

# Speeches and messages: 1973-1974: [NAACP 64th anniversary]

Senator Daniel K. Inouye Papers

Speeches, Speeches and messages, Box SP2, Folder 8

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SPEECH BY U.S. SENATOR DANIEL K. INOUE  
to be delivered to the National Association  
for the Advancement of Colored People on  
Saturday, February 17, 1973, at Sheraton Waikiki

This week, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People marked its 64th year. During those 64 years, your NAACP has been a most effective and respected force for good--good for blacks, and good for all Americans.

This week we also celebrated the 164th year of the birth of the great emancipator, Abraham Lincoln. And a few weeks earlier we joined in mourning the death of that other great emancipator of oppressed Americans, Lyndon Baines Johnson.

Lyndon Johnson believed in the equality and human dignity of all peoples. He firmly believed that government had a positive responsibility to help people realize that dignity and equality--to realize their full potential.

Under Lyndon Baines Johnson, government was not permitted to be a passive bystander while discrimination and disadvantage ran rife among us. The power of the Federal government was to be employed vigorously on behalf of those who were in need of help. He believed with Abraham Lincoln that it was the legitimate object of government "to do for the people what needs to be done, but which they cannot, by individual effort, do...for themselves."

Lyndon Johnson was a man dedicated to the cause of equality--equality in education, equality at the ballot box, equality at the employment office, equality in housing, equality in the whole social, political and economic fabric of our Nation. He too had a dream and he fully believed in the utilization of the immense power of his office to achieve results.

In his final public appearance last December, Lyndon Johnson said that "the essence of government lies with unceasing concern for the welfare, dignity, decency and innate integrity of life for every individual, regardless of color, creed, ancestry, sex or age." He went on to say that, "Yes, there is injustice. Yes, there is intolerance. Yes, there is discrimination and hate and suspicion and division among us.

"But there is a larger truth. We have proved that great progress is possible. We know how much still remains to be done. And if our efforts continue, if our will is strong, if our hearts are right and if courage remains our constant companion, then, my fellow Americans, I am confident we shall overcome."

As Roger Wilkins wrote in a column following Lyndon Johnson's funeral, when "Leontyne Price stood up singing, 'Precious Lord Take My Hand,' it was time to know how far we had come and how much it had cost. And it was time to cry for a beloved mountain."

Given the exciting, stimulating thrust of the Johnson years, it is particularly distressing to note that even as we bury him, his successor in the White House is busy burying the very tools which were engaged on behalf of the underprivileged in our society under the Johnson leadership. This is not only cause for concern, but a challenge to action.

I would not claim that all the programs enacted in our War on Poverty and discrimination were worthy of the struggle. I would not be an advocate of the philosophy that purpose alone is a sufficient test for the survival of a program in a period of mounting costs and scarce revenues.

But neither can I support a policy which seeks to dismantle the whole structure of government designed to deal with those enduring problems with no substitute structure in sight. Headstart, Community Relations Service, Contract Compliance, Community Action, Job Corps, Legal Services, all these and more are being abolished or radically cut-back on the premise that they are inefficient tools for achieving our goals and that our cities and states can more efficiently deal with these problems.

Not content to dismantle the Federal role and disengage from the field of battle, I was particularly disturbed to witness the effort of this Administration to raise the basically false issue of "bussing" as the key Civil Rights issue in the recent election. This was most tragic and unfortunate. It tended to pit race against race and to undo much that had been done in our search for equality and dignity. In concentrating on that issue, other human issues and concerns were set aside to set the stage for the present process of dismantlement.

Bussing is not a solution to the problems of ghetto life. Bussing the ghetto child to the suburbs during the day, to a school predominately of another race, will not relieve the problems of ghetto life. As long as bussing is based on race, we perpetuate a feeling of inferiority on the part of the enforced minority. I will not accept that a black child cannot get a good education in a school where most of his fellow students are of his color. There is nothing magical about majority white schools that makes education for blacks uniquely available in that environment alone.

There is much to be lost and little to be gained by accelerating the flight of the affluent of all races to private institutions of learning while the public schools with reducing public support become the artificial focus of our total effort to integrate society. Removed from the locus of parental involvement, parental participation and community control and beset with the constant problems resulting from transfer from one school to another as ratios change, equality education for all children would be the inevitable victim.

We should rather direct our efforts to the real concerns. The right to adequate housing in an area or community of individual choice, the right of each child to adequate nutrition and to a decent home environment, the right to good health care regardless of the financial resources of the family, the right to security from criminal attack on the streets or in the home. These are not rights secured by spending admittedly limited resources on massive bussing based on precise racial quotas in each of our major metropolitan centers. These are the rights deserving of our full efforts.

I do not say that bussing should never be used to alleviate or correct local problems of long standing but rather that it should not become the focus of our effort to secure equality of opportunity for ourselves and our children.

If we take the proper position that all Americans are entitled to certain rights--to food, housing, education and health care--we will find that it is not a race issue. While the primary thrust of this Administration sometimes appears to be to make the "black" issue paramount, it should be our goal to make the "human" issue the object of our ultimate concern.

President Franklin Roosevelt once drew the distinction between liberals and conservatives with these words. "The liberal party is a party which believes that as new conditions and problems arise beyond the power of men and women to meet as individuals, it becomes the duty of government itself to find new remedies with which to meet them. The liberal party believes that the government has the definite duty to use all its powers and resources to meet new social problems--to insure to the average person the right to his own economic and political life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

While I would replace the words to the "average" person with to "each" person, with that slight change in emphasis, I want you to know that I am proud to subscribe to that definition of "liberal". And in that context, Abraham Lincoln was also a liberal. And so was Lyndon Johnson.

In a very real sense, in the light of history, and God willing, despite the current efforts of some in places of great power to abdicate the responsibilities of government, I am confident that in the long course of history, Lyndon Johnson will not only be looked upon as a great liberal but as the second great emancipator. His dedication to your cause, to our cause, to the cause of human dignity and equality, shall serve as an inspiration for me--and a beacon of hope for all mankind.

Today, we in the Congress are locked in a historical and constitutional battle with the man in the White House. It is a battle over the right to establish spending priorities. It is a battle in which the executive seeks to use a general opposition to higher taxes and higher government expenditures as a vehicle for abdicating the struggle in which you and all who share your vision have a very real and personal stake.

There are many in the Congress who are ready to do battle. We cannot accept that the recent election, which, while it saw the voters overwhelmingly support Richard Nixon, was a mandate for such change. The majorities in the Congress were also overwhelmingly retained and we are confident that the purposes and the programs of the decade of the sixties have not been rejected by the community at large. It is time, however, that the forces which merged to fashion those programs, to enact them into law, and to secure the necessary funding, be re-engaged in the never ending struggle to secure those common goals of equality and human dignity which unite us. We need your help.