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### Dr. Benjamin Hooks, Address before the fifth Annual Dinner of the Congressional Black Caucus, Washington D.C. 1 of 2

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ADDRESS OF COMMISSIONER BENJAMIN L. HOOKS,  
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION, BEFORE  
THE FIFTH ANNUAL DINNER OF THE CONGRESSIONAL  
BLACK CAUCUS, WASHINGTON HILTON HOTEL,  
WASHINGTON, D. C., Saturday, September 27, 1975

From Changing Structures to Using Structures

What Happens To a Dream Deferred?

Does it dry up  
Like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore --  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over--  
like a syrupy sweet?  
Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.

OR DOES IT EXPLODE?

As the nation approaches its bicentennial year, we might well ask ourselves as did the late poet Langston Hughes with such chilling perception: What happens to a dream deferred?

In America, the deferred dream has tended to fester like a sore; at times it has stunk like rotten meat, and sagged like a heavy load. And in the horrendous urban riots of the cities in the mid and late 1960's, it has exploded in cataclysmic bursts of riots, bloodshed and death, bringing victory to neither the oppressed nor the oppressor, only an aching reminder of how far the nation had yet to go to make meaningful these words: "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal."

The trouble was that the founding fathers felt that some men, if they happened to possess a white skin, the great Creator notwithstanding, were more equal than men of darker hue.

The late W. E. B. Dubois said it prophetically 72 years ago in his poignant autobiography, "The Souls of Black Folks," "The Problem of the 20th Century is the problem of the Color Line."

Since I am ever the optimist, I must paraphrase yet another philosopher, Shakespeare's King Richard III, who said "Now is the winter of our discontent, made glorious summer" by our refusal to bow to tyranny and oppression. True hope is swift and flies with swallow's wings; Kings it makes gods and meaner creatures, Kings.

Esteemed members of the Black Caucus, Distinguished officials, honored guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Your theme this year, "From Changing Structures to Using Structures" fits well the twin themes of this talk: "What happens to a dream deferred?" and "This is the winter of our discontent, made glorious summer" by our refusal to accept oppression and a second class citizenship.

For as we start into the year 1976, which marks the bicentennial of the founding of this great nation, we can see in bold relief what has happened to that dream--where we as a race have been so that we may,

thus, see where we ought to go. And in charting our future course, we use lessons drawn from the bitter struggles of the past, to make glorious summer of our winter of discontent, forging into the future.

In looking back down that long, dark road over which we have traveled these past 110 years since the end of chattel slavery we could easily fall into a fit of despondency, into a languishing torpor from which we could be aroused, if at all by almost super human effort.

For that road has been a rocky one, strewn with impossible obstacles, with monumental barriers to economic, social and political progress, barriers to quality education, to housing and to civil rights.

The road ahead appears equally hazardous. It is filled with ugly potholes of prejudice and hate, with dogged opposition to the full enfranchisement of Black folks, a goal for which we have struggled so long. That road is treacherous and uncertain, laced with oil slick areas of chicanery, with iced-over sections of political bigotry, fraught with hairpin curves of deceit and corruption, stretching into infinity, as far as the eye can see.

It makes us cry out, as did the children in the wilderness: "How Long, O Lord, How Long." And so today we're going to address the problem of moving from the long and arduous task of changing



structures--and, believe me, ladies and gentlemen, we have changed the structures of America; if you do not believe this, just open your eyes and look around you. Only a blind man would deny that positive change has been made. But now we move to using these structures we have changed by dint of agonizing struggle and backbreaking effort, into acceptable vehicles for Black progress.

By changing structures we mean--Black folks have spent these past 100 years trying to enter the corporate structures of America, seeking acceptance into the policy-making areas of the Boards of Education, into the powerful religious hierarchy, into the organized House of Labor, into the Chamber of Commerce, into political office, into the police departments and the judicial chambers, into the upper echelons of the Armed Forces and the banks and lending institutions, in short, into the organizations that run this country.

And while we were waging the lofty battle, we were also fighting at the gut level--fighting for that seat at the lunch counter, or a seat at the front of the bus; struggling to use without discrimination public accommodations, the restrooms, hotels, motels, the water fountains. But in spite of these advances--great as they are--we still find the full promise of the American dream has eluded us.

What happens to a dream deferred? The question persists: Does it wither like a raisin in the sun? Does it stink like rotten meat? Or, does it fester like a sweet and then run?

For too many weary years Black folks have watched their dreams deferred. The promise of equality in the Declaration of Independence became a cankered lump in our collective throats. Even as Thomas Jefferson was fashioning a powerful draft that dealt with slavery and its victims, it was being excised by determined opposition from the final document.

The Supreme Court's twin decisions that: (1) told Dred Scott (in 1856) a freed slave had no rights a white man was bound to respect, and (2) held in Plessey versus Ferguson 1896 decree a separate but equal status for Blacks that meant we were to be more separate from than equal to our fellow white citizens, drove the stake of despair even deeper into our hurting hearts.

We looked with hope to the Federal government in the reconstruction statutes of the 1860's. But again our dream was deferred. And just as we regained a measure of hope, our dreams were deferred once again by the infamous Hayes-Tilden elections compromise of the 1876 hurling Blacks back virtually into their original condition of abject servitude.

We looked again to our dream as we stormed battle scarred hills in San Juan with Teddy Roosevelt in the Spanish American War. We fought bloody battles in the Argonne Forests of France in World War I,

our lungs seared with deadly mustard gases. And we listened to Woodrow Wilson talk loftily of that being "The War to end all wars, a war that would make the world safe for Democracy."

But our post-war dreams became a nightmare, smashed by angry whites rioting against Black entry to the city and competition for jobs; smashed by an ever-rising Ku Klux Klan that lynched Blacks with impunity until the late 1940's when the federal government finally passed anti-lynch laws.

We looked for our dream again when Herbert Hoover told the nation that "Prosperity is just around the corner" as the bread lines of the poor and starving grew longer and longer, ushering in the Great Depression of the 1930's.

We thought we saw our dream revived in the various and sundry national recovery acts, but that alphabet soup was a thin porridge that would hardly sustain us as we were hurled into the swirling vortex of World War II.

President Roosevelt's Equal Employment Opportunity Executive Order of 1941 renewed that hope, but again the dream was deferred. We looked for it as we marched off in the work battalions of the second great war, and struggled with our government to fight for our country against nazism and fascism, in democratically integrated fighting units.



We won that fight, only to return from the ranks of fighting men to civilian life where again we were the last hired and the first fired. Our dreams were dimmed as we fought to eliminate restrictive covenants in home ownership in the late 1940's but they were brightened when the Supreme Court in 1954 outlawed the separate but not-so-equal education system in the Brown versus the Topeka, Kansas Board of Education, making glorious summer of our winter of discontent.

We got much meaningful legislation on the books after that, but each time the dream of equality and full participation seemed to be deferred, while our leaders fell like king pins in a bowling alley from bombs and assassins' bullets.

And now we have finally come to the conclusion that while we must still rely on the presidency, while we must still seek support from our political leaders, while we must still pressure banks and lending institutions to treat us fairly, while we must still petition our courts of laws to redress egregious wrongs, and while we must still rely on the Congress and on our great religious, civil rights, civic and social institutions, we must use these structures now ourselves.

We have tried the rest, now we must try the best--us.



And so we echo Charles Dickens who said in the opening passage of his classic Tale of Two Cities: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of LIGHT, it was the season of DARKNESS, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to HEAVEN, we were all going direct the other way--in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only."

It is the best of times because we live in a nation that permits free expression. It is the worst of times because it's astounding that while for 200 years we have declared all men are created equal, our gathering here is a grim testimony that this equality is yet a will-o-the-wisp.

Is this, as King Richard says, the winter of our discontent made glorious summer by our unremitting struggle? I come tonight to say I think we can use the structures, that we can deal with the prejudices that exist in this country.

We must begin to deal with the communications industry in this country. Day by day our minds are being shaped, for good or bad by the things we read, see, hear, in our newspapers, magazines, TV and radio. I was looking at the Kerner Commission