

**CBTU Detroit Awards Dinner 11/16/03**

**Patricia Ann Ford  
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Good evening brothers and sisters! I am especially delighted to join you for the CBTU Detroit Chapter 28<sup>th</sup> Annual Awards Dinner.

I would like to thank my dear brother Nathan Head and my sister Marian Poe for inviting me and for being such forceful leaders. I would also like to acknowledge SEIU executive board members Willie Hampton, Phil Thompson and to give a shout out to all my SEIU brothers and sisters in the house tonight. And to the honorees, I extend congratulations – [list honorees]. You all are trailblazers and champions. I am proud to share the podium with all of you.

I welcome this forum with you tonight as our country continues its war of occupation in Iraq and each day more body bags return home. A few weeks ago I was in Mississippi with Congressman Bennie Thompson when he received a phone call notifying him that one of the casualties of in the helicopter downing lived in his District. I listened to him make arrangements to visit the family of that young man and just grieved at the senseless loss.

May we just have a moment of silence for all those who have died in Iraq, and for the American and Iraqi mourners?

[Pause for a moment.]

I understand the theme for tonight's event is "Remembering the Past with Eyes to the Future."

My theme takes it further to the question of war, peace and justice – not only in the Middle East – but right here on the home front.

I am mindful that the CBTU formed for a reason: to fight for justice, for working people and to be a link between labor struggles and African American struggles.

All of us in this room have to live up to that mission – whether you are a member of the Coalition or not.

We CBTU members owe it to all our constituents to look ahead and recommit ourselves to what needs to be done and then to doing the right thing.

In simple terms, that means stepping up to the plate, being bold and unapologetic about forging an agenda that stands for the advancement of working people, the African

American community, social justice and not just equality – but equity as well.

[Pause]

The Bush administration has put a lot of emphasis on trying to expand the Republicans' base by reaching out to Latino voters.

They will try to find issues that they believe separate Hispanics from other people of color, especially from African Americans.

No ethnic or racial group has a lock on any issue, especially not injustice.

Dr. King understood this. When he left Alabama and went to Chicago, he quickly realized that it was not only about racial justice but it was also about economic justice.

That's why he started the Poor People's Campaign and died vowing to amass a new movement of people of all colors connected by the common struggle of economic justice.

That great organizer of farm workers Caesar Chavez also understood this. He united Filipino, Puerto Rican, Mexican and even Arabic-speaking workers into a great movement.

He prided himself in seeking "minimum dramatics" to win maximum results. For Caesar Chavez, the struggle was about what he called "winning small victories constantly."

His was a movement that was built on its humility and might. It amounted to giving the poorest people who worked at producing food, food for themselves.

Not just bread to eat, but dignity that would allow them to believe in their worth as workers and as human beings.

And Reverend Jesse Jackson understands this. He always reminds us that the majority of poor people in this country are not Black or Latino. They are White. And they don't all live in Appalachia.

Blacks and Latinos are both struggling for decent wages, adequate health care and quality schools for their children.

The incarceration rates of black and brown young people are both higher than the percentage of their kids in college. Both groups still experience racial discrimination in housing, employment and education.

What does it mean to be the largest minority? Just ask my people. We've been the largest minority for 400 years and we are still struggling for justice.

Being a minority group by itself is still a minority – whether large minority or smaller minority.

You are still out-ranked by whatever, or whomever, is defined as the majority. We must not fall into the divide and rule trap.

There is no monopoly on racial exploitation. Nor should there be a monopoly on the fight for racial justice!

[Pause]

Call me old-fashioned. But what we have to do is straight forward and traditional. It means helping our friends to understand they should not run away from the label “liberal” as if it's an incurable disease.

It means not allowing others to determine who our leaders are. It means going to our base because when the chips are down that's who we can depend on.

And it also means enlisting beyond the 40 percent who are registered to vote to the rest of the *Potential* electorate, unregistered and disaffected voters. We must reach out to allies who stand for ideals we fight for every day.

We cannot be successful in a society where all the important decisions – about the economy, about war and peace and about our basic legal rights – are made by a tiny, self-interested elite group of wealthy white men like George Bush, Dick Cheney and John Ashcroft.

The only way we can win is by standing up and standing together.



As trade unionist, we cannot improve the lives of our members if we ignore the problems they face at home and in their community. We must be politically active and engaged. [Pause]

I cannot leave here tonight without revisiting the three-year reign of George W. Bush in the White House.

Our hero A. Phillip Randolph, who helped lay the ground for the achievements of all working people, was branded one of the most dangerous men in America.

In the world of George W. Bush, A. Phillip Randolph could well be branded a terrorist.

These days a lot of policies are being made and money spent on a so-called war on terrorism. [Pause]

Before I could really talk about that war, I decided to consult Webster dictionary for the definition.

Terrorism defined: *The act of terrorizing; use of force or threat to demoralize and intimidate; the use of a political weapon or policy; the act to coerce or make submit by filling with fear due to the threat or act of violence.*

So that brings me to the question, who is the terrorist? To answer that, we need look no further than the policies being dictated by the current occupant in the White House.

[Pause]

Brothers and sisters, it is an act of terrorism to declare a war against a country under a pretext that ends up being a big lie; placing our young men and women in harm's way, disrupting families and leaving an untold death toll of both U.S. troops and Iraqi people.

It's an act of terrorism to allocate untold billions to a battle that seems to have no end.

It's an act of terrorism to hold individuals in indefinite detention, denying them access to lawyers, or family members and not even charging them with a crime.

It's an act of terrorism to rob billions of dollars from the federal budget to give tax cuts to the rich, creating a deficit so large that our great-grandchildren will still be paying the debt.

It's an act of terrorism to divert precious resources from domestic spending that could respond to the 43 million Americans without health insurance.

It's an act of terrorism to maintain an immigration policy that gives automatic entrance to all Cubans who enter Florida's shores and brands as common criminals all

Haitians trying to penetrate those same borders, separating young children from their mothers and holding them in detention camps not fit for animals.

It's an act of terrorism to perpetuate a criminal justice system that enlists more African American men in prisons and the court system than in colleges and universities.

I can't remember an administration that has invoked more fear and insecurity in our country and the world.

It's all a matter of record, a pattern of events that fit into a collection of factoids that I call Bushisms.

Let me share a few of them with you.

He brought an oil company, but couldn't find any oil in Texas. The company went bankrupt shortly after he sold all his stock.

With taxpayer money, he brought the Texas Rangers baseball team in a sweetheart deal. His biggest decision while at the helm of the Rangers was to trade Sammy Sosa to the Chicago Cubs.

What troubles me is not only what we know about him, but also what we don't know.

We know about at least one conviction for drunk driving in Maine, but his Texas driving record has been erased.

He went AWOL from the National Guard and deserted the military during the Viet Nam war. But he refused to talk about that period in his life.

Records of Security and Exchange Commission investigations into his insider trading are sealed. So are all

minutes of meetings for any public corporations he served on.

With Daddy's help and no experience in public office except running for Congress and losing, he got elected Governor of Texas.

He cut taxes and bankrupted the Texas government to the tune of billions in borrowed money. He also set the record for putting more people to death than any Governor in American history.

[Pause]

Then, he goes on to become President of the United States. We all know about the disputed election and the question of whether he should even be in the White House.

While that's a subject of debate in some circles, it's undisputed that he lost the popular vote and was put in office by Supreme Court justices appointed by his Dad.

What does he do in the White House?

He spends the surplus. Bankrupts the treasury. And creates the biggest annual deficit in history.

In addition to presiding over the biggest ever plunge in the stock market; he has scored a number of other noteworthy firsts:

George W. surpasses all presidential records for campaign fundraising trips.

Cuts unemployment benefits for more jobless Americans than any president in history.

Presides over the highest gasoline prices in history and the worst energy crisis ever.

Selects cabinet members who are collectively the richest ever to hold those positions.

Signs more laws and executive orders amending the Constitution than any president in history.

Removes more freedoms and civil liberties for Americans than any president in history.

Let's not forget his trip earlier this year to our Motherland. He includes a stop on Goree Island – the port of processing our ancestors from their homeland into slavery – and uses it as a backdrop for a photo-opportunity.

I wonder if he heard the moans of my African male ancestors as they were being beaten; I wonder if he could hear the cries of my sisters as they were being raped.

Isn't this a disgusting litany?



Well we can't change history, but we *can* put an end to Bushisms. We can make an impact nationally and in state and local elections.

[Pause]

The future of our electoral success rests in our political programs. We must encourage and support our members to run for elected office and develop our Member Political Organizers program, increase our COPE contributions and educate our members on the importance of registering to vote...and then voting!

[Pause]

Not everyone in the labor movement is convinced that fighting for social justice should be a union priority. Well, CBTU has a different vision.

Being a union member is not just about a fatter paycheck. It's about being part of a movement that believes in the worth and dignity of every human being.

We are part of a movement that answers, "Yes, I am my brothers' (and my sisters') keeper."

The skills we learn fighting for justice are the same skills we need to build a stronger labor movement and a More united front with our friends in elected office.

I am convinced that the struggle for social justice makes all of us stronger.

[Pause]

I know this work is difficult. But keep in mind, unionists died so we could have a 40-hour work week and child labor laws so our children would not be exploited.

Many sacrificed their jobs so we could have a 15-minute break, a minimum wage, and the right to organize.

Just as we take up new battles for low wage workers in the public and private sector, the right to organize and collective bargaining – we need our allies and the partnerships forged by CBTU.

We must not let the sacrifices of so many of our heroes be in vain. We have an obligation to continue the work they started.

We in CBTU are the conscience of organized labor. We collectively have a responsibility to make labor live up to the rhetoric, or expose it for what it is. [Pause]

In closing, I would be remiss if I ended without fulfilling the promise I made to a trade unionist I met during my visit last year to Kyoto, Japan.

This man was a newborn when the Atomic bomb was dropped on his home. He and all his family members are Survivors of Hiroshima.

Like people all over the world, this Japanese trade unionist is truly fearful of this U.S. administration and its view of imperial domination of the world.

Because he has an understanding of war that we have never experienced – even in the aftermath of September 11th – my Japanese friend views the Bush administration not, only as a world power, but a very dangerous power.

[Pause]

We must be mindful of this madness, and raise our voices against the instability that the Bush administration has unleashed at home and across the planet.

I leave you with this reflection: *Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding.*

The words of Albert Einstein.

And to paraphrase the Reverend Joseph Lowery of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, let me caution: We've come too far, fought too hard, marched too long and died too young to go backwards.

Brothers and sister, thank you for listening to me tonight.

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