themselves! Where did the eight-hour work-day come from? Labor! Where'd the occupation safety and health laws come from? Labor. Where did child labor laws come from? Labor. Where did vacations come from? Labor. Where'd the middle class come from? Labor. Why take labor from the table? No roof for the wealthy, no floor for the poor, the middle class sinking in the middle, outsourced and downsizing, frustrated and angry, and blaming other people.

Today you are called—you are called to march, you are called to act, you are called to character. Character must drive the order, not skin color, not culture, but character. Be proud of your color and adjust to it; it ain't going to change. You did nothing to create it. So why begin to make of skin color an object of idolatry? Whether it's black, white, brown, any shade in between, it came with the package. Don't brag about it; you did nothing to create your skin color. Accept it, but don't make it an object of idolatry. Follow me, somebody.

Culture—so you speak English because your parents did, and your neighbor and the radio people did, so you've got that down. You put no effort in color and culture, you put effort in character, you mean to be a Chavez, you mean to be a King, you mean to be a Mandela, you mean to have character! You mean to be honest and fair, you mean—you intended to do that! You intended to be sacrificial, you intended to be honest, to help somebody. That's character. One day, Jesus was asked to define character, and he said, "A man was walking down the street tending his business, and two thieves jumped from behind the bushes, and beat him and robbed him and left him to die." He said, "I'll measure character by how you respond to the beaten man. One man saw him lying there bleeding—the reverend, the rabbi, the man of God—he went to the other side of the street and kept walking." He said, "That's one kind of character." Full of holiness, full of righteousness, full of biblical studies, no sensitivity to a beaten man. Maybe he assumed he'd done something wrong and he didn't want to be bothered; he was on the way to worship, and couldn't be bothered with a hurt man. Another man came by of his own ethnic group, the Levite. The Bible says he went to the other side of the street and kept walking, left him to die. He said, "That's another kind of character. Another man came by, from another race, another country, another religion, another language, who didn't even have a green card—the Samaritan. And he stopped and picked him up and helped to get him nurtured back to health." Beyond color, beyond culture, something called character. The Good Samaritan spoke the other language from the other religion from the other country. He got five stars.

Rodney King, not long ago, got beaten nearly to death by four racist white police, and they were racist, and they tried to beat him to death. But don't assume all whites are racist on that basis, because a young white photographer named George Halliday filmed it and took it public. Now Professor Manheim no school is giving him an honorary degree, but let me tell you: when he saw those four white police

beating Rodney King, he could've said, "he shouldn't be in our neighborhood." He could've said, "the police couldn't be wrong." He could've said, "based on what I've seen on TV, he had it coming to him." But some mother, but some father, some teacher, some rabbi, some preacher had built into him a set of values that made the beating repulsive to him. Beyond color, beyond culture—you know about Rodney King because a white photographer filmed it! Character! When they were released from jail, from trial—the four white policemen who convinced a jury that what they saw they didn't see—blacks and browns erupted. Fifty-five were killed.

A young white man, Reginald Denny, driving a truck, was driving down the street; blacks in their frustration snatched him out of the truck and tried to beat him to death. Lest you think all young blacks are thuggish and anti-social in that way, four young blacks in their different homes saw the beating taking place. They didn't talk to each other, didn't have a meeting. From four different places, they saw it and they dashed down the street and saved him from them. They rushed him to a hospital, where one of those black affirmative-action doctors performed surgery and saved his life. Beyond color, beyond culture, is something called character. I urge you to embrace the plateau of character, and let's transform America and make America better and better. Thank you very much.