

Good Morning. And it certainly is a good morning whenever I have the opportunity to share a dais with the likes of Reverend Orange and Reverend Doctor Lowery and Ambassador Andrew Young.

It certainly is a good morning when I can stand before you in this great Ebenezer Baptist Church – the place where the seeds were planted in a young Martin Luther King, Jr.

Seeds that would sprout and take root and flourish into what is indeed one of the greatest movements in the history of human-kind.

It certainly is a good morning when like-minded people can come together to reflect upon and revere and honor the life and legacy of Dr. King.

And what a wonderful morning when we gather to mark the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Dr. King’s birth.

We are like-minded, aren't we? Different, true in many ways, but not different in ways that divide us. Some of you are students, some civic leaders, some elected officials, men and women of the clergy; Black, brown, white, young, not-so young.

[Pause]

So certainly we're different. But we also understand how the rapidly changing demographics make it essential for all of us to guard against falling into that divide and rule trap. We are more alike than we are different.

We are like-minded because we are here. We're not out there at some MLK Day “Fifty Percent Off” sale. And believe me, if some folk have their way, the day set aside to honor Dr. King will be reduced in its meaning.

Some would like to diminish the honor of this observance; to make Martin Luther King smaller until there is no meaning, until the day is just an occasion to be off – another three day weekend.

[Pause]

Thank God that all of you have come here. Because the struggle is so far from being over.

Martin understood that more than thirty-five years ago when he warned, ‘We've got difficult days ahead.’

And yes, we've still got difficult days ahead.

I know in my heart that we've been brought from a mighty long ways... But we've got difficult days ahead.

I sing – or attempt to sing – that old spiritual that trouble don't last always, that I've got a feeling everything's gonna be alright, but we've got difficult days ahead. [Pause]

I work in the labor movement – the same movement that Martin laid down his life for, workers rights. Let me tell you, we've got difficult days ahead.

[Pause]

My union, the Service Employees International Union, the nation's largest trade union, represents more immigrant members than any other union. So I took special interest in the president's new proposal regarding immigrant workers.

And yes, we've got difficult days ahead.

I know that many of you say immigrant rights have nothing to do with you. Bear in mind that eleven percent of the Black population in this country is made up of immigrants. The new workforces across this country includes immigrants from Haiti, Ethiopia, from all over Africa, the Dominican Republic and other countries from throughout the Caribbean and Central and South America.

Undocumented immigrants are hard-working tax payers. They contribute at least 300 billion dollars to the U.S. economy annually.

Over 50,000 immigrants are serving in the armed forces protecting this country. And as we know by now, have heard the horror stories by now, many immigrants have been rounded up and held for months at a time without being charged with a crime, without even access to a lawyer.

So I know some of you may be thinking, well, at least for once it's not my son, or nephew, or brother or spouse being stopped on the New Jersey turnpike driving while black.

But rest assured, whenever they get through fighting their so-called war on terror, they won't stop there, who do you think will be next.

[Pause]

Dr. King understood that. Which is why it was impossible for him to segregate his battles. He could not say that the war in Viet Nam is wrong but it has nothing to do with the Civil Rights Act, so I'll leave that alone.

He didn't say, 'Well this struggle concerning workers rights affects more than just black folk so I won't go there.

And he did it with such eloquence and grace. If Dr. King was here, he would be in the forefront of the immigrant's right movement.

Dr. King was a nonviolent revolutionary. He was a fighter against injustice, declaring injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere. He was a defender of those who have the least, and a voice for those who could not speak for themselves. He was a fearless leader. He began every day not knowing whether it would be his last.

He didn't expect you to do something he himself would not do. Dr. King was a visionary. He had visions and dreams so far ahead of his time that it appeared like fantasy to most of us.

Oh, how frustrating that must have been for him. To know what is possible and can't make other folks see it. [Pause.]

So we must not back off. We must become visionary.

Because let there be no mistake, immigration is a civil rights issue!

We must become warriors in this fight for social and economic justice and for immigrant rights.

Even though the landscape before us is thorny, certainly no crystal staircase will take us to higher ground.

Indeed we've got difficult days ahead.

So back to this new proposal on immigrant workers. Dare I say that it is a proposal that I view with a very high regard of suspicion.

‘Why, Pat Ford,’ you might ask, ‘would you be suspicious of President's Bush's proposal to welcome an influx of immigrant workers?’

Everyone knows that he has pretty much written off the African American community. If we vote in record numbers, we could significantly influence the outcome of the Presidential race.

So it's not rocket science to conclude that the margin of victory is with untapped voters. Bush has to look somewhere to get those votes. He assumes the Latino community can be picked off and duped in a divide-and-rule strategy of historic proportions.

Does that explain, at least a little why I'm suspicious of this proposal regarding immigrant workers. Forget the timing, that it was announced just in advance of his scheduled trip to meet with President Fox of Mexico.

Forget that he is hustling to snag the Latino vote for the next election. Just the fact that it is being positioned as something that will benefit the immigrant population is a mean, cynical plot.

Never mind that Bush has declared open season on immigrants in the name of 'the War on Terrorism,' holding people in indefinite detention, denying them attorneys and violating more civil liberties than any administration in history.

Did I mention that we've got difficult days ahead?

[Pause]



The Bush proposal on immigrants would essentially allow millions of undocumented immigrants to obtain work visas for three years, renewable for an unspecified period, if they can show that they have jobs and if their employers certify that no Americans can be found to perform the work.

The plan would also let employers bring new workers into the country on a temporary basis, again to work at jobs that the employers presumably cannot fill with Americans.

This sounds to me as if he's bent on adding to his incredible legacy the creation of a legal underclass of workers ripe for exploitation. These immigrants want to come here purely in the quest for a better life.

He would be rewarding his rich corporate buddies by supplying them with an endless pool of cheap labor that would never enjoy the benefits of citizenship and therefore possibly not even be fully protected by fair labor standards.

At the same time, he's appealing to that all important Latino vote by casting the proposal as a part of a tradition of welcoming immigration.

In addition to the potential massive exploitation of this new category of worker, the wages and labor protection of all workers might surely be undermined.

I said ALL WORKERS! You and me! And not only that, since the proposal stops way short of offering citizenship, the immigrant worker might still be forced into undocumented status at the close of the term of work.

This proposal sets up the stage for conflicts between American citizens and those imported to further that age-old game of divide and rule. That's the game that we know all too well.

Because we understand that we have difficult days ahead, this means that we're shored up for the battle, with the whole armor. [Pause.]

Dr. King’s spirit rides with us. Can’t we feel his spirit right here in this church?

To know that we have difficult days ahead means that we also know that joy commeth in the morning.

It means that freedom can and *will* ring.

That our true enemy is our own complacency; Our failure to mobilize to change the current status quo in Washington.

Recognizing that we have difficult days ahead means that we also believe that we shall overcome.

And that overcoming is achieved through coming together to expose injustice in all its ugly forms.

To recognize even beyond our exterior differences how our like-mindedness connects us, fuses us and gives us power that we would otherwise not command.

Recognizing that we have difficult days ahead, means that we also have a vision, like Dr. King, that a change is gonna come.

I'm going to be a witness to that change; a fully participating partner in that change. Aren't you? Let me hear you say A'men!

This is a good morning. Thanks you brothers and sisters for listening to me.

Thank God for all of you and this very good, morning!

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