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Dr. Benjamin Hooks, Charge to the Annual NAACP Convention, Boston Massachusetts

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Guest
CHARGE TO THE ANNUAL CONVENTION BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DR. BENJAMIN L. HOOKS
JUNE 28, 1982, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

This is the greatest Convention in all of America. In this our 73rd Convention, we have come to Boston once again to reaffirm our collective commitment to fashioning an America where the content of a man's character and not the color of his skin will determine his fate.

We have met here to reconsider this Association's direction, to revise and reconstruct its action, strategies, and to refocus them more clearly on the achievement of specific and tangible benefits for black America. Given the present mood and climate of our nation, we must do this. I will say more about this in my Tuesday night address. Your mission and mine during this week of collective and cooperative reassessment and re-evaluation is to reshape that necessary consensus without which this Association most surely will fail to achieve its goals.

My charge to each and every delegate here is clear: it is to attend each of the primary workshops on Tuesday--to be informed of the Association's new directions as demonstrated by its Fair Share Program; its Voter Registration-Education effort; captured succinctly in the slogan "Find 'Em; Sign 'Em and Get 'Em to the Polls;" and as demonstrated in the Membership--Branch Administration Program oriented to branch revitalization.

Not only is my charge that every delegate be in attendance at these key workshops, but it is also that you join in the workshops' discussions and debates so that your fellow delegates and the Association's staff can benefit from knowing your ideas.

The charge would not be complete if it omitted the mandate that you return to your branches and put these programs into operation at the local level.

If this simple directive is earnestly followed, minority businesses will achieve a new level of prosperity with the inevitable result that jobs will be created in the black community--that is a key goal of our new program Operation Fair Share. Also, this Convention's theme, "Elect We Must Leadership We Can Trust," would now become a reality throughout America's black communities. Development of black political power is what our Voter Registration-Education Program is about.

We absolutely must register thousands of black voters prior to this November's election. These registrants and voters already on the rolls have to be informed of the issues that affect their daily lives.

MEMBERSHIP

You are aware that the least expensive adult membership that we now have now costs \$10.00. This cannot be allowed to be used as an excuse or a reason for either a decline in membership or a failure to bring in more members. You delegates, must attend, and I underscore must attend, Mr. Penn's Membership and Branch Administration Workshop. Memberships are the very life blood of the NAACP. Without an increasing amount of funds generated through membership our work will have to be drastically reduced because of the continuing ravaging affect of inflation on our cost. We must do a better job of selling the NAACP in the communities in which we live. Janice Johnson our Director of Memberships is prepared to tell you step by step how each of you can sell 100 memberships in two weeks or less.

This year you may notice from your programs that concurrent workshops, ranging over a number of different topics will be held on Thursday afternoon beginning at 2:00 pm. These workshops were set up to discuss the following topics: Economic Development, Labor, Energy, International Affairs, and others.

At this time, it will have become clear to you that we have made a substantial departure from our traditional way of holding these workshops. This change is due primarily to the Board's mandate that the NAACP during its 1982 program year focus on three major areas of concern. Those I covered above in my charge to you: They are Economic Development, Voter Education and Registration and Membership Development.

Workshops dealing with these topics are scheduled in such a way as to afford each delegate an opportunity to attend them. This is our core curriculum for the Convention.

The Thursday workshops would be considered or should be considered as electives since a delegate's election to attend one will prevent him attending the others.

During the remainder of this decade, it is imperative that the NAACP stress the development of blacks economically. Our battle in the 1980's must move into the arena of economic self-sufficiency. The shackles of economic dependency must be severed. Systematic denial and exclusion of blacks from opportunities in the American corporate community must be dealt with. We need to get black Americans into this nation's economic mainstream. To fail this is to risk economic re-enslavement.

It is for this reason that Operation Fair Share as well as other aspects of the NAACP Economic Development Program have adopted what we call Fair Share Goals.

These include the:

- *appointment of blacks to the boards of directors of national, regional, state and local corporate businesses.

- *adoption of minority vendor procurement programs which include the use of construction contractors, professionals such as lawyers, and accountants, and the use of consultants, minority financial and insurance institutions, and advertising in minority print and electronic media, as well as many other services.

- *Review of promotion possibilities for blacks in senior management levels in corporations, and where necessary, fast tracking on the careers of black middle managers to achieve this goal.

- *Broadening of access to entry level jobs in corporations for blacks.

- *From the National Office, we intend to undertake a great deal of work with large national corporations, trade associations which represent entire industries, and different individual corporations in the same industry. I encourage you to go back to your branch after you have become familiar with this program and seek to implement it at the local level.

Because there are some possible dangers involving legal liability as a result of the use of selective patronage campaigns that may be necessary in giving effect to the Fair Share Program, branches absolutely must adhere very strictly to the guidelines governing the Operation Fair Share Program.

Voter Education and Registration

Politics and economics go hand-in-hand, and blacks will not achieve significant political par⁴ until we build a strong economic base, and vice versa. For that reason, we must be in a position to take full advantage of the benefits afforded by the Voting Rights Act which is to be signed this week. We can proudly say by the way that your Association was in the forefront of the Civil Rights coalition which was put together to protect the integrity of this legislation and to seek to have it extended into the future.

Elimination and retrenchment of programs by the present Administration, which benefit minorities and the poor, is largely due to the very low political esteem which the Reagan Administration holds of blacks and the poor. Mr. Reagan's perception of black Americans will change on November 4th when the nation awakens and finds that day, following the elections, that a host of Republican congressmen in all sections of the country were resoundingly defeated in part due to the large turn out of black voters.

None of this can be accomplished, in fact, it is a pipe dream of the worst sort to think that we can succeed without money. The NAACP needs every branch, state conference, youth council and college chapter to make an all out affirmative effort to bring new members on to the rolls. We are so accustomed to asking White Americans to take affirmative action, in fact, demanding that white America take affirmative action, but the times now compel you, me, all of black America to take affirmative action to ensure that our war chest overflows with dollars so that we can secure the necessary ammunition to remove from public office those who even in this modern day would deny our full citizenship rights.

The struggle for freedom is more costly now than ever and no one is going to help us, save us, but us. My friends, you and I are in this boat together and if it is to steer a correct and true course, we must pull on the oars

in unison and be prepared to follow the carefully considered course.

In this great Convention, let us act to re-charge our spiritual commitment to this Association's cause; and to reinvigorate our ideas from discussion and debate of how to do what must be done; and act again this year, as our predecessors have for 72 years past to redirect our energies. As we move forward, go from this session seeking to reshape that necessary consensus that will lift our spirits and quicken the pace of our efforts as we return to the communities we serve across America.