

“And don’t call *me* a racist!”

**A treasury of quotes
on the past, present, and future
of the color line in America**

SELECTED AND ARRANGED BY Ella Mazel

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THE PRESENT

Lest you think you are no longer in danger
of coming across the sensibility
that made lawn jockeys . . . and other dregs
of so-called Black Americana fashionable,
look no further than Popongo:
a small stuffed gorilla
. . . dressed in the latest hip-hop fashions,
and his face . . . molded
so that it is only lacking the red lips
of the old "darkie" caricature.
. . . Give it either to a racist
you wish to express solidarity with
or an NAACP member
who you think is getting too complacent.

CONSTANTINE VON HOFFMAN, 1997





BEING BLACK

Racism and the individual

Being a Negro in America is not a comfortable existence.

It means being part of the company
of the bruised, the battered, the scarred, and the defeated.

Being a Negro in America
means trying to smile when you want to cry.

It means trying to hold on to physical life
amid psychological death.

It means the pain of watching your children grow up
with clouds of inferiority in their mental skies.

It means having your legs cut off,
and then being condemned for being a cripple.

It means seeing your mother and father
spiritually murdered
by the slings and arrows of daily exploitation,
and then being hated for being an orphan.

Being a Negro in America
. . . means being harried by day and haunted by night
by a nagging sense of nobodiness
and constantly fighting to be saved from the poison of bitterness.

It means the ache and anguish of living in so many situations
where hopes unborn have died.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., 1967



The constant burden

Few members of a race that has oppressed another race can understand or appreciate the deep groans and passionate yearnings of those that have been oppressed.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
(Letter) 1963

No white person, even when he wants to, can understand what it means to be a Negro living in the United States of America, any more than a non-combatant can understand what it means to be in action.

MARGARET HALSEY, 1946

The only way I could hope to understand anything about the plight of black people would be to wake up some morning in a black man's skin.

JOHN HOWARD GRIFFIN, 1977

What every black American knows, and whites should try to imagine, is how it feels to have an unfavorable — and unfair — identity imposed on you every waking day.

ANDREW HACKER, 1992

White people of good will can sympathize, but they can never really understand that hot feeling close to sickness that overwhelms a Negro with self-respect and with a real concern for the institutions of democracy when he or she arrives at a bus station to see signs on separate restrooms saying: FOR COLORED WOMEN and FOR WHITE LADIES.

RACHEL ROBINSON, 1960

What black people know to the marrow of their bones is that when whites discriminate against others on the basis of color, it does not matter in the slightest how much black people have worked, struggled, lifted themselves up by their bootstraps, or how many degrees they might hold.

JOHN HOWARD GRIFFIN, 1977

Being black in America is like being forced to wear ill-fitting shoes. Some people adjust to it. It's always uncomfortable on your foot, but you've got to wear it because it's the only shoe you've got. . . . Some people can bear the discomfort more than others. . . . When you see some acting docile and some acting militant, they have one thing in common: the shoe is uncomfortable. It always has been and always will be.

JOSEPH LATTIMORE, 1992

There's a moving violation that many African-Americans know as DWB: Driving While Black.

HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR., 1995

I have come to know race as a sealed dwelling with windows but no doors. One can look out but never leave.

RANDALL ROBINSON, 1998

The sun rises and the sun sets on our blackness. . . . No man or woman escapes this blackness, for from the first cry of birth to the last sigh of death, black we are and black we shall be.

CHARLES H. KING, JR., 1983

Prior to 1954, we lived in an atmosphere of novocain. Negroes found it necessary, in order to maintain whatever sanity they could, to remain somewhat aloof and detached from "the problem."

ELDRIDGE CLEAVER, 1968

Being black is like skating on ice but not knowing the location of the thin places, going to war without weapons, holding a hand grenade and searching for a target beyond the ten-second interval allotted after pulling the pin.

To be black is a confusing proposition. Not the color itself, but the complexities brought to it by the cold, harsh realities of a nation filled with all-encompassing whiteness. We are caught in the briar patches of white power and institutional controls, and there is no escape.

CHARLES H. KING, JR., 1983

I couldn't believe I was going to spend the rest of my life fighting with people who hate me when they don't even know me. . . . Why should I have to keep getting my face smashed? Why did I have to prove what no white man had to prove?

SAMMY DAVIS, JR., 1989

Before that nameless prejudice . . . before that personal disrespect and mockery, the ridicule and systematic humiliation, the distortion of fact and wanton license of fancy, the cynical ignoring of the better and the boisterous welcoming of the worse . . . before this there rises a sickening despair that would disarm and discourage any nation save that black host to whom *discouragement* is an unwritten word.

W.E.B. DU BOIS, 1903

Death comes early to my people: the slow death of incurable depression, eyes closed to hope, blinded by the brilliance of well-to-do Caucasian twilights, the gleaming finery of white opportunism so long denied to those whose skins are tinted or tainted by color.

CHARLES H. KING, JR., 1983

Only a Negro understands the social leprosy that segregation inflicts upon him.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., 1967

The American Negro . . . simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit on by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face.

W.E.B. DU BOIS, 1903

A pall of sadness hangs over my life and the lives of almost all African Americans because of what we as a people have experienced historically in America, and what we as individuals experience each and every day.

Segregation . . . left me a marked man, forever aware of a shadow of contempt that lays across my identity and my sense of self-esteem. . . . the shadow is always there; only death will free me, and blacks like me, from its pall.

ARTHUR ASHE, 1993

I doubt if the problems of our teeming ghettos will have a great chance to be solved until the white majority, through genuine empathy, comes to feel the ache and anguish of the Negroes' daily life.

There is very little in the life and experience of white America that can compare to the curse this society has put on color. . . . The central quality in the Negro's life is pain — pain so old and so deep that it shows in almost every moment of his existence.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., 1967

Whites talked about the problems of blacks as though such burdens sprang from blackness, from the color of a person's skin. But for black people, the burdens come not from blackness but from white people's seeming inability to see beyond that color to the human individual within.

JOHN HOWARD GRIFFIN, 1977

What Negroes have wanted and needed was not to cease being Negroes, but to cease being "Negroes"; i.e., the possessors of an identity marked by their skin and their features which automatically and inescapably condemned them to total disability for life.

HAROLD R. ISAACS, 1963

I was for all practical purposes a made-in-America person. Yet the making itself had not convinced me that I was truly a part of the process that governed the society. Black and white, two colors, two origins, two destinies, that is what intervened in the midst of reflections on place for a young African in the south of Georgia.

MOLEFI KETE ASANTE, 1993

I grew up aware that I was a Negro, colored, black, a coon, a pickaninny, a nigger, an ace, a spade, and other less flattering terms.

ARTHUR ASHE, 1981

Three was the age when I learned that I was black, the colored kid, monkey-child, different.

PATRICIA WILLIAMS, 1997

Every parent some time faces the problem of explaining the facts of life to his child. Just as inevitably, for the Negro parent, the moment comes when he must explain to his offspring the facts of segregation.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
1958

I know that no matter what I achieve, how hard I work, how much I contribute, how high my standards, how deep my values, how good my intentions — in the minds of too many who have the power to impact my life, the color of my skin relegates me to second class citizenship; that is and always will be a Constant Burden.

JEAN TUCKER MANN, 1997

We were walking down the tree-lined street [in Columbus, Nebraska] when suddenly we found ourselves in the midst of a sea of white faces pointing, snickering, whispering, and staring at us. . . . I was not a stranger to this mutual sense of otherness, but I was overwhelmed by the strength and lopsidedness of the feeling.

FAYE WATTLETON, 1996

As a child, every time I encountered prejudice — which was rubbed in your face, once segregation started under Jim Crow — I would feel it down to my core. I was not a crying child, except when it came to being treated badly because of my race. . . . In those instances, I would go home and sit on my bed and weep and weep . . . the tears streaming down my face.

BESSIE DELANY, 1993

When I was very young, before an impervious shell had been grown around me by both those who loved me and those who hated me, I thought grownups quite silly for making such fuss about a difference in human features that seemed no more important than any other. . . . A small child's logic soon to be crushed by an infectious malevolence that would make the color difference all-consuming and unique among human differences.

RANDALL ROBINSON, 1998

I am pleased that God made my skin black, but I wish He had made it thicker.

CURT FLOOD

Over and above the political, economic, sociological, and international implications of racial prejudices, their major significance is that they place unnecessary burdens upon human beings.

KENNETH B. CLARK, 1963

You don't have to be as good as white people, you have to be *better or the best*. When Negroes are average, *they fail*, unless they are very, very lucky. Now, if you're average and *white*, honey, you can go far. Just look at Dan Quayle. If that boy was colored he'd be washing dishes somewhere.

BESSIE DELANY, 1993

Overnight the world looked different, it wasn't one color anymore. . . . It was as if I'd walked through a swinging door for eighteen years, a door . . . always secretly held open. But . . . when it finally hit me it was worse than if I'd learned about it gradually and knew how to move with it.

SAMMY DAVIS, JR., 1989

I get mad because they don't see *me*. They see black. I'm not trying to act like I'm better than anyone else, but they don't see that I'm fairly intelligent. That I have opinions on different things. All they see is that I'm black and all that goes with it.

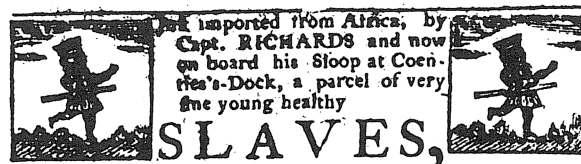
TASHA KNIGHT, 1992

I was torn between two issues — colored, and women's rights. But it seemed to me that no matter how much I had to put up with as a woman, the bigger problem was being colored. People looked at me and the first thing they saw was *Negro*, not *woman*. So racial equality, as a cause, won my heart.

BESSIE DELANY, 1993

My God, what do we want? What does any human being want? Take away an accident of pigmentation of a thin layer of our outer skin and there is no difference between me and anyone else. All we want is for that trivial difference to make no difference.

SHIRLEY CHISHOLM, 1970



To be sold by HENRY C. BOGART, next Door to Mr. John Vanderpiegle.----He has also Molasses for Sale.

Our vices and degradation are ever arrayed against us, but our virtues are passed by unnoticed.
JOHN B. RUSSWURM, 1827

Psychological murder

Prejudice is more than an incident in many lives; it is often lockstitched into the very fabric of personality. In such cases it cannot be extracted by tweezers. To change it, the whole pattern of life would have to be altered.

GORDON ALLPORT, 1954

How much faith in education can be clung to by people whose minds have been raped. For three centuries, black people have been told by white people that they were intellectually inferior — and generations of blacks have believed it and acted accordingly.

CARL T. ROWAN, 1974

From birth to death, the Negro is handled, distorted and violated by the symbols and tentacles of white power, tentacles that worm their way into his neurons and invade the gray cells of his cortex. . . . The Negro not only dons a mask; he becomes, in many instances, the mask he dons.

LERONE BENNETT, JR., 1964

There was not, no matter where one turned, any acceptable image of oneself, no proof of one's existence. One had the choice, either of "acting just like a nigger" or of *not* acting just like a nigger — and only those who have tried it know how impossible it is to tell the difference.

JAMES BALDWIN, 1961

I learned not so much to turn the other cheek as to present, wherever possible, no cheek at all. . . . I learned in moments of humiliation to walk away with what was left of my dignity, rather than lose it all in an explosion of rage.

ARTHUR ASHE, 1993

Black folks aren't born expecting segregation, prepared from day one to follow its confining rules. Nobody presents you with a handbook when you're teething and says, "Here's how you must behave as a second-class citizen." Instead, the humiliating expectations and traditions of segregation creep over you, slowly stealing a teaspoonful of your self-esteem each day.

MELBA PATILLO BEALS, 1994

Where does a black soul go to rest?
RANDALL ROBINSON, 1998

Because the society, with unmitigated cruelty, has made the Negro's color anathema, every Negro child suffers a traumatic emotional burden when he encounters the reality of his black skin.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
1967

Conscious submission to racism seemed to me worse than death. It killed a person's spirit. It took a little from him each time he knew he should not submit — and did.

JAMES FORMAN, 1972

Racism ultimately created the state in which defensiveness and hypocrisy are our almost instinctive responses, and innocence and generosity are invitations to trouble.

ARTHUR ASHE, 1993

The blacks bore lifetimes of insults quietly like ancient scars, most of them insults casually, rather than wilfully, inflicted, tossed at them by whites operating under the foolish assumptions of racism. Even to be talked to fondly, like a favorite hound, can leave a mark, and the black people bore up under this marking until they were psychologically a tattooed people.

MELISSA FAYE GREENE, 1991

Struggle is the essence of life for us, yet the form of struggle makes a difference in the psychology of the individual. I have often wished that our struggle could somehow be less agonized, less emotionally complex . . . with more promise of clear victory than we have seen after four hundred years of sacrifice and death.

JAMES FORMAN, 1972

I knew . . . that in trying to shut the Negro race away from us, we have shut ourselves away from so many good, creative, honest, deeply human things in life . . . that the warped, distorted frame we have put around every Negro child from birth is around every white child also . . . that what cruelly shapes and cripples the personality of one is as cruelly shaping and crippling the personality of the other.

LILLIAN SMITH, 1949

A social system in which "white is right" presents a serious threat to the self-esteem of black Americans. . . There is thus abundant psychological justification for the new emphasis on black pride. Teaching children that "black is beautiful" is a healthy corrective to the lesson long inculcated by white society that black is blemished.

ALEXANDER THOMAS, M.D., 1972

Racial identity

Black Americans are tied to each other in ways that the majority cannot begin to presume to understand.

ANTHONY WALTON, 1993

The Afro-American identity movements and some form of affirmative action were the inevitable social fires that had to be ignited in the fight against the centuries-long holocaust of Euro-American racism.

ORLANDO PATTERSON, 1997

The quest for black identity involves self-respect and self-regard, realms inseparable from, yet not identical to, political power and economic status.

CORNEL WEST, 1993

Your real work as a Negro lies in two directions: *First*, to let the world know what there is fine and genuine about the Negro race. And *secondly*, to see that there is nothing about that race which is worth contempt; your contempt, my contempt; or the contempt of the wide, wide world.

W.E.B. DU BOIS, 1928

"I really don't think of you as Black." . . . The erasure of my Blackness is meant to be a compliment, but I am not flattered. For when I am e-raced, I am denied an identity that is meaningful to me and am separated from people who are my flesh and blood.

HARLON L. DALTON, 1995

Black awareness is the essential beginning step in creating a framework for understanding and accomplishing the educational and political work that values our humanity. Real empowerment begins by learning the lessons of our own heritage and knowing something about ourselves.

MANNING MARABLE, 1997

The cornerstone of identity in the African American world was the knowledge that we as a people had been historically wronged by the larger culture that dominated us. We believed that we were morally superior to that culture because it was only a misfortune to be a slave but a shame and a sin to be the owner of slaves.

ARTHUR ASHE, 1993

If men despise Negroes, they will not despise them less if [they] are called "colored" or "Afro-Americans."

W.E.B. DU BOIS, 1928

If society says it is better to be white, not only white people but Negroes come to believe it. And a child may try to escape the trap of inferiority by denying the fact of his own race.

KENNETH B. CLARK, 1963

Not many Negroes were impressed by the [Black] Muslims' call for total separation. But almost all Negroes were touched by their savage indictment of hypocrisy and their delicious acceptance of the fact of being black.

LERONE BENNETT, JR., 1964

Like it or not, a black man, unless he has become irretrievably "white-minded," responds with an additional dimension of his being to the articulated experience of another black — in spite of the universality of human experience.

ELDRIDGE CLEAVER, 1968

Identity is so much a part of human nature that its significance is too easily minimized. Nowhere is this tendency to take identity for granted more dramatic than in the touchy area of race.

The cloak of proud black identity has provided a therapeutic warmth for my naked self after the chilly cocoon of inferiority imposed early in my life by a white-exalting society. But it is best worn loosely, lest it become as constricting and isolating for the famished individual soul as the garment it replaced.

Black folks still tell me how to be "black" when I stray from the racial party lines, while white folks tell me how to be "color-blind." I still feel as frustrated in my attempts to transcend race as a reluctant lemming must feel while being rushed over the brink by its herd.

CLARENCE PAGE, 1996

Completely by the accident of racism, we have been bound together with people with whom we may or not have something in common, just because we are "black." One day you wonder: What do the misdeeds of a Mike Tyson have to do with me? So why do I feel implicated? And how can I not feel racial recrimination when I can feel racial pride?

HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR., 1994

I am made "black" only in the most superficial way by virtue of being the object of a white racist's hate. The empathetic exchange of survivors' tales among "brothers," even the collective struggle against the clear wrong of racism, does not provide a tapestry sufficiently rich to give meaning and definition to the totality of my life.

GLENN C. LOURY, 1993

Though it is no longer fashionable to say it, I am obsessively black. Race is an overarching aspect of my identity. America has made me this way. Or, more accurately, white Americans have made me this way.

RANDALL ROBINSON, 1998

One's racial identity can be a source of either pride or shame, according to the individual. I choose the former over the latter.

KEILI LANGFORD, 1998

Weak as its scientific foundation may be, race is an essential part of who we are (and of how we see others) that is no more easily shed than unpleasant memories. Few of us would choose to be rendered raceless — to be suddenly without a tribe.

ELLIS COSE, 1997

While [blacks] were ashamed of their color, it was an albatross hanging around their necks. They freed themselves from that dead weight by picking up their blackness and holding it out proudly for all the world to see. They found their own beauty and turned their former shame into their badge of honor.

SHIRLEY CHISHOLM, 1970

Do I need to appear "Black," in the manner in which blacks are negatively portrayed in the media, to be considered "Black"? . . . I am an educated, well-spoken black woman. My race is one of my many attributes: neither limiting, nor defining. I represent the culmination of my experiences, and the many cultures that have influenced me. I represent the colors of my ancestors. But most of all, I represent myself, and of that, I am most proud.

RENEE DELPHIN, 1997



Color is not a human or a personal reality; it is a political reality.

JAMES BALDWIN, 1963

Living in two worlds

One ever feels his two-ness
— an American, a Negro;
two souls, two thoughts,
two unreconciled strivings;
two warring ideals in one
dark body, whose dogged
strength alone keeps it
from being torn asunder.

W.E.B. DU BOIS, 1903

To be a Negro in America
. . . means fighting daily a
double battle — a battle
against pathology within
and a battle against
oppression without.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
1967

It is a fact — though few of the dominant race have the imagination to realize it — that the life of a Negro . . . must always be lived in the United States on two planes. This double existence too often creates below the surface a deadly war of shame and blame.

ELIZABETH SHEPLEY SERGEANT, 1927

Like so many other people who have become members of the American society, Negroes have to blend their unique character as a group with the common character they share as Americans. Between these two identifications there has been up to now a deep and mutually deforming split.

HAROLD R. ISAACS, 1963

There were times . . . when I felt a burning sense of shame that I was not with other blacks — and whites — standing up to the fire hoses and the police dogs . . . As my fame increased, so did my anguish. I knew that many blacks were proud of my accomplishments on the tennis court. But I also knew that some others . . . did not bother to hide . . . their disdain and contempt for me.

ARTHUR ASHE, 1993

As a black professional in America it is sometimes so difficult to find true acceptance in either the black or the white communities that I often feel like an outsider to both; alienation seems to be the price of living with a foot in each world.

LAWRENCE OTIS GRAHAM, 1995

The very act of constantly dividing one's personality between a predominantly white world of work and a predominantly black home community can be wearying.

CLARENCE PAGE, 1996

No matter how liberal, how well accepted into the white community, no matter how popular or famous, no matter how unprejudiced a Negro may be, most of us have to wear some sort of mask outside our own group.

ALTHEA GIBSON

The fact that blacks were dichotomous out of the need for psychic and emotional survival was a truth that, either known or unknown, was denied by whites.

CHARLES H. KING, JR., 1983

There's that clunky social *box*, larger than your body, taking up all that space. You need two chairs at the table, one for you, one for your blackness.

PATRICIA WILLIAMS, 1997

Paranoia becomes a way of life as black personalities become dichotomous. Living in a white world is like skating on thin ice. A hypocritical posture of well-being and adjustment must be projected lest the full dimension of inner black thoughts and feelings disrupt white illusions and perspectives.

What I found on those [dominantly white] campuses is . . . black faces popping up in an ocean of white milk. Black students, submerged in both numbers and potential, living two lives. The retreat from white customs and traditions into the solidarity of blackness was occasioned by establishing a black house on campus. This separate world within the white world was the only means of escaping the trauma induced by racism.

CHARLES H. KING, JR., 1983

The ability to remain true to *one* self . . . must begin with the ethical project of considering how we can align a sense of ourselves with a sense of the world. This is the essence of integrity, is it not, never having to split into a well-maintained "front" and a closely guarded "inside."

In its most literal sense, the ability to be one person rather than two refers to some resolution of the ethically dangerous position of finding oneself split between the one one is and the one one feels one *has* to be. The sheltered self and the masquerade.

PATRICIA WILLIAMS, 1997

Blacks and whites see the world differently because they live in different worlds.

CHRISTOPHER EDLEY, JR., 1996

Fear and rage

With the passage of time, I became increasingly aware of how all the adults around me . . . were living with constant fear and apprehension. It felt as though we always had a white foot pressed against the back of our necks.

MELBA PATILLO BEALS, 1994

All our efforts to make ourselves acceptable Negroes could not keep us safe. In a confrontation with white authority, the odds were clearly against us.

ANDREW YOUNG, 1996

My son was turning three years old. . . . Somewhere along the way he is going to turn almost overnight from someone who is perceived as cute and innocent into someone who is perceived as a menace, the most feared creature on America's urban streets today, *a young black male*.

CLARENCE PAGE, 1996

The constant danger which enshadows the Negro American all his life — danger of small and great indignities, and of actual physical harm or outright destruction — is something that cannot be conveyed to those who have not lived through it.

MARGARET HALSEY, 1946

The fear that I heard in my father's voice . . . when he realized that I really *believed* I could do anything a white boy could do, and had every intention of proving it, was not at all like the fear I heard when one of us was ill. . . . It was another fear, a fear that the child, in challenging the white world's assumptions, was putting himself in the path of destruction.

JAMES BALDWIN, 1963

I was eight years old when I saw a photo of Emmett Till's body. . . . The murder shocked me; I began thinking of myself as a black person for the first time, not just a person. And I grew more distrustful and wary. . . . I could be hurt or even killed just for being black.

KAREEM ABDUL-JABBAR, 1996

How frustrating it is for those who think they have reached the dream of equal opportunity, dignity, and acceptance, only to discover it fading into a nightmare of guilt, fear, suspicion, and resentment. Whether we actually are *subjected* to contempt or not, we are enraged by the very vulnerability that makes us forever *subject* to it.

CLARENCE PAGE, 1996

The accumulated effect of the black wounds and scars suffered in a white-dominated society is a deep-seated anger, a boiling sense of rage, and a passionate pessimism regarding America's will to justice. CORNEL WEST, 1993

It's hard enough to be a human being under any circumstances, but when there is an entire civilization determined to stop you from being one, things get a little more desperately complicated. What do you do then? LEROI JONES, 1961

The fire in my bones achieves white heat, consuming my joy at individual successes, stunting the growth of love toward all who are not of my hue, stifling the very air considered to be free.

CHARLES H. KING, JR., 1983

If people can understand what motivates Jackie Robinson, what makes him appear in moments of crisis to be consumed by rage . . . [they] may also find a better understanding of the forces with which [Negroes] grapple throughout the world today. CARL T. ROWAN, 1960

In a democracy . . . a segregated minority is going to hate its segregators just as sure as God made little apples. This is not Negro nature, but human nature, which resents false promises a good deal more intensively than it resents no promises at all. MARGARET HALSEY, 1946

You cannot deny people the basic emotions of rage, resentment and, yes, hate. Only slaves or saints or masochists love their oppressors. If you humiliate a man, if you degrade him, if you do this over and over for hundreds of years, he will either hate you or hate himself. This is a basic fact of humanity, and Negroes are human.

LERONE BENNETT, JR., 1964

God help me if I ever decide that there is no course left but that of destruction. I can feel in myself sometimes an anger that wants only to destroy everything in its path. There is a point at which passions as great as those that burn in the hearts of black Americans will not be frustrated any longer.

SHIRLEY CHISHOLM, 1970

It cannot be taken for granted that Negroes will adhere to nonviolence under any and all conditions. When there is rocklike intransigence or sophisticated manipulation that mocks the empty-handed petitioner, rage replaces reason.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., 1967

It would be years before I understood the emotional toll of repressing anger and natural frustration.

ARTHUR ASHE, 1981

I think that rage is an understandable and appropriate response to an absurd situation, namely, black people finding themselves in a situation of white supremacist power.

CORNEL WEST, 1997

The anger of the oppressed man is a sign of health, not pathology. It says: "I am condemning you for doing wrong to me."

ALEXANDER THOMAS, M.D.
1972

There is a fire in my bones. It is there because of the problem of race. I speak of race as a condition, not as a state of being. The black of me has now become the whole of me. It has not always been thus. The flames of hate and hostility toward white America developed slowly — burning all vestiges of accommodation or subjugation to whiteness. I am now a man.

White institutions make of me a warrior, ready to do battle, hammering incessantly against those practices and customs that eat the heart out of my existence. What you have not known, cruel white world, is the steel beneath my sinew and muscles, and the untapped reservoir of my brain.

CHARLES H. KING, JR., 1983

The Los Angeles cops acted out their racist nature on one more black man. They beat, tortured, persecuted me until my nerves snapped and those bright white lights seared my mind asunder. . . . If I had my way, I have thought many times in the years since then [1953], I would line these criminals against the wall and coolly, coldly, with calculated aim, shoot all of them through the icy blue of their murderous eyes.

JAMES FORMAN, 1972

Malcolm X articulated black rage in a manner unprecedented in American history. . . . The substance of what he said highlighted the chronic refusal of most Americans to acknowledge the sheer absurdity that confronts human beings of African descent in this country — the incessant assaults on black intelligence, beauty, character, and possibility.

CORNEL WEST, 1993

The most dangerous creation of any society is that man who has nothing to lose.

JAMES BALDWIN, 1963

Malcolm X: The embodiment of black rage

Debate with James Farmer

March 1962

We who are Muslims . . . don't think that an integrated cup of coffee is sufficient payment for 310 years of slave labor.

Second-class citizenship is only a modified form of slavery, which means the Civil War didn't end slavery and the Amendments didn't end slavery. They didn't do it because we still have to wrestle the Supreme Court and the Congress and the Senate to correct the hypocrisy that's been practiced against us by whites for the past umteen years.

The Autobiography of Malcolm X, 1964-5

Human rights! Respect as *human beings*! That's what America's black masses want. That's the true problem. The black masses want not to be shrunk from as though they are plague-ridden. They want not to be walled up in slums, in the ghettos, like animals. They want to live in an open, free society where they can walk with their heads up, like men, and women!

Is white America really sorry for her crimes against the black people? Does white America have the capacity to repent — and to atone? Does the capacity to repent, to atone, exist in a majority, in one-half, in even one-

third of American white society? . . . Indeed, how *can* white society atone for enslaving, for raping, for unmaning, for otherwise brutalizing *millions* of human beings, for centuries? What atonement would the God of Justice demand for the robbery of the black people's labor, their lives, their true identities, their culture, their history — and even their human dignity?

Where the really sincere white people have got to do their "proving" of themselves is not among the black *victims*, but out in the battle lines of where America's racism really *is* — and that's in their own communities.

Sometimes, I have dared to dream . . . that one day, history may even say that my voice — which disturbed the white man's smugness, and his arrogance, and his complacency . . . helped to save America from a grave, possibly even a fatal catastrophe.

The goal has always been the same, with the approaches to it as different as mine and Dr. Martin Luther King's . . . that dramatizes the brutality and the evil of the white man against defenseless blacks. And in the racial climate of this country today, it is anybody's guess which of the "extremes" in approach to the black man's problems might *personally* meet a fatal catastrophe first — "non-violent" Dr. King, or so-called "violent" me.

Malcolm X: Controversial rebel [1925-1965]

I . . . refuse to be put in the position of denying the truth of Malcolm's statements simply because I disagree with his conclusions.
JAMES BALDWIN, 1963

Malcolm . . . was refreshing excitement; he scared hell out of the rest of us, bred as we are to caution, to hypocrisy in the presence of white folks, to the smile that never fades. . . Whatever else he was — or was not — *Malcolm was a man!* OSSIE DAVIS, 1965

Malcolm X sharply crystallized the relation of black affirmation of self, black desire for freedom, black rage against American society, and the likelihood of early black death. . . the first real black spokesperson who looked ferocious white racism in the eye, didn't blink, and lived long enough to tell America the truth.
CORNEL WEST, 1993

Although Malcolm X was assassinated before he could organize his ideas into a movement, he was an enormously talented theorist who influenced millions with his articulate expositions on television programs and his lectures on public platforms.

LERONE BENNETT, JR., 1987

Because of his untimely death, Malcolm X bequeathed to the cause of civil rights an incomplete legacy open to wide interpretation. Many whites saw his transformation from hatred and anger to a religiously inspired quest after racial equality as a hopeful sign. . . .

Militant blacks emphasized Malcolm X's earlier message that only blacks could free themselves.

ALAN AXELROD / CHARLES PHILLIPS, 1992

Malcolm X, in the eyes of Elijah's [Muslim] followers, had committed the unforgivable heresy when, changing his view and abandoning the racist position, he admitted the possibility of brotherhood between blacks and whites.
ELDRIDGE CLEAVER, 1968

Even had Malcolm not changed, he would still have been a relevant figure on the American scene, standing in relation . . . to the "responsible" civil rights leaders, just about where John Brown stood in relation to the "responsible" abolitionists . . . One final salute to that brave, black, ironic gallantry, which was his style and hallmark, that shocking *zing* of fire-and-be-damned-to-you, so absolutely absent in every other Negro man I know.

OSSIE DAVIS, 1965

Beyond rage and hate

The sins of the fathers are visited upon the heads of the children — but only if the children continue in the evil deeds of the fathers.

ELDRIDGE CLEAVER, 1968

Hate is just as injurious to the hater as it is to the hated. Like an unchecked cancer, hate corrodes the personality and eats away its vital unity. . . . Hate is too great a burden to bear.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
1967

It demands great spiritual resilience not to hate the hater whose foot is on your neck, and an even greater miracle of perception and charity not to teach your child to hate.

JAMES BALDWIN, 1963

I want to say to every African-American living in this country and abroad, who holds, like, one teeny little piece of bitterness in your heart, you need to let it go and live on the legacy.

OPRAH WINFREY, 1998

I esteem myself a good, persistent hater of injustice and oppression, but my resentment ceases when they cease, and I have no heart to visit upon children the sins of their fathers.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS, 1881

My father . . . told us that the men who burned down our farm were not three white men. They were individuals with hatred and jealousy in their hearts. He implored us not to label or stereotype anyone based on the color of their skin. My father further warned us not to become embittered by other people's hatred because it would poison our lives as it had the lives of those three men.

ARMSTRONG WILLIAMS, 1997

I . . . must oppose any attempt that Negroes may make to do to others what has been done to them. I think I know . . . the spiritual wasteland to which that road leads. It is so simple a fact and one that is so hard, apparently, to grasp: *Whoever debases others is debasing himself.*

JAMES BALDWIN, 1963

Nothing can ever justify the articulation of hatred. Color prejudice transcends the barriers of black and white. The great strength of the black freedom movement . . . has been the realization that our struggle for equality is not just for ourselves, but for all humanity. When we surrender this moral and ethical principle, we sacrifice our greatest weapon in the battle for democracy for all people who experience discrimination.

MANNING MARABLE, 1997

The price of hating other human beings is loving oneself less.

ELDRIDGE CLEAVER, 1968

Overcoming

We come from a legacy of people who, when they were told they were nothing and everything around them, every single experience in their life, said, "You are nobody. You are nothing". . . . somewhere inside themselves, said, "I believe I'm better."

OPRAH WINFREY, 1998

The reason I don't feel anger is because the white man's not keeping his foot on my mind. He can't do anything to my mind. I'm free to think whatever I want to think. He's afraid, but he doesn't know he's afraid.

CAROL FREEMAN, 1992

By age thirteen, I had intuitively developed the cardinal guidepost for emotional health: the Never Wannabe Rule. Never want to be with people who don't want to be with you.

RANDALL ROBINSON, 1998

The Negro will only be truly free when he reaches down to the inner depths of his own being and signs with the pen and ink of assertive selfhood his own emancipation proclamation. . . . The Negro must boldly throw off the manacles of self-abnegation and say to himself and the world: "I am somebody. I am a person. I am a man with dignity and honor."

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., 1967

We were neither trained nor expected to protest against racial injustice, for that was not considered possible, or even desirable. . . . It was wisdom that would enable us to survive, not courage or the unpleasant and uncomfortable emotions evoked by honesty.

ANDREW YOUNG, 1996

Under conditions of slavery, enforced backwardness, oppression, and debasement, Negroes in varying ways accepted the white man's image of them and survived by building up their own inner defense against it and finding their own ways of expressing their energies and their hopes, their angers and their sorrows.

HAROLD R. ISAACS, 1963

However the white man may have enslaved the Negro's body he did not enslave his soma — his inner stamina, his functions were kept free; and this audacious fact is one of the causes of some white men's envy and fury.

LILLIAN SMITH, 1949

Textbooks now point out that surviving slavery took a skill and stamina that no other race has been called upon to sustain.

ANDREW HACKER, 1992

I was on my way to becoming a master at the game that all African Americans must learn if they wish to preserve their sanity: how to live with reasonable freedom and dignity and yet also avoid insult, disappointment, and conflict rooted in racism.

ARTHUR ASHE, 1993

Racism was not just a black problem. It was America's problem. And until the country solved it, I was not going to let bigotry make me a victim instead of a full human being.

COLIN POWELL, 1995

I tire of wearing blackness as a badge, but I have worn it so long, so well, that I've caught that second wind, that mysterious force that propels me onward and upward. It is this mystic power that anoints my bushy head with a tenacity unpossessed by any other race of man under the heavens, or outside or inside the gates of hell.

CHARLES H. KING, JR., 1983

Fields of play became human proving grounds where blacks had a reasonable shot at disproving the white fantasy about their inferiority. Watching Jackie [Robinson], somehow I decided that I would do that on the sloping grounds of government, philanthropy and journalism, where there are no umpires and where white people cheat and demean blacks every day. I took my fast ball to those fields because Jackie had taught me that a black man need never again submit his psyche to the cruelties of white people's racist fantasies.

ROGER WILKINS, 1982

I have lived in and risen in a white-dominated society and a white-dominated profession, but not by denying my race, not by seeing it as a chain holding me back or an obstacle to be overcome. Others may use my race against me, but I will never use it against myself. My blackness has been a source of pride, strength, and inspiration, and so has my being an American.

I remembered the well-intentioned remarks of some of my white superiors: "Powell, you're the best black lieutenant I've ever known." Thank you, suh. But inside me, I was thinking, if you intend to measure me against only black lieutenants, you are making a mistake. I'm going to show you the best lieutenant in the Army, period.

COLIN POWELL, 1995

To live is to wrestle with despair yet never to allow despair to have the last word.

CORNEL WEST, 1997

Beyond survival lies the potential to perceive more clearly both a reason and the means for further struggle. DERRICK BELL, 1992

One has to view the "new Negro" as . . . the embodiment . . . of healthy strivings that were never smothered, despite all the efforts of an oppressive society. The social blows may bruise, but they do not necessarily crush.

ALEXANDER THOMAS, M.D.
1972

The genius of our black foremothers and forefathers was to create powerful buffers to ward off the nihilistic threat, to equip black folk with cultural armor to beat back the demons of hopelessness, meaninglessness, and lovelessness.

CORNEL WEST, 1993

After centuries of being brainwashed by every symbol and medium of the dominant culture into a sense of their own inferiority and unattractiveness, it was inevitable that Afro-Americans go through a process of psychological liberation that entailed not just the denial of the worthlessness but some emphasis on the positive worth of being Afro-American.

ORLANDO PATTERSON, 1997

By the simple act of survival, the Negro made an inestimable contribution to his posterity and to his native land. . . . He descended into the hell of slavery, was denied books, pencil and paper, was denied the sanctity of marriage — was crucified, in fact, and rose again some three hundred years later in Chicago and Harlem and Atlanta and Washington. *The Negro endured.*

My grandmother and her generation were perhaps the last living witnesses of a religious tradition that surged like billowing flames from the choir lofts and rickety benches of old Baptist and Methodist churches, of a tradition that dared to flesh out that without which religion is a mere Sunday morning game: the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. . . . In the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, in the face of lynchings, legalized robbery, institutionalized degradation, they dared to affirm the goodness and the greatness of man.

LERONE BENNETT, JR., 1964

This may strike you as terribly anti-intellectual, or a Rowan version of voodoo, but it is a reality that discerning black people can smell a racist a mile away. Those who have gone through decades of suffering the slings and barbs of bigotry have a sixth sense that tells them who in white America is a friend, who is foe.

CARL T. ROWAN, 1991

In fear and trembling, in blood and suffering, the Negro has retained a certain dark joy — a zest for life, a creative capacity for meeting adversity and transcending it — that is beautiful and meaningful.

LERONE BENNETT, JR., 1964

Had it not been for our art and our culture, when all else was ripped from us, we would never have been able to survive as a people.

HARRY BELAFONTE, 1997

Jim Crow's not law anymore, but it's still in some people's hearts. I don't let it get me, though. I just laugh it off, child. I never let prejudice stop me from what I wanted to do in this life.

SADIE DELANY, 1993

When you are faced with as many insults, big and small, as black people have to put up with, you learn to laugh or go crazy. Laughing off life's lesser insults helps you to conserve your energies to cope with the bigger ones.

CLARENCE PAGE, 1996

Many white people do not understand how Negroes can laugh at the stupid indignities so often heaped upon them, from high to low, in this American country of ours. . . . Maybe it is this wry laughter that has kept us going all these years, from slavery's denial of the draught of freedom up to the Washington airport's denial of a glass of milk. Maybe it is just a way of saying, "To defeat us you must defeat our laughter."

LANGSTON HUGHES, 1948

Oppressed people have a good sense of humor. Think of the Jews. They know how to laugh, and to laugh at themselves! Well, we colored folks are the same way. We colored folks are survivors.

Those rebby types! What do they think, anyway? When we get to the Spirit World, do they think colored people are going to be waiting on their tables, pouring their tea? I think some of them are in for a big surprise. They're going to be pouring tea for *me*.

BESSIE DELANY, 1993

Being able to laugh got me through.

TONI MORRISON, 1998

Being American

I was surprised at how patriotic I felt, being the first native-born American winner [in 1993, of the Nobel Prize for Literature] since Steinbeck in 1962.

... I felt pride that a black and a woman had been recognized in such an international forum.

TONI MORRISON, 1998

The United States of America is your country ...

Some people will tell you it is theirs alone, not yours to share. Don't believe them.

... You must resist any group that believes it has a proprietary right to guide the ship of state.

ARTHUR ASHE, 1993
To his young daughter

Most African Americans, if given a chance, would have chosen to be "just Americans" ever since the first of us was brought here to Jamestown colony in 1619, a year before the *Mayflower* landed. But that choice has never been left up to us.

CLARENCE PAGE, 1996

Negroes have played a large role in the survival of America. Hundreds of thousands of Negroes, from Bunker Hill to Vietnam, have died for an idea that was not real in their own lives. Has any other people in any other age had such faith and hope — and received so little charity?

LERONE BENNETT, JR., 1964

As children we learned in school about the lowest common denominator; America is about the highest common denominator. That is why Dr. King loved this country. He often spoke about "the glory of America, with all its faults."

VICE PRESIDENT AL GORE, 1998

Segregation and racism had made me loathe aspects of the white South but had left me scarcely less of a patriot. In fact, to me and my family, winning a place on our national team would mark my ultimate triumph over all those people who had opposed my career in the South in the name of segregation.

ARTHUR ASHE, 1993

The Army was living the democratic ideal ahead of the rest of America. Beginning in the fifties, less discrimination, a truer merit system, and leveler playing fields existed inside the gates of our military posts than in any Southern city hall or Northern corporation. The Army, therefore, made it easier for me to love my country, with all its flaws, and to serve her with all my heart.

COLIN POWELL, 1995

The paradox of success

There was a great deal of fuss about being the "first black" . . . The fact that this kind of accomplishment by a black player got so much attention was an indication that we still had so far to go.

ARTHUR ASHE, 1981

The recognized achievements of some Negroes, despite rigid racial barriers, indicate that society by its prejudices may be depriving itself of valuable contributions from many others. It is now doubtful whether America can afford the luxury of such a waste of human resources.

KENNETH B. CLARK, 1963

Black minds and talent have skills to control a spacecraft or scalpel with the same finesse and dexterity with which they control a basketball.

RONALD MCNAIR, 1983

As a celebrity, I encounter few examples of overt racism directed specifically at me. Perhaps I encounter more than I acknowledge, because I never want to dignify ignorant or malicious people by assuming they are fully aware of what they do.

ARTHUR ASHE, 1993

Whatever the dramatic achievements in the lives of individual African Americans, those somehow were not credited to the group in general. Perhaps they should not have been, but they should not have had the opposite effect either. . . . Underneath the fulsome praise was more than a slight suggestion that he or she was the exception that proved the rule.

JOHN HOPE FRANKLIN, 1993

Blacks were routinely denied the recognition of individual talent that is supposed to define the American creed. This history is barely mentioned now that blacks are made by many whites to look as if they duck individual assessment while embracing group privilege.

MICHAEL ERIC DYSON, 1996

America has become comfortable and literally color-blind in its acceptance and adoration of the blacks who entertain, but it is still stubbornly racist in conceding equitable power to blacks in most other arenas. That shouldn't be surprising. The power to entertain is not quite the same as the power to control.

AUDREY EDWARDS / CRAIG K. POLITE, 1992

I had to become so big, so strong, so important that those people and their hatred could never touch me.

SAMMY DAVIS, JR., 1989

America does not yet permit Negro artists and intellectuals to wash their hands in the waters of cultural freedom.

LANGSTON HUGHES, 1948

Whites, ready and willing to applaud, even idolize black athletes and entertainers, refuse to hire, or balk at working with, blacks.

DERRICK BELL, 1992

[When Jackie Robinson had to escape from a crowd of fans to catch a plane], it was probably the only day in history that a black man ran from a white mob with love instead of lynching on its mind. SAM MALIN, 1960

An Afro-American music, jazz, is the nation's classical voice, defining, audibly, its entire civilizational style. So powerful and unavoidable is the Afro-American popular influence that it is now common to find people who, while remaining racists in personal relations and attitudes, nonetheless have surrendered their tastes, and much of their viewing and listening time, to Afro-American entertainers, talk-show hosts, and sitcom stars.

ORLANDO PATTERSON, 1997

There is no doubt that white America will accept a black champion, applaud and reward him, as long as there is no "white hope" in sight. But what white America demands in her black champions is a brilliant, powerful body and a dull, bestial mind — a tiger in the ring and a pussycat outside the ring.

ELDRIDGE CLEAVER, 1968

Jackie [Robinson] had to speak out because deep in his heart he knew that no Negro, however famous, however great his contributions, was safe from the poison darts of racial bigotry . . . for in the minds of millions the most accomplished black man would remain "just another Negro," as vulnerable to attitudes of racial superiority as any Mississippi sharecropper.

CARL T. ROWAN, 1960

When I was on that stage . . . it was as though my talent was giving me a pass from their prejudice.
SAMMY DAVIS, JR., 1989

Being a role model

I am just me. . . . I do not and did not and most likely will not ever feel that I have to justify that. I do not have to be a role model, a good person, a credit to the race. NIKKI GIOVANNI, 1993

Personal success can be no answer. It can no longer be a question of an Anderson, a Carver, a Robinson, or a Robeson. It must be a question of the well-being and opportunities not of a few but for *all* of this great Negro people of which I am a part. PAUL ROBESON, 1949

How can we elevate Seyi Fayanju, the twelve-year-old black child from Verona, New Jersey, who won the *National Geographic* Geography Bee in a competition of thousands, into a more compelling role model for our children than gangsta rap artists and NBA players?

RANDALL ROBINSON, 1998

All “first blacks” become conditioned to racism and do not allow it to intrude upon their missions or goals. To become a “first black,” one had to force himself to accept bias as a way of life, to wink at it, blink at it, and become blind if necessary to its dehumanizing methodology.

CHARLES H. KING, JR., 1983

[Arthur] Ashe had been trained by his father to survive and overcome by making white people comfortable . . . in the Joe Louis tradition . . . never to mock a white opponent or to be photographed with a white woman.

ROBERT LIPSYTE, 1997

Even as race relations in America became increasingly stormy, and I started to feel the attraction of more militant approaches to segregation and racism, I nevertheless saw my Davis Cup appointment as the outstanding honor of my life to that point. Since no black American had ever been on the team, I was now a part of history.

ARTHUR ASHE, 1993

Arthur Ashe was what the white news media and the U.S.T.A. thought the image of a black tennis athlete should be, and they have tried to sell that image even after his death. . . . You don’t see young black tennis athletes trying to be like Arthur. Today’s role models must be found among the living, not among the dead.

WILLIAM WASHINGTON, 1997

It’s not easy to be a martyr in the field of race relations.

JACKIE ROBINSON, 1960

If we're going to have role models — whatever that term may mean — who gets to pick them? Fans, news media, athletes, shoe companies? . . . If Tiger [Woods] and Venus [Williams] don't end up as this decade's Homecoming king and queen, I'll demand a recount. So will Nike.

ROBERT LIPSYTE, 1997

This step is being made . . . by a single individual [Jackie Robinson], by a young man who has already had to undergo racial barbs and humiliations that are sickening to any human being with a heart; by one young man whose wounds you cannot see or share. BRANCH RICKEY, 1947

The opportunity for one black man to play professional baseball alongside a field full of white men had significance beyond the ballpark. From day one, every step Robinson took seemed tuned to the national imagination, to the dreams — and nightmares — of millions of people. The real burden Robinson bore was that he knew this . . . In this strange moment it seemed that history could be shaped to the contours of a baseball field.

Robinson's pact with Rickey was to play ball. His pact with himself was to prove beyond any measure that he could not only play with white men, he could play so well that the doors would have to open for others. He was never content merely to fit in; to integrate, he knew that he would always have to be one step ahead.

DAVID FALKNER, 1995



With an earnest zeal, [Jackie Robinson] personified the ritualized angst of racial assimilation.

MICHAEL ANDERSON, 1997

Paul Robeson: Speaking out ahead of his time

Commencement oration Rutgers University, 1919

We of this less favored race realize that our future lies chiefly in our own hands. . . . But . . . it is necessary that you of the favored race catch a new vision and exemplify in your actions this new American spirit. . . embodying the desire to relieve the manifest distress of your fellows.

Interview, 1935

I believe it would be a good thing for the American Negro to have more consciousness of his African tradition, to be proud of it. Africa has contributed great culture to the world, and will continue to do so.

Speech, 1953

No one has yet explained to my satisfaction what business a black lad from a Mississippi or Georgia share-cropping farm has in Asia shooting down the yellow or brown son of an impoverished rice-farmer.

Here I Stand, 1958

The equal *place* to which we aspire cannot be reached without the equal *rights* we demand, and so the winning of those rights is not a maximum fulfillment but a minimum necessity and we cannot settle for less.

The *power of spirit* that our people have is intangible, but it is a great force that must be unleashed in the struggles of today. A spirit of steadfast determination, exaltation in the face of trials—it is the very soul of our people that has been formed through all the long and weary years of our march toward freedom.

One of the [Congressional] committee members angrily demanded: “Why didn’t you stay in Russia?” “Because my father was a slave,” I retorted, “and my people died to build this country, and I am going to stay right here and have a part of it, just like you.”

The one voice in which we should speak must be the expression of our entire people on the central issue which is all-important to every Negro — our right to be free and equal. On many other issues there are great differences among us, and hence it is not possible for any one person, or any group of people, to presume to speak for us all. . . . A unified leadership of a unified movement means that people of *all* political views — conservatives, liberals, and radicals — must be represented therein.

To achieve the right of full citizenship which is our just demand, we must ever speak and act like free men.

Paul Robeson: Role model for all humanity [1898-1976]

At a time when there seemed to be no hope at all . . . Paul Robeson spoke out . . . for all of us. JAMES BALDWIN, 1965

Paul Robeson is a legendary American, one of the few true Renaissance men of the 20th Century. An actor, singer, scholar, athlete, and political activist, Robeson could dominate a stage or concert hall like the sun radiating its rays across the land on a hot summer day. His rich baritone voice was resonant and melodic. He enraptured his audiences with his talent — despite the color of his skin.

Had Robeson been born white, or had he been born in a more tolerant era, every school child would speak his name along with Muhammad Ali's and Martin Luther King's. But . . . he was doomed to be stifled by the climate of his times. . . . His successes . . . were ultimately overshadowed by heartache and rejection, the result of a society which would not tolerate a Black man who spoke his mind.

ROB EDELMAN, 1979

The man

Before King dreamed, before Thurgood Marshall petitioned and Sidney Poitier emoted, before the big breakthroughs in Hollywood and Washington, before the Jim Crow signs came down and before the civil rights banners went up, before Spike Lee, before Denzel [Washington], before Sam Jackson and Jesse Jackson, there was Paul Robeson. One of the most phenomenally gifted men ever born in America . . . he lived one of the most extraordinary stories of the century . . . When he died . . . even his critics and detractors conceded that he was one of the immortals.

LERONE BENNETT, JR., 1998

His has been appropriately called democracy's most powerful voice. Nature endowed him with a magnificent talent, housed it in a . . . most attractive frame; provided a winsome and congenial personality to go along with it; instilled in him a quality of courage in direct ratio to his enormous physique; and topped it off by saturating this extraordinary man with boundless love for his fellows and an uncompromising hatred of injustice and oppression in all their ugly forms. He, on his part, accepted these gifts as tools with which to work. . . . He has probably personally addressed, in speech and in song, without the aid of television, more people on the earth, than any other living human being. HOPE R. STEVENS, 1965

Paul was a man and a half, and we have no category, even now, to hold the size of him. . . . Athletic champion, yes; Phi Beta Kappa scholar, singer, actor, spokesman, activist, leader — yes! Africanist, socialist, black Nationalist — all that, too, but something more, something new, something different. . . . He had studied many life styles till they became his by second nature, was himself transfigured by what he learned, and became by *accident* what socialist societies are meant to produce by design.

OSSIE DAVIS, 1971

To tell of the achievements, the successes and the experiences of Paul Robeson would be to relate the history of most of the first half of this century. . . . Love for people, a passion for justice and a yearning for freedom. That is the Paul Robeson that no power on earth can conceal. . . . How tragic for this present generation of our youth to be denied his participation in their lives! Not only the magnificence of his art, but also the genius of his mind — and for black youth in particular. What a model for this and every generation to aspire to!

GEORGE W. CROCKETT, 1973

He is one of the few of whom I would say that they have greatness. . . . I despair of ever putting into convincing words my notion of this quality in him. I can say only that by what he does, thinks and is, by his unassailable dignity, and his serene, incorruptible simplicity, Paul Robeson strikes me as having been made out of the original stuff of the world. In this sense he is coeval with Adam and the redwood trees of California. He is a fresh act, a fresh gesture, a fresh effort of creation.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT, 1934

The tallest tree in our forest has fallen. Along with the countless persons here and around the world who mourn his loss, I think Nature herself must feel that with the passing of Paul Robeson something uniquely wonderful has departed from the earth. . . . A whole generation must be startled to learn now that such a person actually existed in their lifetime — a modern-day black American with the manifold talents of a Renaissance man!

LLOYD L. BROWN, 1976

The remarkably wonderful thing about the principles for which Paul Robeson stood during his lifetime is that they remain relevant and even urgent today. . . . Very few . . . have the courage to speak out in support of unpopular causes when the stakes are high and the risks are many. In taking his stand, Robeson was such a person; and although his stands caused him much anguish and even pain and physical suffering, he saw no alternative. . . . It was his failure to be a narrow-minded nationalist that led many of his fellow Americans to turn against him. But it was this world view that placed him ahead of his time.

JOHN HOPE FRANKLIN, 1998

The heritage

His father had been a slave in North Carolina, and when, afterwards, a Methodist preacher holding revivalist meetings, he used to sing the songs of the slave days, the boy Paul learned them and carried them about, sunk deep in his heart. Out of them now he is making a great international reputation.

HANNEN SWAFFER, 1929

The scholar / athlete

When the 1917 football season ended, Paul Robeson was considered by many experts to be the best football player in America. . . . Walter Camp, who was often referred to as the father of American football, judged the black star to be the all-time best at his position. . . . In his third year he added baseball and track. . . . And then . . . Robey also tried out for and won a place on the varsity debating team.

LLOYD L. BROWN, 1997

[In 1919] in recognition of his excellence in class and on campus, the president of [Rutgers University] chose him as commencement orator. Robeson selected as his title, "Our New Idealism." . . . His speech was a triumph — epochal, as it were, in the history of the college.

J. A. ROGERS, 1947

The singer

I have heard all the great singers of our time. No voice has moved me so profoundly with so many passions of thought and emotion. . . . We laughed and wept. He broke our hearts with beauty.

JAMES DOUGLAS, 1928

He is the finest musical instrument wrought by nature in our time.

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT, 1934

As a musician he is known as a singer of Negro song — pieces in the vernacular. He himself says, "I sing the Negro songs because they suit my voice and suit me."

MAUD CUNEY-HARE, 1936

His rendition of English, Hebrew, Mexican, Russian and German folk songs, often sung both in the original tongue and in English, shows the same understanding and deep sincerity that make him the most famous male singer of Negro spirituals of his day.

CURRENT BIOGRAPHY, 1941

Paul sang the songs of freedom, of love, of gaiety, of hope, with a new meaning for all oppressed and dispossessed people — but particularly for black people. The songs of protest and solace that the black people of America had composed and sung to noteless music for over three centuries, he dignified and glorified by presenting them with pride and confidence everywhere he went.

HOPE R. STEVENS, 1965

Paul Robeson became the voice of the cultural heritage, not only of the Afro-American people, but of the entire international working class. So far as this country is concerned, we may consider him the father of the American political song of the contemporary era.

PHILIP S. FONER, 1978

The actor

Mr. Robeson's Ebon Othello [in London] is as sturdy as an oak, deep-rooted in its elemental passion and many branched in its early tenderness, a superb giant of the woods for the great hurricane of tragedy to whisper through, then rage open, then break. One thinks of a tree because the greatness is of nature, not of art.

IVOR BROWN, 1930

[Robeson] gave a portrayal of great resonance, vitality, and fluency, and one surpassing any Othello within my experience. He brings majesty and power to the role, as well as pathos and terror.

WARD MOREHOUSE, 1943

Robeson received one of the most prolonged and wildest ovations in the history of the New York theatre. LIFE MAGAZINE, 1943

The activist

In honoring you today, we do not . . . express our enthusiasm for your histrionic and musical achievements alone. We honor you chiefly as a man — a man of tremendous stature, energy and physical dexterity; a man of brilliant mind, a man whose sensitive spirit makes possible your penetrating interpretations; and a man who, above all else, travels across the world as an example of the humanity and the greatness of our democratic heritage. W. H. COWLEY, 1940

President, Hamilton College, on conferring honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters

Never reticent about his social outlook, Mr. Robeson has often expressed it not only in the choice of some of his program numbers . . . but also in his remarks from the platform introducing these songs. . . . "I want to use my singing for direct political action against fascism in America," he explained to reporters. "I feel that singing pretty songs is not enough."

JULIUS BLOOM, 1947

For two generations of Americans, Paul Robeson represented the entire Negro people of this country. He was a spectacular hero who seemed to have been born lucky. . . . He might have kept quiet as so many other Negro celebrities have done; he might have taken it easier, and kept his friends happy, but he couldn't. . . . We salute more than a man, we salute a cause. We salute the dreams and aspirations and the hopes of an oppressed people whether they be in Selma, Alabama, in Jackson, Mississippi, or in Vietnam.

JOHN LEWIS, 1965

He spoke and lived black pride before it became politically acceptable in the white community; Paul Robeson is a model of black political activism. . . . He transcended his time, his race, and his own person to join that select group of souls who speak for all humanity.

EDWARD J. BLOUSTEIN, 1972

If ever a man placed himself on the altar of sacrifice for his people, that man was Paul Robeson. In the climate in which he refused to bend the knee to the tyrants of thought-control and paid the price therefor, others less rigid or less strong — in conformity or by compromise — went on to riches and approval. . . . After the names and the deeds of the pygmies who in their pomp and circumstance attempted to detract and to defame him have long been forgotten — this moral giant of our time will live in the hearts of his people and of the fighters for freedom yet unborn, and his voice can never be stilled.

HOPE R. STEVENS, 1965

WHOSE PROBLEM?

Racism and society

Am I an American?
I'm — just — an
Irish, Negro, Jewish, Italian,
French and English, Spanish, Russian,
Chinese, Polish, Scotch, Hungarian,
Litvak, Swedish, Finnish, Canadian,
Greek and Turk, and Czech
and double-Czech American.
And that ain't all,
I was baptized
Baptist, Methodist, Congregationalist,
Lutheran, Atheist, Roman Catholic,
Orthodox Jewish, Presbyterian,
Seventh-Day Adventist, Mormon, Quaker,
Christian Scientist
— and lots more!

JOHN LATOUCHE, 1940



SECTARIAN BITTERNESS.

Th. Nast.

White privilege

Every white person who is not too caught up in his or her own sense of righteous victimization knows that white skin still affords certain privileges in our color-coded society.

CLARENCE PAGE, 1996

Malcolm [X] knew that every white man in America profits directly or indirectly from his position vis-à-vis Negroes, profits from racism even though he does not practice it or believe it.

OSSIE DAVIS, 1965

No white American, including those who insist that opportunities exist for persons of every race, would change places with even the most successful black American.

ANDREW HACKER, 1992

We have long since grown accustomed to thinking of Blacks as being “racially disadvantaged.” Rarely, however, do we refer to Whites as “racially *advantaged*,” even though that is an equally apt characterization of the existing inequality.

HARLON L. DALTON, 1995

As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage.

Many, perhaps most, of our white students in the United States think that racism doesn’t affect them because they are not people of color; they do not see “whiteness” as a racial identity.

In my class and place, I did not recognize myself as a racist because I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth.

PEGGY MCINTOSH, 1988

Centuries of discrimination had significantly diminished the economic competition encountered by whites. Loud proclamations of white self-sufficiency ignored a more subtle truth: The incalculable value of being white in America rested to a large extent on the calculable disadvantage of being black.

TOM WICKER, 1996

Whiteness in a racist, corporate-controlled society is like having the image of an American Express Card . . . stamped on one's face: immediately you are "universally accepted."

MANNING MARABLE, 1997

In settings where Whites dominate, being White is not noteworthy. It is like the tick of a familiar clock, part of the easily tuned-out background noise.

HARLON L. DALTON, 1995

When whites are forced to look honestly upon the objective proof of their deeds, the cement of mendacity holding white society together swiftly disintegrates.

ELDRIDGE CLEAVER, 1968

I don't think most whites understand what it is to be black in the United States today. They don't even have a clue. They blame the blacks to a large degree for their own problems. . . . As a white, I can tell you that whites have a lot to do to make it a fair game.

DOUGLAS MASSEY, 1992

In our culture, whiteness is rarely marked in the indicative there! there! sense of my bracketed blackness. And the majoritarian privilege of never noticing themselves was the beginning of an imbalance from which so much, so much else flowed.

PATRICIA WILLIAMS, 1997

This is a racist nation. I am a racist and you are a racist because we've had the advantage from the day we were born. We may not be bigots. . . . But I'm still a racist because my tribe still has the power and seems determined to hang onto it.

WILL D. CAMPBELL, 1992

Nothing that we do is qualified, limited, discredited or acclaimed simply because of our racial background. We don't have to represent our race, and nothing we do is judged as a credit to our race, or as confirmation of its shortcomings or inferiority.

PAUL KIVEL, 1993

I am afraid the nerve of some white folks has gone to their heads and affected their brains so that they can't think right — only white — which is too bad, because this is *our* world, too, so they had better get over that.

LANGSTON HUGHES, 1945

We must take whiteness itself and hold it up to the light and see that it is a color too.

PAUL KIVEL, 1993

A shared destiny . . .

Many of our white brothers . . . have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny and they have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
(Dream) 1963

There are no winners and losers in the battle against racism. Its defeat is not a victory for one particular group, but for society as a whole, and for us all as human beings.

PROJECT HIP-HOP, 1997

We must be together. This is not a matter of doing something "for" blacks or "for" whites; it is a matter of making American society viable in the future.

THOMAS F. PETTIGREW, 1971

Actively we have woven ourselves with the very warp and woof of this nation — we have fought their battles, shared their sorrow, mingled our blood with theirs, and generation after generation have pleaded with a headstrong, careless people to despise not justice, mercy, and truth, lest the nation be smitten with a curse. Our song, our toil, our cheer, and warning have been given to this nation in blood-brotherhood.

W.E.B. DU BOIS, 1903

Black America is called upon to stand as the protagonist of tolerance, of fair play, of justice, and of good will. Until white America heeds, we shall never let its conscience sleep. For the responsibility for the outcome is not ours alone. White America cannot save itself if it prevents us from being saved.

JAMES WELDON JOHNSON, 1934

The relationship between American society and the Negro problem is not one-sided. The entire structure of American society is itself greatly conditioned by the presence of the thirteen million Negro citizens.

The Negro problem is not only America's greatest failure but also America's incomparably great opportunity for the future. If America should follow its own deepest convictions, its well-being at home would be increased directly. . . . America can demonstrate that justice, equality and cooperation are possible between white and colored people.

GUNNAR MYRDAL, 1942

Just as most Negroes still believe that the ultimate solution for us is in America, I am firmly convinced that the ultimate salvation of America is the Negro.

JOHN OLIVER KILLENS, 1964

The question of the Negro's place in America, which for a long time could actually be kicked around as a serious question, has been decisively resolved: he is here to stay.

ELDRIDGE CLEAVER, 1968

If we were to take joint responsibility for cleaning up the racial mess, we could search for creative solutions that expand opportunities for everyone. . . . In a very real sense Black liberation holds the promise of White liberation as well.

HARLON L. DALTON, 1995

I think it is naive in the extreme to assert that there is no persistent vulnerability to prejudice — rooted in human nature, prejudice based on race and ethnicity — and other characteristics as well. . . . Yet, in our society, when we have this increasing diversity, we have a community value, a national interest in helping to overcome this inherent vulnerability.

VICE PRESIDENT AL GORE, 1997

Both Northerners and Southerners often make the mistake of assuming that the race situation is an exclusively Southern problem. Actually, it is an American problem. While it has different aspects in the North and in the South, anything that is done about it, good or bad, has national repercussions; and the individual citizen is involved, not as a Northerner or Southerner, but as an American.

MARGARET HALSEY, 1946

The choice was not alone between fairness and unfairness to an oppressed people, but also between wholeness and division in the family of man. It was between integration and disintegration in our very hearts, between love and hate — between the highest and the lowest values I knew.

SARAH PATTON BOYLE, 1962

We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial "outside agitator" idea. Anyone who lives in the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere in this country.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., (Letter) 1963

Both black and white are trapped by race.

DOUGLAS MASSEY, 1992

Racism always involves an injustice committed by one person or group against another person or group for reasons of race, color, religion or political ideology. It is fatal in the end because it always works to damage *both* groups.

JOHN HOWARD GRIFFIN, 1977

If we do not want a black Ireland here, if we do not want our cities divided into mutually hostile casbahs, if we do not want the Negro rebellion to become a real revolution, then we must dare to flesh out the words we profess.

LERONE BENNETT, JR., 1964

The integration of the Negro into American society is one of the most exciting challenges to self-development and self-mastery that any nation of people ever faced.

MARGARET HALSEY, 1946

Too many African-American leaders fail to grasp — as Martin Luther King, Jr., did — that their task is not simply to lead blacks but to lead blacks and whites. . . . We have had too few who spoke *from* the souls of black folk while speaking *to* the souls of us all.

CHRISTOPHER EDLEY, JR., 1996

We can embrace our diversity, find strength in it, and prosper together, or we can focus on our differences and try to restrict access to resources by members of ethnic and racial groups different from ours and limit prosperity for all.

ANDREW YOUNG, 1996

We, the black and white, deeply need each other here if we are really to become a nation — if we are really, that is, to achieve our identity, our maturity, as men and women. To create one nation has proved to be a hideously difficult task; there is certainly no need now to create two, one black and one white.

JAMES BALDWIN, 1963

When our politicians appeal to our greed, our selfishness, and our fear, we have the power to say to them, “We are better than that.” . . . This is the meaning that informs our defense of affirmative action. None of us is free until all of us are free.

CHARLES R. LAWRENCE III / MARI J. MATSUDA, 1997

The long noble struggle for civil rights . . . was a struggle to free white people, too.

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON, (June 14) 1997

. . . or a divided one

If we say, as we do, that no one in this country intends for racism to lead to genocide, the effects of racism are genocidal, regardless of our intentions.

JOHN HOWARD GRIFFIN, 1977

We must acknowledge that as a people — *E Pluribus Unum* — we are on a slippery slope toward economic strife, social turmoil, and cultural chaos. If we go down, we go down together.

CORNEL WEST, 1993

When cities go up in smoke . . . we stop and say we have to do something about it. . . . Cities will burn until we decide, once and for all, to root out the cause of such self-immolation.

CHARLES R. LAWRENCE III /
MARI J. MATSUDA, 1997

There is nothing inherently wrong with being aware of color . . . It is only when character is attached to color, when ability is measured by color, when privilege is tied to color, and a whole galaxy of factors that spell the difference between success and failure in our society are tied to color . . . that it becomes a deadly, dreadful, denigrating factor among us all . . . that we have two nations, black and white, separate, hostile, unequal.

JOHN HOPE FRANKLIN, 1993

After years of enduring America at home and watching her abroad, I am convinced that I will die in a society as racially divided as the one into which I was born more than a half century ago. This no longer appears to concern white Americans.

We are, in America, now sealed off from each other in well-defended racial camps with negligible intergroup knowledge or communication. . . . Better we face the painful problem now than the conflagration looming ahead.

RANDALL ROBINSON, 1998

The many sharp differences between the races, expressed along hardened political and social battle lines, may be precursors for an escalating racial conflict and, ultimately, conflagration. This process is already at work, and accelerating. . . . The peril must be an impetus for self-conscious projects to build bridges among communities.

CHRISTOPHER EDLEY, JR., 1996

The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of civilizing white people.

NIKKI GIOVANNI, 1993

If we, who can scarcely be considered a white nation, persist in thinking of ourselves as one, we condemn ourselves, with the truly white nations, to sterility and decay.

The Negroes of this country may never be able to rise to power, but they are very well placed indeed to precipitate chaos and ring down the curtain on the American dream.

JAMES BALDWIN, 1963

For me, the agony of observing and living the contemporary problem of race in America is just this: to hold simultaneously the fear of war and the dream of community.

CHRISTOPHER EDLEY, JR., 1996

Turn now and look at black America. We are not only separated by geographical and discriminatory containment, but also isolated in spirit. We have become a separate people — both in philosophy and in experience. That black experience is unknown to white America.

CHARLES H. KING, JR., 1983

Real community is based on reciprocity of emotion and relation between individuals sharing a common vision of the possibilities and potentialities of man. The basic fact of race relations in America is that white people and Negroes do not belong to the same community.

Ten years from now or twenty years from now, when Negroes comprise from one-third to more than one-half of the population of our major cities, a bill is coming due. Sooner or later, in a good season or a bad season, the Commonwealth is going to have to decide between the American idea or Fascism.

LERONE BENNETT, JR., 1964

A huge racial chasm remains, and there are few signs that the coming century will see it closed. A century and a quarter after slavery, white America continues to ask of its black citizens an extra patience and perseverance that whites have never required of themselves. So the question for white America is essentially moral: is it right to impose on members of an entire race a lesser start in life, and then to expect from them a degree of resolution that has never been demanded from your own race?

ANDREW HACKER, 1992

Integration . . .

True integration, unlike assimilation, is a two-way street. It involves *cultural sharing*, a genuine respect and interest in difference, not cultural submergence by one party to please another.

Instead of the melting pot metaphor, I prefer the muligan stew. . . . Everything went into the pot and was stirred up, but the pieces didn't melt.

CLARENCE PAGE, 1996

On the one hand, how do we maintain the rituals, the mother tongues, the intimacies that reinforce the boundaries of what keeps us sane? On the other, how do we remain open to the possibility that my son may want to marry your daughter?

PATRICIA WILLIAMS, 1997

This is what Negroes have meant and mean now by integration. It simply means being included in everything that everybody is included in. The rest would be up to the free interplay of society, group, and individual.

HAROLD R. ISAACS, 1963

For genuine integration to exist, the two races must be of equal status and have equal access to resources . . . "Racial integration" . . . is not to be confused with mere desegregation or with the assimilation of black Americans into so-called "white American standards" — two misinterpretations common in the mass media. There is, of course, precious little racial integration fitting this rigorous definition in the United States today.

THOMAS F. PETTIGREW, 1971

The solution may be a long way off, but I think there is more understanding between white kids and black kids than there was thirty years ago. The hope is that, slowly, America, the melting pot that accepted immigrants like my family, can do the same thing for the people who were already here.

FRED WERNER, 1992

In view of the forces at work in the situation, the integration of the Negro American into American society will, when it is finally accomplished, be one of the greatest monuments to the human spirit in all of history.

MARGARET HALSEY, 1946

The attainment of a viable, democratic nation . . . requires extensive racial integration in all realms of life.

THOMAS F. PETTIGREW, 1971

Historical events become convenient excuses for those who want to drive people apart instead of bringing them together.

One of the problems . . . is that you can win a lot of arguments, yet you look in people's eyes and you see that you haven't changed them. There is something still being held back, some core you haven't touched.

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON
(Spring) 1998

On the one hand, integration is true intergroup, interpersonal living. On the other hand, it is the mutual sharing of power. I cannot see how the Negro will be totally liberated from the crushing weight of poor education, squalid housing and economic strangulation until he is integrated, with power, into every level of American life.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., 1967

You will never get the American white man to accept the so-called Negro as an integrated part of his society until the image of the Negro the white man has is changed, and until the image the Negro has of himself is also changed.

MALCOLM X, 1962

A certain despair rises . . . not only among youthful newcomers but . . . in older men weary of having to continue a struggle that they thought, for a brief time in the 1950's, might really be coming to an end at last. . . . One comes upon the feeling that effective integration for Negroes in the American society is unlikely, impossible, or even no longer desirable.

HAROLD R. ISAACS, 1963

As the relations between the previously segregated groups change, becoming objectively better for Afro-Americans, they will be experienced by Afro-Americans as getting much worse even as they are genuinely seen by Euro-Americans to be improving. Both perceptions will be correct.

If the integration of two groups legally and socially separated for more than 350 years does not produce friction, it is the surest sign that no meaningful change has taken place.

ORLANDO PATTERSON, 1997

This word "integration" has millions of white people confused, and angry, believing wrongly that the black masses want to live mixed up with the white man.

MALCOLM X, 1965

A vigorous enforcement of civil rights will bring an end to segregated public facilities, but it cannot bring an end to fears, prejudice, pride and irrationality, which are the barriers to a truly integrated society.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
1967

How can one respect, let alone adopt, the values of a people who do not, on any level whatever, live the way they say they do, or the way they say they should? . . . I am far from convinced that being released from the African witch doctor was worthwhile if I am now — in order to support the moral contradictions and the spiritual aridity of my life — expected to become dependent on the American psychiatrist. It is a bargain I refuse.

JAMES BALDWIN, 1963

Life's piano can only produce the melodies of brotherhood when it is recognized that the black keys are as basic, necessary and beautiful as the white keys. The Negro, through self-acceptance and self-appreciation, will one day cause white America to see that integration is not an obstacle, but an opportunity to participate in the beauty of diversity.

Let us . . . not think of our movement as one that seeks to integrate the Negro into all the existing values of American society. Let us be those creative dissenters who will call our beloved nation to a higher destiny, to a new plateau of compassion, to a more noble expression of humaneness.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., 1967

Integration and transformation: these two themes are at the heart of the rebellion which holds enormous possibilities for all Americans. For if the rebellion fulfills itself it will stimulate our creativity which only comes from diversity; it will relieve the drab sameness of our middle-class minds and our middle-class neighborhoods; it will give us an America more concerned about the claims of human personality and less concerned about color and machines.

LERONE BENNETT, JR., 1964

Integration is not about rubbing shoulders with whites; it's about becoming engineers.

ANDREW YOUNG, 1996

It will do black Americans absolutely no good to be politically and economically enfranchised into a system that systematically denies human values.

SHIRLEY CHISHOLM, 1970

Of course, by now everyone has heard the story of the Southern senator in Washington who became unduly friendly toward a colored lady typist in one of the government offices. When his Dixie cronies reproached him about it, he said, "But I don't want to go to school with her. I just want to have a date."

LANGSTON HUGHES, 1958

Subcultures often have much to teach the mainstream. Until Americans are willing to show a little more genuine curiosity about the joys and pains of one another's ethnic and racial experiences, we will continue to build walls between one another and true integration will continue to be nothing more than an elusive dream.

CLARENCE PAGE, 1996

We are not fighting for the right to be like you. We respect ourselves too much for that. When we fight for freedom, we mean freedom for us to be black, or brown, and you to be white and yet live together in a free and equal society. This is the only way that integration can mean dignity for both of us.

JOHN OLIVER KILLENS, 1964

If some measure of successful integration does finally offer the Negro a more tolerable life as an *American* — where will it leave him as *Negro*? . . . The conquest of civil rights carries us toward those vague and shadowy places where all the new questions about the future of the Negro group identity wait for us.

HAROLD R. ISAACS, 1963

At the price of becoming pseudowhites, we have been admitted in small numbers as probationary members of American society. "Integration" on those terms was an idea that was foredoomed to be rejected by the mass of black Americans. . . . It does not close or even appreciably narrow the gulf between them and the greater society.

SHIRLEY CHISHOLM, 1970

In practice, there is nothing especially dramatic in people getting along well together.

MARGARET HALSEY, 1946

. . . or resegregation

Before we throw around the word "resegregate," the campuses must first desegregate.

There are two sets of reasons for self-segregation. One is to be with people who are like you. The other is to get away from people who are not like you.

CLARENCE PAGE, 1996

The problem of identity and image is the key to why more blacks are seeking black institutions for their educational growth.

CHARLES H. KING, JR., 1983

The thought that repeatedly haunts me as I travel the nation's campuses is that the South did indeed finally win the moral battle over integration, for no group of people now seems more committed to segregation than Afro-American students and young professionals. The motto now seems to be an in-your-face "separate yes, but make damn sure it's equal, by affirmative action or any other means."

ORLANDO PATTERSON, 1997

Working against the integrationist impulse is the affinity impulse, the desire to spend time with those who share your background and values. You miss the old familiar. . . At the roots of resegregation are a set of *parallel realities*, each defined by decidedly different ways of looking at the world.

The self-segregation we see today may be the early vision of a new, pluralistic, multicultural century that will see blacks become a part of the economic and political mainstream but . . . maintain their cultural integrity and identity.

White people are quick to notice whenever black people are getting tribal. They are slow to notice that white people are still tribal, too. . . . Black students sitting with one another is called "self-segregating" or "balkanizing." White students sitting together is called "normal." If self-segregation is not a virtue, it also must be remembered that, alas, students of color didn't invent it.

CLARENCE PAGE, 1996

To prescribe more separation . . . is like getting drunk again to cure a hangover.

THOMAS F. PETTIGREW, 1971

If many black students choose predominantly black schools, it may be a very rational choice. . . . to avoid the racism and alienation they may encounter at largely white campuses.

ANDREW HACKER, 1992

Persisting segregation is partly — and for most middle-class Afro-Americans, largely — a voluntary phenomenon. As a strong believer in integration, I personally find this fact discouraging, but one simply has to face up to it.

ORLANDO PATTERSON, 1997

Segregation is no longer the law, but too often, separation is still the rule. . . . The alternative to integration is not isolation or a new separate but equal, it is disintegration.

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON
(September 25) 1997

That large and unmeasured number who are now banging on the doors of black institutions are echoing a new song to whites who now are attempting to integrate them into their settings: “When you could, you wouldn’t; now you want to, but you can’t.” It is, in essence, a farewell to the white plantation.

CHARLES H. KING, JR., 1983

In 1954, the Supreme Court outlawed officially segregated schools on the ground that they generated in black students “a feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community.” Now, a generation later, it is being argued that blacks who go to schools with predominantly white enrollments can end up with the same inferior feelings. There is no inconsistency here. Today, the people proposing separate schools want those who enroll to sign up voluntarily. And, at least as important, these schools should be under black control. ANDREW HACKER, 1992

Separatism is not a practical alternative in a country with so much diversity. . . . To actually withdraw, to pretend that you can hold the country together while being in separate enclaves, is an illusion. All you have to do is look around the world to see what happens when people have tried that. PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON, (Spring) 1998

We are a nation of unlimited opportunity *and* serious unsolved social ills; and we are all in it together. Racial reintegration can only lead to social disintegration. Far better to resume the dream of Martin Luther King, Jr.: to build a nation where whites and blacks sit side by side at the table of brotherhood. COLIN POWELL, 1995

The limits of law

Intelligent propaganda, legal enactment and reasoned action must attack the conditioned reflexes of race hate and change them.

W.E.B. DU BOIS, 1940

The enforcement of the law is itself a form of peaceful persuasion. But the law needs help. . . . In the end, for laws to be obeyed, men must believe they are right.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
1958

Prejudices are not likely to be reduced by laws which, in the manner of their passing, arouse other prejudices. GORDON ALLPORT, 1954

We need to appreciate the importance of legislation, judicial decisions, and executive orders . . . Without them it is not possible for individuals or groups of individuals, however dedicated, to make a good-faith and successful effort to eliminate the color line.

JOHN HOPE FRANKLIN, 1993

The civil rights measures of the 1960's engraved solemn rights in the legal literature. But after writing piecemeal and incomplete legislation and proclaiming its historic importance in magnificent prose, the American Government left the Negro to make the unworkable work.

Throughout our history, laws affirming Negro rights have consistently been circumvented . . . Laws that affect the whole population — draft laws, income-tax laws, traffic laws — manage to work even though they may be unpopular; but laws passed for the Negro's benefit are so widely unenforced that it is a mockery to call them laws.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., 1967

America has the laws and the material resources it takes to insure justice for all its people. What it lacks is the heart, the humanity, the Christian love that it would take.

In spite of all the passion, the sacrifices, and the idealism that the civil rights movement called forth, it left little behind it but some new laws that have yet to be really enforced.

SHIRLEY CHISHOLM, 1970

There is a tragic gulf between civil rights laws passed and civil rights laws implemented.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., 1967

The hard-won civil rights legislation of the 1960s, which I benefited from, was fought for . . . over the opposition of those hiding behind transparent arguments of "states' rights" and "property rights."

COLIN POWELL, 1995

While state and local laws requiring segregation have been nullified, the goal of racial integration has not been achieved.

ANDREW HACKER, 1992

We were all, as it turns out, extremely naive about the capacity of a legal revolution to create a political and cultural revolution . . . [Discrimination] was too embedded in the bones and blood of the body politic. It was too much in the heads of too many parents raising too many children to have gone away simply because laws were passed.

IRA GLASSER, 1994

Antidiscrimination laws tell us what not to do and how to behave under specified formal circumstances. They do not, and cannot, dictate how we are to interact in everyday encounters.

ORLANDO PATTERSON, 1997

America has traveled and is still traveling a long, hard road . . . littered with . . . persistent intolerance and bigotry. However, our progress as a nation has been marked by a succession of civil rights laws, standposts that rise above political party and endure as lasting, bipartisan achievements. . . . Without proper enforcement, these laws are merely empty promises.

BILL LANN LEE, 1997

Basing our self-esteem on the ability to look down on others is not the American way. . . . We have torn down the barriers in our laws. Now we must break down the barriers in our lives, our minds, and our hearts.

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON, (June 14) 1997

What is integration when the law says yes, but the police and howling mobs say no?

ROBERT F. WILLIAMS, 1964

The economic gap

Most Americans have never seen the ignorance, degradation, hunger, sickness, and futility in which many other Americans live. Until a problem reaches their doorsteps, they're not going to understand.

SHIRLEY CHISHOLM, 1970

We must accent the best of each other even as we point out the vicious effects of our racial divide and the pernicious consequences of our maldistribution of wealth and power.

CORNEL WEST, 1994

To put it bluntly, beneath the record-breaking stock markets on Wall Street and bipartisan budget-balancing deals in the White House lurk ominous clouds of despair across the nation.

CORNEL WEST, 1997

The pattern of racial disparities in economic and social conditions remains painfully stark. This is not the America we want; the most unrepentant apologist for the status quo cannot dress it up to make an appealing portrait of American justice. CHRISTOPHER EDLEY, JR., 1996

The present emphasis on studying the poor and the blacks implies that these are the "problem" groups. The real problem resides in the haves rather than the have nots. What stands in the way of social advance is resistance to change on the part of the rich and powerful, their reluctance to give up even a tiny fraction of their privileges.

ALEXANDER THOMAS, M.D., 1972

When enough Americans realize how rotten are the fruits of our policy of "benign neglect," how costly our prejudice is both in dollars and in human misery, the demand for change will be made — not for the sake of minority people but for the sake of us all.

JOHN HOWARD GRIFFIN, 1977

Immigrants from Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Central and Latin America and the Caribbean, have made the "minority" population increasingly diverse. . . . The politics of divide and rule set one group against another, and encourage them to fight for the ever smaller pieces of the American pie reserved for people who are neither white, nor well off.

PROJECT HIP-HOP, 1997

To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of hardships.

W.E.B. DU BOIS, 1903

One must question the values of a society that tolerates the kind of poverty that exists in the United States.

ANDREW YOUNG, 1996

Where we had been two Americas, whites and blacks, we were soon to become three, the whites, the blacks who would now rise, and finally the millions of bottom-mired blacks who could not.

RANDALL ROBINSON, 1998

The challenge remains to harness the power of prosperity and turn it to overcoming poverty and despair. . . . To continue to ignore the less fortunate among us will place the nation in peril.

KELVIN SHAWN SEALEY, 1997

The problem of the great majority of the Afro-American poor is the problem of income inequality. In a land of extraordinary abundance, the top fifth greedily takes so much that the bottom fifth, even working two jobs, sinks deeper and deeper into poverty.

ORLANDO PATTERSON, 1997

My conservative friends seem to have a Marxist worldview that the economy is a fixed pie, that in order for the poor to get more, the rich must get less. But . . . the more people included in the economy, the more growth and the larger one's slice becomes. In an economy that is producing equitable growth, wealthier citizens find they may have a smaller percentage of a much larger pie, but the result is greater wealth all around.

Federal programs that would alleviate conditions for the most needy in our society . . . were labeled "creeping socialism." The federal government should not "interfere" with the free enterprise system, it was said. Yet we noted that leaders of the free enterprise system did not hesitate to turn to the federal government when they need help. "Socialism" was just fine when it was socialism for the rich.

What had begun as a movement for racial equality had evolved until Martin [Luther King] could no longer ignore the role that war and poverty played . . . Only when we removed the first layer of segregation did we see clearly the cancer of poverty eating away at the hope and strength of black people in America. Segregation nourished that cancer, but the elimination of segregation could not eradicate it. . . . By attacking poverty, Martin was calling into question fundamental patterns of American life.

ANDREW YOUNG, 1996

In the final analysis, the rich must not ignore the poor because both rich and poor are tied together. They entered the same mysterious gateway of human birth, into the same adventure of mortal life.

The agony of the poor impoverishes the rich; the betterment of the poor enriches the rich. We are inevitably our brother's keeper because we are our brother's brother. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.

There is nothing new about poverty. What is new, however, is that we now have the resources to get rid of it.

A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
1967

The daily life of the Negro is still lived in the basement of the Great Society. He is still at the bottom despite the few who have penetrated to slightly higher levels. Even where the door has been forced partially open, mobility for the Negro is still sharply restricted. There is often no bottom at which to start, and when there is, there is almost always no room at the top.

All too many of those who live in affluent America ignore those who exist in poor America; in doing so, the affluent Americans will eventually have to face themselves with the question: How responsible am I for the well-being of my fellows? To ignore evil is to be an accomplice to it.

The contemporary tendency in our society is to base our distribution on scarcity, which has vanished, and to compress our abundance into the overfed mouths of the middle and upper classes until they gag with superfluity. If democracy is to have breadth of meaning, it is necessary to adjust this inequity.

From issues of personal dignity, [Negroes] are now advancing to programs that impinge upon the basic system of social and economic control. At this level Negro programs go beyond race and deal with economic inequality, wherever it exists.

There is nothing but a lack of social vision to prevent us from paying an adequate wage to every American citizen . . . There is nothing except shortsightedness to prevent us from guaranteeing an annual minimum — and *livable* — income for every American family.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., 1967

The economic highway to power has few entry lanes for Negroes.
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., 1967

Equal opportunity

My fight is not *for* racial sameness but for racial equality and *against* racial prejudice and discrimination.

JOHN OLIVER KILLENS, 1964

Offering [the impoverished Negro] equal rights, even equal opportunity, at this late date without giving him a special boost is the kind of cruel joke American individualism has played on the poor throughout history.

JAMES FARMER, 1965

Unless we start to fight and defeat the enemies in our own country, poverty and racism, and make our talk of equality and opportunity ring true, we are exposed in the eyes of the world as hypocrites when we talk about making people free.

SHIRLEY CHISHOLM, 1970

I refuse to let my personal success, as part of a fraction of one per cent of the Negro people, explain away the injustices to fourteen million of my people . . . I fight for the right of the Negro people . . . to have decent homes, decent jobs, and the dignity that belongs to every human being.

PAUL ROBESON, 1949

[Jackie Robinson] was twenty years old as he hurtled through his first brilliant year at UCLA, but he was already old, old in the ways that James Baldwin would say any young black man was old growing up in America. He had already been marked so that he knew all too well where he was and was not going.

DAVID FALKNER, 1995

An increasing number of white Americans will assent to the proposition that Negroes should share more fully, even equally, in the good things of American life. At the same time an increasing number are demonstrating that they are unwilling to give up any part of their share of these good things.

LEWIS M. KILLIAN, 1968

America will not have racial equality until opportunities are equalized, beginning at the preschool level, to build up the supply of qualified applicants for the new jobs emerging in information-age America. The American ideal of equal opportunity still produces rewards, when it is given a real try. It needs to be tried more often.

CLARENCE PAGE, 1996

All we want is what you want, no less and no more.

SHIRLEY CHISHOLM, 1970

These people who now call for the end of policies to promote equal opportunity say there's been so much progress that no more such efforts are justified. But they fail to recognize that the tap root of racism is almost 400 years long.

VICE PRESIDENT AL GORE, 1998

Our Constitution and our national conscience demand that every American be accorded dignity and respect, receive the same treatment under the law, and enjoy equal opportunity.

COLIN POWELL, 1995

In the long run, there has to be something like equal opportunity for all kids to get a good education in this country. Better-off people will always have an advantage, but equal opportunity should be a goal, an aspiration.

ALBERT CARNESALE, 1997

[As Malcolm X said], if you've had a knife in my back for four hundred years, am I supposed to thank you for pulling it out? . . . The very least of your responsibility now is to compensate me, however inadequately, for centuries of degradation and disenfranchisement by granting peacefully — before I take them forcefully — the same rights and opportunities for a decent life that you've taken for granted as an American birthright.

ELDRIDGE CLEAVER, 1969

Debates over affirmative action, of qualifications versus quotas, deflect attention from more chronic disparities; in fact, that may be their purpose. At issue is whether government can or will commit itself to so raise black Americans that they will stand on a social and economic parity with members of other races.

What black Americans want is no more nor less than what white Americans want: a fair chance for steady employment at decent pay. But this opportunity has been one that the nation's economy continues to withhold. To be black in America is to know that you remain last in line . . . [and] have much less choice among jobs than workers who are white.

ANDREW HACKER, 1992

We must go beyond addressing the symptoms of poverty to treating the causes of poverty. Toward that end, the challenge is to evolve an economy that includes everybody and accords a fair chance to every American. . . . If this country's monumental problems are to be solved to everyone's betterment, the disenfranchised must be given a realistic opportunity to apply themselves to economic achievement.

ANDREW YOUNG, 1996

I'm not asking for any more or any less than anybody else. But just give me a chance to fail.

KEN GRIFFEY, SR., 1998

Affirmative action

Contrary to what some critics say, affirmative action, when it works properly, guarantees only equal opportunity, not equal results.

Affirmative action is not a perfect remedy, but it beats the alternative, if the only alternative is to do nothing.

CLARENCE PAGE, 1996

The remedial justification for affirmative action asks about the extent of present discrimination, the risk of future discrimination, and the lingering effects from the past.

CHRISTOPHER EDLEY, JR., 1996

Defending affirmative action often feels like talking to someone who owns the remote control to all human discourse. The words explaining affirmative action, carefully chosen to cross great divides, disappear; mouths move, but no one listens.

CHARLES R. LAWRENCE III /
MARI J. MATSUDA, 1997

Affirmative action originated in the 1960s to remedy and to prevent discrimination — primarily in employment and education — for all historically disadvantaged minorities and for women. It was later extended to Vietnam veterans and people with disabilities.

This is a day which demands new thinking and the re-evaluation of old concepts. A society that has done something special *against* the Negro for hundreds of years must now do something special *for* him, in order to equip him to compete on a just and equal basis.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., 1967

The issue of affirmative action is absolutely critical in America today. . . . When you see our country, and see how diverse it really is . . . you wonder, how are we going to be able to prevent a revolution in five or twenty or thirty years from now when all of these young people begin to realize they're not part of the social fabric, the economic fabric, the political fabric of America.

REPRESENTATIVE ROBERT MATSUI, 1998

Blacks were held back for two centuries of slavery plus another century of legally sanctioned subjugation and humiliation. One does not, as President Lyndon Johnson once said, hold some people back that long, then tell them they are free to run the race the same as everyone else.

CLARENCE PAGE, 1996

Tolerance and understanding won't "trickle down" in our society any more than wealth does.

MUHAMMAD ALI, 1996

Fairness as well as logic requires that special consideration be given to people who have been locked out of the economic mainstream.

ANDREW YOUNG, 1996

Except in very narrow court-ordered remedial circumstances of a last-resort nature, any affirmative action program must consider race flexibly, as one of several factors, and numerical goals must be true goals, rather than quotas.

CHRISTOPHER EDLEY, JR., 1996

The example of the Army is a good place to start a conversation about affirmative action. Long before it was fashionable, the Army was re-examining traditional standards.

LANI GUINIER, 1997

If there were social democratic redistributive measures that wiped out black poverty, and if racial and sexual discrimination could be abated through the good will and meritorious judgments of those in power, affirmative action would be unnecessary.

CORNEL WEST, 1993

If American society had the strength to do what should be done to ensure that justice prevails for all, then affirmative action would be exposed for what it is: an insult to the people it is intended to help. What I and others want is an equal chance, under one set of rules . . . While rules are different for different people, devices like affirmative action are needed to prevent explosions of anger.

ARTHUR ASHE, 1993

If a history of discrimination has made it difficult for certain Americans to meet standards, it is only fair to provide temporary means to help them catch up and compete on equal terms. Affirmative action in the best sense promotes equal consideration, not reverse discrimination.

COLIN POWELL, 1995

We would do well . . . to put the matter of courts, laws, and litigation to one side. We should focus instead on deciding what we believe to be right, for any given institution and set of circumstances.

When setting priorities, designers of affirmative action have to be very careful, but not compulsive. They should be concerned about criticism and litigation, but not obsessive about research or constipated by caution. Life must go on; the goal is justice, not perfection.

CHRISTOPHER EDLEY, JR., 1996

The . . . signs of racial apartheid are long gone, but news accounts of discrimination continue.

CLARENCE PAGE, 1996

I really believe that these debates turn more on how the initiative is described as opposed to what the problem is and whether we can reach agreement on how to solve it.

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON
(December 17) 1997

The affirmative action debate, as it is largely presented, focuses on abstract ideas outside of social context — ideas like “colorblind” discussed without the history of racism; ideas like “preference” discussed outside the context of widening class division; ideas like “merit” discussed without reference to social structures like patriarchy.

CHARLES R. LAWRENCE III /
MARI J. MATSUDA, 1997

Over the past thirty years, affirmative action has turned out to be one of the most controversial and divisive aspects of the debate on racism, framed in opposing perceptions of issues like “preferences,” “quotas,” “reverse discrimination,” and “stigma.”

A number of whites dislike the idea . . . so much and perceive it to be so unfair that they have come to dislike blacks as a consequence. Hence the special irony of the contemporary politics of race. In the very effort to make things better, we have made some things worse. Strong arguments can be made in behalf of affirmative action, but its political price must also be recognized. Wishing to close the racial divide in America, we have widened it.

PAUL M. SNIDERMAN / THOMAS PIAZZA, 1993

We do not say that [preferences] make no difference whatsoever. We do say that they haven’t made as much difference as is widely attributed to them and that they carry with them a very high cost. When it comes to race, the test of any public policy is, Will it bring us together or divide us? Preferences flunk that test.

ABIGAIL THERNSTROM, 1998

Talking about what we call preferences . . . is central to the discussion about race. Yes, there is a problem in America. . . . one that’s complex, multidimensional. . . . But we can’t get to the problem of moving this nation forward with respect to the issue of race unless we deal with the perception by a large number of people that there are preferences that are being given to people simply because they check a box.

WARD CONNERLY, 1997

The most unusual aspects of this debate . . . are that only a minuscule number of Euro-Americans even claim to have been adversely affected by it, and the majority of Euro-American workers actually express support for it when it is explained in unbiased terms.

ORLANDO PATTERSON, 1997

You can look at [the] figures and ask, why are black folks making such a big deal out of affirmative action? That's the wrong question. The real question is why are white folks making such a big deal of it?

CHRISTOPHER EDLEY, JR., 1997

The rhetoric of reverse discrimination and racial preference erases the statistical reality of inordinate advantage and preference that come from being white and male in this country, creating a surreal landscape for public debate.

CHARLES R. LAWRENCE III /
MARI J. MATSUDA, 1997

Given the fact that the average white household's net worth is *ten times* that of a black family's, and that the overwhelming majority of leaders in business, government, banking, and the media are upper-class white males, the argument that whites suffer "reverse discrimination" is absurd. Justice demands affirmative action based on race and gender to address continuing patterns of inequality in America.

MANNING MARABLE, 1997

It would be disingenuous to deny that some white men — and perhaps even some white women — did not get jobs that . . . might otherwise have gone to them. Some of these individuals may be quite bitter about having been kept from positions they feel they worked for and deserved. So long as there are a limited number of desirable jobs . . . there are going to be disappointed people. . . . But given the disappointments that so often accompany having a black skin, it could be argued that whites should give way just a little.

ANDREW HACKER, 1992

Opponents of effective affirmative action . . . argue that white rights are at stake and must not be compromised. This is a straightforward issue, and the position you take on it depends on which you care about more: the moral and worldly urgency of African-American progress or the moral and other consequences of deviating from the newly embraced principle of a color-blind society.

There are few howls about merit when it comes to college preferences for alumni or musicians or would-be social workers. Somehow "merit" can be stretched to encompass these preferences. Race is different, it seems. And . . . the question of *why* race is different is the very heart of the debate.

CHRISTOPHER EDLEY, JR., 1996

As long as [affirmative action] was functioning the other way, there was . . . no opposition at all.

JOHN HOPE FRANKLIN, (January 12) 1998

Affirmative action in the 1990s shows how innocent and even victimized white Americans now feel compared to how insecure and embattled black people continue to feel.

CLARENCE PAGE, 1996

Despite the color-blind theory, white claims of reverse racism and preferential treatment for blacks, there is no queue of whites claiming black heritage to qualify for the "benefits" of black membership.

ROBERT STAPLES, 1993

To be concerned only with the white applicants who don't get the job, and not with the people of color who don't, is showing racial preference.

PAUL KIVEL, 1993

Whites have always had . . . preferential treatment. Trying to level that playing ground sometimes is made to seem not working in the interest of all Americans because some people get disadvantaged as a result. . . . We do need to talk about how to do it fairly. RONALD FOWLER, 1997

This whole business of affirmative action was no problem at all till the jobs run out. It's no big thing when you're on the job. If the lion and the deer is both full, nobody attacks. It's only when the lion gets hungry, he really fights for the thing. FRANK LUMPKIN, 1992

The illusion of classlessness among whites led them to believe that all whites had opportunities to do this, that, and the other until the blacks came along. Every psychologist knows there are individual differences in every group. Every white applicant for say, a policeman's job, believing he'd get the job or promotion were it not for affirmative action, is engaging in a fascinating sort of idiocy.

KENNETH B. CLARK, 1992

How, it is asked, can people go through life, knowing that they have been hired not on their inherent talents, but to fill some quota or to satisfy appearances? Not surprisingly, white people seem to do most of the worrying about this apparent harm to black self-esteem. In fact, there is little evidence that those who have been aided by affirmative action feel many doubts or misgivings. For one thing, most of them believe they are entitled to whatever opportunities they have received. . . . Nor should it be forgotten that feelings of unworthiness seldom plague white Americans who have profited from more traditional forms of preferment. ANDREW HACKER, 1992

Whites move to the head of the line simply by being born White.

HARLON L. DALTON, 1995

Some people have claimed that affirmative action programs lower self-esteem in those who are favored by them . . . It seems to be something that white people worry about more than people of color.

PAUL KIVEL, 1993

Every corporate board, every university, every union, every branch of the media, should make full integration its goal and should accelerate affirmative action initiatives to achieve that goal today. There is no reason, given the wealth of talent available, to continue exclusion in these institutions.

CHARLES R. LAWRENCE III /
MARI J. MATSUDA, 1997

My view . . . has always been that affirmative action has a cost; that part of the cost is the risk of stigma; but that the stigma I may suffer is a small price compared to the price I would pay if I faced closed doors, or . . . the price paid by crusaders a generation ago who faced vilification, mobs, beatings, and even murder.

CHRISTOPHER EDLEY, JR., 1996

Of all the arguments I have heard various people make against affirmative action, I find the least persuasive to be the charge that it makes its recipients feel bad. . . . When [Barbara Babcock] was asked in a press conference how it felt to think that she had gotten the job [in the Justice Department] because she was a woman, she replied that it felt a lot better than thinking she had *not* gotten the job because she was a woman. . . . Most white males have not felt particularly bad about the special preferences they have received because of their race and gender for thousands of years.

CLARENCE PAGE, 1996

Mobility by means of affirmative action breeds tenuous self-respect and questionable peer acceptance for middle-class blacks. The new black conservatives voiced these feelings in the forms of attacks on affirmative action programs (despite the fact that they had achieved their positions by means of such programs).

CORNEL WEST, 1993

Many corporate executives have learned to live with affirmative action over the years, and even to welcome what they thought were clear rules that enabled them to increase diversity in their work forces without inviting lawsuits.

LINDA GREENHOUSE, 1997

The whole country can . . . agree that slavery is bad—and still come to blows over affirmative action.

FRANK RICH, 1997

What needs to be stressed is that despite all the controversies surrounding affirmative action, fewer blacks now have steady jobs of any kind and their unemployment rates have been growing progressively worse relative to those recorded for whites.

ANDREW HACKER, 1992

If we honestly add up the benefits of whiteness and the disadvantages of being a person of color, we can see that existing affirmative action programs don't go very far toward leveling the playing field.

PAUL KIVEL, 1993

Affirmative action has not been perfect in America — that's why two years ago we began an effort to fix the things that are wrong with it — but when used in the right way, it has worked. It has given us a whole generation of professionals in fields that used to be exclusive clubs — where people like me got the benefit of 100 percent affirmative action.

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON, (June 14) 1997

The new black conservatives assume that without affirmative action programs, white Americans will make choices on merit rather than on race. Yet they have adduced no evidence for this. Most Americans realize that job-hiring choices are made both on reasons of merit and on personal grounds. And it is this personal dimension that is often influenced by racist perceptions.

CORNEL WEST, 1993

One of the reasons that it often makes sense to use affirmative action to lever open the doors is that they are closed for reasons other than a racist desire to oppress; they are closed, rather, because of the prevailing racialist stereotypes that render black people beneath the notice of white people. . . . Once they take notice, quality will out.

STEPHEN L. CARTER, 1993

It is crucial that at this stage of backlash against the gains of the last three decades, we don't abandon one tool that we know works. . . . The hypocrisy is clear when white people who say they support equal opportunity attack affirmative action, yet want to leave intact the basic economic and racial injustices it is designed to correct.

PAUL KIVEL, 1993

Mend, don't end, affirmative action, so that all Americans can have a fair chance at living the American dream.

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON
(December 15) 1997

To that we add "and expand it." Reach out and pull up the many who wish to stand beside you — not above you, not below you — to bring their hands, too, to the task of rebuilding our land.

Nondiscrimination is not enough when powerful state-supported forces systematically keep some people out of the social world: devalued, silenced, casually violated. In a time when so many say affirmative action has gone too far, we say it has not gone far enough.

CHARLES R. LAWRENCE III /
MARI J. MATSUDA, 1997

We use affirmative action all the time. It is not by looking at academic merits alone that we have a football team with a 9-2 record, going to a bowl. . . . The fact is that, in California and everywhere, values apart from test scores do figure in university admissions policies — and should. A society that has prospered in diversity cannot want monochrome higher education.

ALBERT CARNESALE, 1997

For all its imperfections, affirmative action has made a major difference in the lives of women and minorities, in the process helping to realize, as no other policy has done, the nation's constitutional commitment to the ideals of equality, fairness, and economic integration. In utilitarian terms it is hard to find a program that has brought so much gain to so many at so little cost.

The continued institutional and direct discriminatory biases against Afro-Americans and women in the workplace require that affirmative action continue for at least another fifteen years. . . . After a quarter of a century, the time has come to think about not only how to extend it for a while longer, but how to phase it out with as much grace and as little harm as possible.

ORLANDO PATTERSON, 1997

When will affirmative action end in the United States? If we mean "end entirely and for all situations," the answer is simple: it should end when the justification for it no longer exists, when America has achieved racial justice in reality.

CHRISTOPHER EDLEY, JR., 1996

The genie of subtle racial intolerance is out of the bottle and not easily recaptured.

CHRISTOPHER EDLEY, JR., 1996

Color blindness . . .

All of us should embrace the vision of a colorblind society, but recognize the fact that we are not there yet and we cannot slam shut the doors of educational and economic opportunity.

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON
(September 25) 1997

Total repression of attention to difference is not possible, not even desirable. So color blindness, as either goal or method, is far from being straightforward.

Why does color matter?
When I hear this question, I often just sigh. Deeply. It's almost too basic a question to be answered. . . . But the need for an explanation is symptomatic of our divisions.

CHRISTOPHER EDLEY, JR., 1996

Neither the courts nor the Congress nor the president can declare . . . that the United States is a color-blind society. . . . Those who insist that we should conduct ourselves as if such a utopian state already existed have no interest in achieving it and, indeed, would be horrified if we even approached it. JOHN HOPE FRANKLIN, 1993

It is ironic that some of the modern apostles of apathy now misappropriate Dr. King's own words to support their belief that the struggle for justice in which he led us is nearly over . . . The phrase "the content of our character" takes on a different meaning when it is used by people who pretend that that is all we need to establish a color-blind society. They use their color blind the way duck hunters use a duck blind. They hide behind the phrase and just hope that we, like the ducks, can't see through it. VICE PRESIDENT AL GORE, 1998

The "color-blind theory" . . . has as its main premise that after 365 years of slavery and legal segregation, only 25 years of governmental laws and actions were necessary to reverse the historical systematic and legalized segregation and inequality in this country, and no further remedial effort is needed. The net effect of the color-blind theory is to institutionalize and stabilize the status quo of race relations for the twenty-first century: white privilege and black deprivation. . . . This does not sound like the racial utopia Martin Luther King dreamed of. Indeed, it may be his worst nightmare. ROBERT STAPLES, 1993

The law should be "color-blind," the Supreme Court's conservative majority tells us. Yet our society is not. We Americans must deal with that sad fact or it will forever deal with us.

Perhaps the much-touted, widely cherished 1960s goal of a color-blind society is not possible. As long as we remain sighted, we remain inexorably color-conscious, and that is not totally bad.

The obligation to make America work as a "color-blind society," one in which all will be judged as Dr. King dreamed, by the content of our character and not by the color of our skin, is not up to its people of color alone. White people must also do their part.

CLARENCE PAGE, 1996

The evolution of the ideal color-blind society is imagined to occur more within feelings than in response to policy change; the ideal society's origins lie not in the resolution of complex group conflict but in mysterious, irreversible movements of the passionate heart.

BENJAMIN DEMOTT, 1995

The ideal of a color-blind society is a pale imitation of a greater, grander ideal: of living in a society where our color won't be denigrated, where our skin will be neither a badge for undue privilege nor a sign of social stigma. Because skin, race, and color have in the past been the basis for social inequality, they must play a role in righting the social wrongs on which our society has been built. We can't afford to be blind to color when extreme color consciousness continues to mold the fabric and form of our nation's history.

MICHAEL ERIC DYSON, 1996

Our thinking about the nation's most pressing social problems has become deeply "racialized"—saturated with attitudes, beliefs, and fears about race. We tend to dance around this fact whenever we publicly debate social policy. In our zeal to approach issues in a "color-blind" fashion, we often push their complex and volatile racial dimensions underground.

To not notice race is to miss one of the central ways in which power, position, and material well-being are distributed in our society. To not notice race is to be oblivious to the concerns of those below us in the pecking order and to lower our defenses against those above.

HARLON L. DALTON, 1995

A color-blind society does not exist in the United States and never has existed.

JOHN HOPE FRANKLIN, 1993

Instead of . . . nasty people intent on using our color against us, we are surrounded by perfectly nice people who embrace the color-blind ideal with a vengeance.

HARLON L. DALTON, 1995

To argue that we should begin to solve the problem of "racial" exclusion by assuming a color-blind world is to assume away the very problem we are trying to solve: only voodoo priests and rational choice theorists can get away with this kind of mumbo-jumbo.

ORLANDO PATTERSON, 1997

Since honest talk about our nation's racism is essentially off-limits, the old-time politics of race baiting has returned, disguised in the liberal rhetoric of colorblindness. . . . To believe that we live in a colorblind society, free of the legacy of slavery and segregation, is to deny what we see and hear every day.

CHARLES R. LAWRENCE III /
MARI J. MATSUDA, 1997

It is disingenuous in the extreme to argue . . . that because the ideal of the civil rights movement, and of all persons of ethnic good will, is a color-blind world, any policy that takes account of African ancestry betrays this ideal.

ORLANDO PATTERSON, 1997

Too much has been made of the virtue of "color-blindness." I don't want Americans to be blind to my color as long as color continues to make a profound difference in determining life chances and opportunities. Nor do I wish to see so significant a part of my identity denied.

The "forgetting of race" . . . will not become a reality by rendering black life invisible . . . in a way that denies their humanity and tells them that their 350 years of history and life in America count for nothing. Inequality breeds distrust, resentment, and contempt. To sit down together at the great table of brotherhood in peace and comfort, we must do it as equal partners, not as dominant and submissive.

CLARENCE PAGE, 1996

"Color-blindness" is no virtue if it means denial of differences in the experience, culture, and psychology of black Americans and other Americans. These differences are not genetic, nor do they represent a hierarchy of "superior" and "inferior" qualities. But to ignore the formative influence of substantial differences in history and social existence is a monumental error.

The white psychiatrist who likes to think he is "color blind" may be as far off the mark as the psychiatrist who is blinded by color.

ALEXANDER THOMAS, M.D., 1972

The very notion of blindness about color constitutes an ideological confusion at best, and denial at its very worst.

PATRICIA WILLIAMS, 1997

On occasion, people move from trying to ignore race to explicitly pronouncing it irrelevant. A typical claim is: "I don't think of you as Black" . . . When I am on the receiving end of such a "compliment," I am tempted to respond, "Really? What *do* you think of me as?"

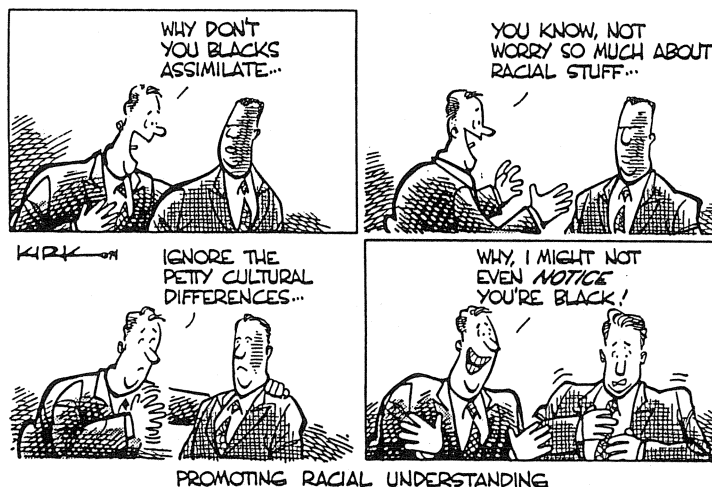
HARLON L. DALTON, 1995

While . . . I embrace color-blindness as a legitimate hope for the future, I worry that we tend to enshrine the notion with a kind of utopianism whose naïveté will ensure its elusiveness. In the material world ranging from playgrounds to politics, our ideals perhaps need more thoughtful, albeit more complicated, guardianship. By this I mean something more than . . . "I don't think about color, therefore your problems don't exist." If only it were so easy.

PATRICIA WILLIAMS, 1997

I, for one, am growing weary of those well-meaning white liberals who are forever telling me they don't know what color I am. The very fact that they single me out at the cocktail party and gratuitously make me the beneficiary of their blessed assurance gives the lie to their pronouncements.

JOHN OLIVER KILLENS, 1964



It's just important that we're people rowing. They shouldn't see us as African-American rowers.

NOAH HICKS, 1997

. . . and our children

Color blindness comes naturally to children, who have not been taught the many ubiquitous lessons of racial life, values, and etiquette in America.

CLARENCE PAGE, 1996

White children in this country have no feeling about Negro children, other than the feelings all children have about each other, until it is taught to them.

MARGARET HALSEY, 1946

Children are the bearers of life in its simplest and most joyous form. Children are color-blind and still free of all the complications, greed, and hatred that will slowly be instilled in them through life.

KEITH HARING, 1986

In those first days in the South . . . a white kid of nine or ten was hanging over the roof of the Royals' dugout. Above the chorus of boos, [Jackie] Robinson could hear him shouting, "Atta boy, Jackie, nice try! Atta boy, Jackie!" . . . He knew that never in his life would he forget the face of this boy who was honest at heart, not yet filled with the poison of prejudice, who shouted a word of encouragement above the cries of the mob.

CARL T. ROWAN, 1960

Surely few crimes are more tragic than the crime of fostering in children a false view of what man is by teaching them to believe that any other humans are basically different in their human needs or in their response to the frustration of those needs. This concept of fellow human beings as "other" is at the base of all racism.

JOHN HOWARD GRIFFIN, 1977

I wheel my two-year-old daughter in a shopping cart through a supermarket . . . and a little white girl riding past in her mother's cart calls out excitedly, "Oh look, Mommy, a baby maid!" And your mother shushes you, but she does not correct you.

AUDRE LORDE, 1981

If they can just leave the young children alone, integration will do some good.

CHESTER DEVILLERS, 1991

A young child . . . asks his mother why the man in the grocery store is so dark. Instead of answering, his mother tells him to be quiet, which tells the child it's not okay to discuss differences.

BEVERLY DANIEL TATUM
(May) 1998

Absence of prejudice is one of the virtues we ought to be trying to promote on a uniform basis throughout the country, and it ought to be part of the school curriculum.

PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON
(December 3) 1997

You've got to be taught to hate and fear,
You've got to be taught from year to year,
It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear.
You've got to be carefully taught.

You've got to be taught to be afraid
Of people whose eyes are oddly made
And people whose skin is a diff'rent shade.
You've got to be carefully taught.

You've got to be taught before it's too late,
Before you are six or seven or eight,
To hate all the people your relatives hate.
You've got to be carefully taught.
You've got to be carefully taught.

OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II, 1949

Our young must be taught that racial peculiarities do exist, but that beneath the skin, beyond the differing features and into the true heart of being, fundamentally, we are more alike, my friend, than we are unlike.

MAYA ANGELOU, 1993

BEST BUDDIES, 1990



A key factor in preventing racism, say many psychologists, is to get children to talk about it.

ERIN BURNETTE, 1998