

Address of Walter P. Reuther  
President, UAW  
Before the 48th Annual NAACP Convention  
Detroit, Michigan, June 26, 1957

Mr. Chairman, friends, it's difficult for me to tell you how happy and proud I am to be here, because when I come to an NAACP meeting, I have a feeling that I belong here. I'm home here. And I can never escape the same reaction every time I hear that wonderful song, "Lift Up Our Voices and Sing." It always gives me a sense of renewed faith and dedication, because I feel that a people who can sing that song cannot lose.

I'm proud to belong to the NAACP, because it is made up of people who are dedicated in a great crusade to make America true to itself. This is what this is about. Make America live up to its highest hopes and aspirations and translate those hopes and aspirations into practical, tangible reality in the lives of all people, whether they are white or black, whether they live in the North or in the South. I say that each of us is blessed that we can be engaged in this crusade, in this struggle for justice for human dignity--in this struggle to wipe out in every phase of our national life, every ugly and immoral kind of discrimination.

A couple of years ago I had the privilege of attending an ADA meeting in Washington and Roy Wilkins was the principal speaker. And I want to say that Roy did himself proud that night. He was reporting on some of the struggles in the South. He had just returned from a speaking tour in a number of the Southern states, and he said there are three organizations that are being held responsible for the drive for civil rights and human dignity in the South. He said there is

the NAACP. There is the ADA, and there is the CIO. Mrs. Roosevelt was my dinner partner and I said to her, "No wonder I'm having trouble. I'm an officer of all three of those organizations."

Now why did they come together? Well because they shared the same values, the same respect for human dignity. They shared the same hopes and the same aspirations. And they dreamed the same dreams about that bright new tomorrow that we're working and fighting to build. A tomorrow where discrimination will be no more. Where Jim Crow will be buried for keeps in every phase of our national life. A bright tomorrow where every child, regardless of race, creed or color, all created in the image of God will have equal educational opportunities, so that every child can grow, intellectually, spiritually and culturally, limited not by a segregated school room, but limited only by the capacity that God gave each child to grow.

But the NAACP, the American labor movement - and now the AFL-CIO brings together 15 million organized workers - we do more than just dream about that better tomorrow into fulfillment. And that's why you can preach about the brotherhood of man from morn til night, and the Eastlands and the Talmadges and the bigots will never raise their voices in protest. But when you begin to work to translate the brotherhood of man into practical fulfillment, that's when they begin to fight back. They are fighting us because we are working trying to give practical substance and meaning and purpose to the noble concept of the brotherhood of man.

We had a distinguished churchman, Bishop Oxnam, who addressed the UAW Convention some months ago. He said you know there is a lot of noble talk

about the brotherhood of man, but there are some people who keep the hood and drop the brother. And those are the people who are fighting us. And because they are fighting us, we meet at a time of great crisis. The challenge is compelling, but when the burden is heavy, always remember that the reward is so great and wonderful in terms of basic human values that it's more than worth the struggle and the sacrifice that go into winning the reward. Since you meet in the city in which the headquarters of the UAW is located, I am sure you will permit me to bring to you the fraternal greetings and the best wishes from the one and a half million members of the UAW, and I would like to say for them that we are with you all the way until victory is ours in this fight for civil rights.

You have come back. You were here in 1943. Detroit was the great arsenal of democracy. We were turning out more weapons of war with which to fight Hitlerism, totalitarianism, than was any other city in the world. But unfortunately, this city went wrong and we had tragic, ugly race riots back in that period. But one of the things that we have always been proud of about the UAW is that when the people of Detroit were rioting and destroying and killing each other on the streets, white and Negro workers worked side by side in brotherhood in the plants under our contracts. Because they had learned to know the meaning of human solidarity, of brotherhood, because they had learned through the hard experience of struggle that when the employer can divide you and pit white against black, American-born against foreign-born, he can divide and rule and exploit everyone. And we learned a lesson that only in the solidarity of human brotherhood, only as you stand together with your fellow man can you solve your basic problems.

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And just as the Negro workers have proven themselves in the factories and on the assembly lines, Negroes have proven themselves in the field of public service. Since 1943, we have elected four Negroes to important political positions in the city of Detroit. They were elected by tremendous majorities, and they have demonstrated the good judgment of the people who put them there, by dedication and by a high sense of public trust and service. We're proud of the fact that the Honorable Judge Wade McCree sits in the highest court in the city of Detroit. And we are proud that another Negro, the Honorable Judge Davenport sits in another court of Detroit. And we are equally proud that in the city of Washington from the Thirteenth Congressional District, a Negro, the Honorable Charles Diggs, is in that position. And we are proud that a distinguished Negro doctor, Dr. Remus Robinson sits on the Detroit Board of Education. Because of the outstanding public service and the sense of dedication that these four outstanding Negro citizens have demonstrated in the public positions to which they have been elected, I would like to predict that in the fall election in 1957 in Detroit, we will elect a prominent Negro to the Common Council where we need one.

I think we all realize that the world is troubled--that we live with crisis in America and the people of every nation are living with crisis in the world. I have been saying for a long time that the crisis in the world is not economic or political or military. Essentially, the crisis in the world is a moral crisis. It's a reflection of man's growing immorality to himself. Of man's growing inhumanity to man. The H-bomb is the highest and most terrible destructive expression of that growing inhumanity.

And in a sense our crisis in America, the crisis in education, the crisis in civil rights is not political, it is moral. We've got all that it takes to solve these problems. But we haven't demonstrated the moral courage to step up to solving these problems, and this is our basic problem. America is in crisis, not because it lacks economic resources, not because it lacks the political know-how, not because we don't know how to do the job of squaring democracy's practices with its noble promises. We just haven't demonstrated the moral courage. And until we do, we will not meet this basic crisis in civil rights and in education.

And I believe that the civil rights issue, and I don't say this because this is an NAACP convention, I have been saying this wherever I go, because I believe it. I believe that the question of civil rights must be made the top priority item on American Democracy's unfinished business in the 20th Century. Civil rights is not a political issue, because when a matter or issue is essentially a moral matter, it must transcend partisan politics. This is exactly the approach that we have been making together. We have been trying not to play politics with civil rights, but to put the civil rights question in its proper focus and mobilize people from all political parties to try to adopt legislation and to take necessary steps to implement an effective civil rights program.

We have been saying that there are three basic reasons why we support civil rights. First we support it as a matter of simple justice. As a matter of human decency. As a matter of dignity and as a matter of basic morality.

Secondly, we fight for civil rights to make them universal, because as Joe Rauh

said in his speech, civil rights and human freedom are indivisible. You cannot have those things unto yourself. You can be free only as your neighbor is free. You can be free only as you share freedom with the people you live with. Hitler taught us that when he jeopardized the freedom of the smallest country in the world, he jeopardized our freedom. And when Mr. Eastland and the Dixiecrats and the bigots in the South jeopardize the Constitution and deny Negroes their freedom, they are putting my freedom in jeopardy, even though I live in the city of Detroit.

Those people who can't understand the first two basic reasons that ought to put America on the high road in the struggle for civil rights at least ought to understand the third reason: that civil rights is no longer a domestic question confined to the geography of the United States. The question of civil rights in the United States is an international issue. As a matter of fact, there are more people thinking about it abroad than there seem to be in America thinking about this problem. Because more than one half of the people of the world are dark of skin, and they look at America, and they brush aside our noble slogans about the virtues of American democracy. They brush aside our economic indexes which say that we are the richest country in the world. And they say, yes, but how do you square your noble professions with your ugly practices in the civil rights field?

Mr. Eastland sits there in his Committee, and you would think that he is really trying to fight the Communists. He doesn't know anything about what makes a Communist. What he does not understand are the great social, dynamic forces sweeping the world. This struggle between freedom and tyranny is not an

old fashioned struggle for geography. This is a struggle for the hearts and minds of people. And you can't win it with an H-bomb, even though you need one to defend yourself. You can't win the struggle of ideas and ideals with guns, although we as a part of the free world must of necessity be strong on the military front, in order to meet the challenge of aggression no matter where it may raise its ugly head. But what we need to understand in the world is that military power is the negative aspect of a dynamic foreign policy, and that if you want to win the struggle of ideas and ideals for the hearts and minds of men, you have got to wage the struggle on the positive basis, and civil rights is the key issue in the world. Mr. Eastland and his associates and the association of bigots don't understand this. We need somehow to get through to the dark corners of their small mentalities on these kind of things.

My feelings on this are not based upon reading a book. I have been in Asia, India and North Africa. I have talked to people--workers in the big cities, intellectuals, business men, government officials. I have gone into the mountain villages. I am here to tell you that they know what's going on in America. I went up into the foothills of the Himalaya mountains in Northern India, in a little village of 300 people, and we had a meeting, and I talked about America--what we were doing trying to bring to fulfillment the great promise of America. They didn't want to know about how many Chevrolets General Motors made last year, or whether the Chrysler fins had a bigger sweep than the Cadillac fins. They asked me about Montgomery, Alabama. Just sit down on a doorstep with a peasant



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And yet we have enemies. I get a lot of literature, you know. I don't read it all, but I read a couple that came over my desk the other day. Here's one: "Behind the Plot to Sovietize the South." And on the back it tells you in summary what this pamphlet is about, and I'll quote it to you: "This booklet tells about the activities of Walter Reuther and his collaborating white and Negro communist, socialist and Marxist kind of labor agitators who are mobilizing a massive offensive to impose an insidious civil rights program on the South." I want to say to the people who put out this kind of literary trash that the NAACP, the AFL-CIO, and all of the good people who are joined together in the fight for civil rights, we do more to fight the Communists in one week, than all these people would do in their whole lives put together.

We need to understand that this fight between freedom and tyranny is for keeps. It's the only world series in which there is only one game. No play-offs, no return matches, no next year's season. You either win the first game, or you lose for keeps. That's what we are. Now you would think that in that kind of a game you would put your best team in, and Mr. Eastland and Mr. Talmadge and those fellows shouldn't even be on the scrub team. We've got to put our best team in, because we've got to demonstrate not only that we have great economic muscle, but we have the sense of moral responsibility to find a practical way to equate economic muscle with social and political morality in terms of the lives of everyone, because, you know if we were just a little country, no bigger than Luxembourg, it really wouldn't be tragic if we were doing so badly. But in truth, America is the last best hope of freedom. If we can't make freedom

and democracy work in America, then it can't be made to work any place in the world. And I say we are going to make it work in America, because it must be made to work.

Now the task ahead is a difficult one. We will need to mobilize all of our forces. We will need to pull together men and women of good will and good faith--people in the NAACP, our good friends in the churches, the labor movement, the liberal people who are willing to stand on the side of morality in this struggle. We need to broaden our efforts to get more allies in the leadership conference that has been working so effectively in the past. And we need to have the courage to tell both political parties that they both should be ashamed of the shoddy record that they have registered on the field of civil rights.

The Supreme Court is living in the 20th Century and the Congress is still somewhere back in the dark Nineteenth Century. It's about time they catch up. You know these fellows are the same fellows who passed the Taft-Hartley Act, the same people who fight against civil rights are the same people who fight against raising minimum wages, the same people who fight against social progress. Well, I want to say to these people in Congress that they have been on the longest sit-down strike in the history of America--80 long years. And we think it's about time that they terminate that sit down strike on civil rights and begin to turn out some legislation. Now the bill has passed the House, but that's nothing new. That's happened many times, but now it's over in the Senate, the graveyard of civil rights legislation. I think that we've got a job to do. It can be done. We must mobilize the American people, and we must translate their moral will into practical political pressure and say to that Senate, "Stay in there.

Outlast the filibuster, if it takes all summer and all fall, until the next Congress meets in January. And if these evil men who use the right of unlimited debate to block the will of the majority, if they know that the majority is going to stay put through the hot summer into fall, and into the winter months, maybe they won't try so hard, because they know it will not succeed. And the only people in America who can see to it that the filibuster does not succeed are the American people, and our job is to mobilize the American people, so that their will and their moral pressure will exert itself upon the Congress.

We also must make it clear there can be no compromise on the jury trial provision. We don't want a civil rights in name without any substance. We don't want a civil rights bill that looks good on paper, that has no enforcement machinery, and these people who talk about the jury trial, they are using that only to try to destroy a civil rights bill that can be enforced through the federal government and the federal courts.

Then we have got the long range fight of Rule 22. Because even though the present limited civil rights bill is adopted, this is only the beginning, because there are many other areas in which the ugly forms of discrimination are working every day in the lives of millions of Americans and Rule 22 is the key that will open the door in the Senate so that majority rule can prevail and the filibuster can be ended. We have been saying a long time that the right of debate does not mean the right to prevent the majority from acting. Debate is not an end. It is the means to an end, and the end must be legislative action.

We are very happy that the UAW was able to join forces with the NAACP in originating the original approach to changing Rule 22. We helped finance some of the Constitutional lawyers who went back to the Hamilton papers and the early Constitutional papers and developed the whole case to prove that the Senate was not a continuing body. Therefore, every new Senate, on the day of its organization can adopt its own rules, and, any new Senate can abolish Rule 22 and substitute in its place a rule providing for majority rule. And because we participated in that historic effort, with the NAACP, we have received many brickbats from the people in the Senate who believe that filibuster is their best line of defense.

Now we made progress on Rule 22. In 1953, we only got 21 votes. We had 15 liberal Democrats with us. We had five liberal Republicans, and we had Wayne Morse, the Independent. In 1957, we got 41 votes, seven votes short of what we needed. I say we need to intensify our efforts between now and the January date in which the new Congress in 1959 is organized to get those other seven votes, so that we can abolish the filibuster in the United States Senate for all time.

We are continuing to work on this matter. As a matter of fact, hearings are being held now. Friday morning, June 28, 1957, I'm going to testify on Rule 22 before a Subcommittee of the United States Senate dealing with rules of procedure. But Rule 22, let us always remember, has been the shovel with which the Dixiecrats and reactionary Republicans have always dug the grave for our Civil Rights legislation. And until we abolish Rule 22, we will never be able to translate our Civil Rights program into practical legislation and implementation.

We have the question of FEPC. Yes, 38 major cities have adopted local FEPC ordinances. Fifteen states have state FEPC laws. We have made progress, but no one should kid us into believing the answer to FEPC can be found either locally or at the state level. Tell me how you'll get relief in Mississippi, at the state level, where you need it most. The only way that we can get a comprehensive FEPC law on the books is to do it in Washington, D. C., and to bind the 48 states in the process.

Well there are some mighty fine people in America who tell you yes, they are against discrimination in every phase. They are opposed to it in terms of job opportunities. They are opposed to it in terms of education. They are opposed to it in terms of transportation. But, they say, legislation is not the way to do it. Education. You've got to educate people. You've got to get hatred out of men's hearts. Well, we agree. Education is important. But you can't educate this problem out of existence by education alone. You've got to work both on the educational front and the legislative front. And you've got to parallel those two activities right down the line.

I have told a story on other occasions which I think bears repetition because it's the simplest way to illustrate what I think to be a very fundamental point. These people who talk about education as the answer to FEPC, and these other problems. I ask them to look to see what happens in America in about 10 days from now. We're going to have a Fourth of July weekend. There are going to be millions and millions of Americans in their automobiles driving all over America. And on the Friday before the weekend, the National Safety Council will

launch its comprehensive, intensive educational program. They'll be on the radio networks, the TV networks and the newspapers. Everybody is going to be told and warned to drive carefully, don't exceed the speed limit. Don't go through a red light. Observe all the traffic regulations. We're going to just saturate America with education on traffic safety, but no one would propose that that's where we end. In addition to this educational program, we have thousands of fellows on motorcycles in blue uniforms. And when you go through a red light or exceed the speed limit or violate some other traffic law, the motorcycle officer pulls you over to the curb. He gets a book out, and he gives you a ticket. It costs you ten bucks, and that speeds up the educational process like nobody's business.

So we say let's educate and educate and educate. But let's expedite the educational process by some effective legislation. And if an employer will not give a qualified Negro, or a qualified Jew a job, because of prejudice, let's take that employer into court like you go into court when a cop catches you going through a red light. And you will see how fast the educational process picks up. Now these good people who are all for education and opposed to legislation don't think it's wrong to have this fellow on the motorcycle. They think that's perfectly proper, perfectly fine, and yet, when you're dealing in a field of basic human values of human rights of basic morality, they just want the educational process to take its own course. We've got to keep pressing and pressing and pressing until we get a federal FEPC law.

We're proud in the Auto Worker's Union of the progress we've made. Other unions have made great progress in breaking down discrimination in the factories. But we haven't got one single major contract, although we've got one and a half million workers under contract, and although we try and try and try at the bargaining table in which the employer has agreed to a clause prohibiting discrimination because of race or creed or color at the hiring gate. They say to us, "Oh, you don't represent the workers until we employ them. We aren't going to let you say anything about who we hire. After we hire them, then you can talk about their work, their conditions of employment, their wages." Well, we believe that the question of the policy at the hiring gate is important, and if we can't do it at the bargaining table, then we have to do it in the halls of Congress.

Now there are many other things we need to be thinking about. I want to say to this Convention of the NAACP, the American labor movement is not a fair weather friend of yours in the fight for civil rights. I want to say for the AFL-CIO, its leadership, George Meany, and the people involved in directing that organization: "We are with you all the way, and we are going to stay with you all the way until we get on the statute books of America effective civil rights legislation in all of these fields, not only in FEPC, but in every other aspect of our national life."

We want an America in which every citizen is equal when he walks into the polling place to cast his ballot. We want an America in which every child has



educational opportunity, an America in which every citizen has equal job opportunity, equal rights to the use of all public facilities, the right to live in a decent neighborhood, in a decent house.

It's about time we look at this problem of clearing the slums in our major cities. We're not clearing the slums. We're just modernizing them. We're just creating new ghettos. I say it's about time we had some courage to build decent communities in which all Americans can live on an integrated basis as decent citizens living together in a wholesome community.

Now these are not matters of special privileges. These are basic rights to which every American is entitled. And no American should be satisfied with less.

The task is difficult. The struggle will be hard, but let us always remember that human progress has never been served to mankind on a silver platter. The history of the world shows chapter after chapter that men of faith and courage have had to fight to bring to fulfillment their dreams and their hopes and their aspirations. What we need to do is to keep the faith. Keep the faith in ourselves. And when the going is rough, as it will be, let us remember that the test of one's convictions is not how did you behave, how did you stand up when it was convenient and comfortable. The test of one's convictions is do you stand up for the things that you believe when it takes courage? Do you stand up in the face of adversity, in the face of great controversy? This is the kind of fight we are engaged in. That's why when the going is rough, always remember that there are millions of us, and that together we can move

mountains, and that together we can solve this problem and make America in the image of what it really stands for.

So I say to you, we pledge our hands and our hearts, we pledge our all to you in this struggle, because we believe that this is the most important struggle that America must win, if it is going to be true to itself and provide leadership to the free world. And if we mobilize our multitudes, if we mobilize all the people of good will and good faith in America, I say that we can do the job, and together we can build that brave new tomorrow that we dream about and fashion it in the image of peace, freedom and justice and human brotherhood.

Thank you and may God bless all of you.

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