

## Restoring the American Community

The following remarks as prepared were delivered on December 7, 2003 by Governor Howard Dean, candidate for Democratic Party's presidential nomination, in Columbia, South Carolina:

In 1968, Richard Nixon won the White House. He did it in a shameful way – by dividing Americans against one another, stirring up racial prejudices and bringing out the worst in people.

They called it the "Southern Strategy," and the Republicans have been using it ever since. Nixon pioneered it, and Ronald Reagan perfected it, using phrases like "racial quotas" and "welfare queens" to convince white Americans that minorities were to blame for all of America's problems.

The Republican Party would never win elections if they came out and said their core agenda was about selling America piece by piece to their campaign contributors and making sure that wealth and power is concentrated in the hands of a few.

To distract people from their real agenda, they run elections based on race, dividing us, instead of uniting us.

But these politics do worse than that – they fracture the very soul of who we are as a country.

It was a different Republican president, who 150 years ago warned, "A house divided cannot stand," and it is now a different Republican party that has won elections for the past 30 years by turning us into a divided nation.

In America, there is nothing black or white about having to live from one paycheck to the next.

Hunger does not care what color we are.

In America, a conversation between parents about taking on more debt might be in English or it might be in Spanish, worrying about making ends meet knows no racial identity.

Black children and white children all get the flu and need the doctor. In both the inner city and in small rural towns, our schools need good teachers.

When I was in medical school in the Bronx, one of my first ER patients was a 13-year-old African American girl who had an unwanted pregnancy. When I moved to Vermont to practice medicine, one of my first ER patients was a 13-year-old white girl who had an unwanted pregnancy.

They were bound by their common human experience.

There are no black concerns or white concerns or Hispanic concerns in America. There are only human concerns.

Every time a politician uses the word "quota," it's because he'd rather not talk about the real reasons that we've lost almost 3 million jobs.

Every time a politician complains about affirmative action in our universities, it's because he'd rather not talk about the real problems with education in America – like the fact that here in South Carolina, only 15% of African Americans have a post-high school degree.

When education is suffering in lower-income areas, it means that we will all pay for more prisons and face more crime in the future.

When families lack health insurance and are forced to go to the emergency room when they need a doctor, medical care becomes more expensive for each of us.

When wealth is concentrated at the very top, when the middle class is shrinking and the gap between rich and poor grows as wide as it has been since the Gilded Age of the 19th Century, our economy cannot sustain itself.

When wages become stagnant for the majority of Americans, as they have been for the past two decades, we will never feel as though we are getting ahead.

When we have the highest level of personal debt in American history, we are selling off our future, in order to barely keep our heads above water today.

Today, Americans are working harder, for less money, with more debt, and less time to spend with our families and communities.

In the year 2003, in the United States, over 12 million children live in poverty. Nearly 8 million of them are white. And no matter what race they are, too many of them will live in poverty all their lives.

And yesterday, there were 3,000 more children without health care - children of all races. By the end of today, there will be 3,000 more. And by the end of tomorrow, there will be 3,000 more on top of that.

America can do better than this.

It's time we had a new politics in America – a politics that refuses to pander to our lowest prejudices.

Because when white people and black people and brown people vote together, that's when we make true progress in this country.

Jobs, health care, education, democracy, and opportunity. These are the issues that can unite America.

The politics of the 21st century is going to begin with our common interests.

If the President tries to divide us by race, we're going to talk about health care for every American.

If Karl Rove tries to divide us by gender, we're going to talk about better schools for all of our children.

If large corporate interests try to divide us by income, we're going to talk about better jobs and higher wages for every American.

If any politician tries to win an election by turning America into a battle of us versus them, we're going to respond with a politics that says that we're all in this together - that we want to raise our children in a world in which they are not taught to hate one another, because our children are not born to hate one another.

We're going to talk about justice again in this country, and what an America based on justice should look like – an America with justice in our tax code, justice in our health care system, and justice in our hearts as well as our laws.

We're going to talk about making higher education available to every young person in every neighborhood and community in America, because over 95% of people with a 4-year degree in this country escape poverty.

We're going to talk about rebuilding rural communities and making sure that rural America can share in the promise and prosperity of the rest of America.

We're going to talk about investing in more small businesses instead of subsidizing huge corporations, because small businesses create 7 out of every 10 jobs in this country and they don't move their jobs overseas – and they can help revitalize troubled communities. We're going to make it easier for everyone to get a small business loan wherever they live and whatever the color of their skin.

We're going to talk about rebuilding our schools and our roads and our public spaces, empowering people to take pride in their neighborhood and their community again.

We're going to talk about building prosperity that's based on more than spending beyond our means, a prosperity that doesn't force us to choose between working long hours and raising our children, a prosperity that doesn't require a mountain of debt to sustain it, a prosperity that lifts up every one of us and not just those at the very top.

The politics of race and the politics of fear will be answered with the promise of community and a message of hope.

And that's how we're going to win in 2004.

At the Democratic National Convention in 1976, Congresswoman Barbara Jordan asked, "Are we to be one people bound together by common spirit sharing in a common endeavor or will we become a divided nation?"

We are determined to find a way to reach out to Americans of every background, every race, every gender and sexual orientation, and bring them – as Dr. King said – to the same table of brotherhood.

We have great work to do in America. It will take years. But it will last for generations. And it begins today, with every one of us here.

Abraham Lincoln said that government of the people, by the people and for the people shall not perish from this earth. But this President has forgotten ordinary people.

That is why it is time for us to join together. Because it is only a movement of citizens of every color, every income level, and every background that can change this country and once again make it live up to the promise of America.

So, today I ask you to not just join this campaign but make it your own. This new era of the United States begins not with me but with you. United together, you can take back your country.