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Remarks at a Memorial Service for Victims of the Shootings in Dallas, Texas
July 12, 2016

Thank you very much. To Mr. President and Mrs. Bush; my friend, the Vice President, and Dr. Biden; Mayor Rawlings; Chief Spiller; clergy; Members of Congress; Chief Brown—I'm so glad I met Michelle first, because she loves Stevie Wonder—[*laughter*]—but most of all, to the families and friends and colleagues and fellow officers: Scripture tells us that in our sufferings there is glory, "because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." Now, sometimes, the truths of these words are hard to see. Right now those words test us. Because the people of Dallas—people across the country—are suffering.

We're here to honor the memory, and mourn the loss, of five fellow Americans; to grieve with their loved ones, to support this community, to pray for the wounded, and to try and find some meaning amidst our sorrow.

For the men and women who protect and serve the people of Dallas, last Thursday began like any other day. Like most Americans each day, you get up, probably have too quick a breakfast, kiss your family goodbye, and you head to work. But your work—and the work of police officers across the country—is like no other. For the moment you put on that uniform, you have answered a call that at any moment, even in the briefest interaction, may put your life in harm's way.

Lorne Ahrens, he answered that call. So did his wife Katrina, not only because she was the spouse of a police officer, but because she's a detective on the force. They have two kids. And Lorne took them fishing and used to proudly go to their school in uniform. And the night before he died, he bought dinner for a homeless man. And the next night, Katrina had to tell their children that their dad was gone. And "they don't get it yet," their grandma said. "They don't know what to do quite yet."

Michael Krol answered that call. His mother said, "He knew the dangers of the job, but he never shied away from his duty." He came a thousand miles from his home State of Michigan to be a cop in Dallas, telling his family, "This is something I wanted to do." And last year, he brought his girlfriend back to Detroit for Thanksgiving, and it was the last time he'd see his family.

Michael Smith answered that call: in the Army and over almost 30 years working for the Dallas Police Association, which gave him the appropriately named "Cops' Cop" award. A man of deep faith, when he was off duty, he could be found at church or playing softball with his two girls. Today, his girls have lost their dad, for God has called Michael home.

Patrick Zamarripa, he answered that call. Just 32, a former altar boy who served in the Navy and dreamed of being a cop. He liked to post videos of himself and his kids on social media. And on Thursday night, while Patrick went to work, his partner Kristy posted a photo of her and their daughter at a Texas Rangers game, and tagged her partner so that he could see it while on duty.

Brent Thompson answered that call. He served his country as a marine. And years later, as a contractor, he spent time in some of the most dangerous parts of Iraq and Afghanistan. And then a few years ago, he settled down here in Dallas for a new life of service as a transit cop.

And just about 2 weeks ago, he married a fellow officer, their whole life together waiting before them.

Like police officers across the country, these men and their families shared a commitment to something larger than themselves. They weren't looking for their names to be up in lights. They'd tell you the pay was decent, but wouldn't make you rich. They could have told you about the stress and long shifts, and they'd probably agree with Chief Brown when he said that cops don't expect to hear the words "thank you" very often, especially from those who need them the most.

No, the reward comes in knowing that our entire way of life in America depends on the rule of law; that the maintenance of that law is a hard and daily labor; that in this country, we don't have soldiers in the streets or militias setting the rules. Instead, we have public servants—police officers—like the men who were taken away from us.

And that's what these five were doing last Thursday when they were assigned to protect and keep orderly a peaceful protest in response to the killing of Alton Sterling of Baton Rouge and Philando Castile of Minnesota. They were upholding the constitutional rights of this country.

For a while, the protest went on without incident. And despite the fact that police conduct was the subject of the protest, despite the fact that there must have been signs or slogans or chants with which they profoundly disagreed, these men and this department did their jobs like the professionals that they were. In fact, the police had been part of the protest planning. Dallas PD even posted photos on their Twitter feeds of their own officers standing among the protesters. Two officers, Black and White, smiled next to a man with a sign that read, "No Justice, No Peace." [*Laughter*]

And then, around 9 o'clock, the gunfire came. Another community torn apart. More hearts broken. More questions about what caused, and what might prevent, another such tragedy.

I know that Americans are struggling right now with what we've witnessed over the past week. First, the shootings in Minnesota and Baton Rouge and the protests, then the targeting of police by the shooter here, an act not just of demented violence, but of racial hatred. All of it's left us wounded and angry and hurt. It's as if the deepest faultlines of our democracy have suddenly been exposed, perhaps even widened. And although we know that such divisions are not new—though they've surely been worse in even the recent past—that offers us little comfort.

Faced with this violence, we wonder if the divides of race in America can ever be bridged. We wonder if an African American community that feels unfairly targeted by police, and police departments that feel unfairly maligned for doing their jobs, can ever understand each other's experience. We turn on the TV or surf the Internet, and we can watch positions harden and lines drawn, and people retreat to their respective corners, and politicians calculate how to grab attention or avoid the fallout. We see all this, and it's hard not to think sometimes that the center won't hold and that things might get worse.

I understand. I understand how Americans are feeling. But, Dallas, I'm here to say we must reject such despair. I'm here to insist that we are not as divided as we seem. And I know that because I know America. I know how far we've come against impossible odds. I know we'll make it because of what I've experienced in my own life, what I've seen of this country and its people—their goodness and decency—as President of the United States. And I know it

because of what we've seen here in Dallas, how all of you, out of great suffering, have shown us the meaning of perseverance and character and hope.

When the bullets started flying, the men and women of the Dallas police, they did not flinch, and they did not react recklessly. They showed incredible restraint. Helped in some cases by protesters, they evacuated the injured, isolated the shooter, saved more lives than we will ever know. We mourn fewer people today because of your brave actions. "Everyone was helping each other," one witness said. "It wasn't about Black or White. Everyone was picking each other up and moving them away." See, that's the America I know.

The police helped Shetamia Taylor as she was shot trying to shield her four sons. She said she wanted her boys to join her to protest the incidents of Black men being killed. She also said to the Dallas PD, "Thank you for being heroes." And today, her 12-year-old son wants to be a cop when he grows up. That's the America I know.

In the aftermath of the shooting, we've seen Mayor Rawlings and Chief Brown, a White man and a Black man with different backgrounds, working not just to restore order and support a shaken city, a shaken department, but working together to unify a city with strength and grace and wisdom. And in the process, we've been reminded that the Dallas Police Department has been at the forefront of improving relations between police and the community. The murder rate here has fallen. Complaints of excessive force have been cut by 64 percent. The Dallas Police Department has been doing it the right way. And so, Mayor Rawlings and Chief Brown, on behalf of the American people, thank you for your steady leadership, thank you for your powerful example. We could not be prouder of you.

These men, this department, these—this is the America I know. And today, in this audience, I see people who have protested on behalf of criminal justice reform grieving alongside police officers. I see people who mourn for the five officers we lost, but also weep for the families of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile. In this audience, I see what's possible when we recognize that we are one American family, all deserving of equal treatment, all deserving of equal respect, all children of God. That's the America I know.

Now, I'm not naive. I have spoken at too many memorials during the course of this Presidency. I've hugged too many families who have lost a loved one to senseless violence. And I've seen how a spirit of unity, born of tragedy, can gradually dissipate, overtaken by the return to business as usual, by inertia and old habits and expediency. I see how easily we slip back into our old notions, because they're comfortable, we're used to them. I've seen how inadequate words can be in bringing about lasting change. I've seen how inadequate my own words have been. And so I'm reminded of a passage in John's Gospel [First John][*]: "Let us love not with words or speech, but with actions and in truth." If we're to sustain the unity we need to get through these difficult times, if we are to honor these five outstanding officers who we've lost, then we will need to act on the truths that we know. And that's not easy. It makes us uncomfortable. But we're going to have to be honest with each other and ourselves.

We know that the overwhelming majority of police officers do an incredibly hard and dangerous job fairly and professionally. They are deserving of our respect and not our scorn. And when anyone, no matter how good their intentions may be, paints all police as biased or bigoted, we undermine those officers we depend on for our safety. And as for those who use rhetoric suggesting harm to police, even if they don't act on it themselves, well, they not only

[*] White House correction.

make the jobs of police officers even more dangerous, but they do a disservice to the very cause of justice that they claim to promote.

We also know that centuries of racial discrimination—of slavery and subjugation and Jim Crow—they didn't simply vanish with the end of lawful segregation. They didn't just stop when Dr. King made a speech or the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act were signed. Race relations have improved dramatically in my lifetime. Those who deny it are dishonoring the struggles that helped us achieve that progress.

But we know—but, America, we know that bias remains. We know it. Whether you are Black or White or Hispanic or Asian or Native American or of Middle Eastern descent, we have all seen this bigotry in our own lives at some point. We've heard it at times in our own homes. If we're honest, perhaps we've heard prejudice in our own heads and felt it in our own hearts. We know that. And while some suffer far more under racism's burden, some feel to a far greater extent discrimination's sting; although most of us do our best to guard against it and teach our children better, none of us is entirely innocent. No institution is entirely immune. And that includes our police departments. We know this.

And so when African Americans from all walks of life, from different communities across the country, voice a growing despair over what they perceive to be unequal treatment; when study after study shows that Whites and people of color experience the criminal justice system differently so that if you're Black you're more likely to be pulled over or searched or arrested, more likely to get longer sentences, more likely to get the death penalty for the same crime; when mothers and fathers raise their kids right and have "the talk" about how to respond if stopped by a police officer—"yes, sir," "no, sir"—but still fear that something terrible may happen when their child walks out the door, still fear that kids being stupid and not quite doing things right might end in tragedy—when all this takes place more than 50 years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, we cannot simply turn away and dismiss those in peaceful protest as troublemakers or paranoid. We can't simply dismiss it as a symptom of political correctness or reverse racism. To have your experience denied like that, dismissed by those in authority, dismissed perhaps even by your White friends and coworkers and fellow church members again and again and again, it hurts. Surely, we can see that, all of us.

We also know what Chief Brown has said is true: That so much of the tensions between police departments and minority communities that they serve is because we ask the police to do too much and we ask too little of ourselves. As a society, we choose to underinvest in decent schools. We allow poverty to fester so that entire neighborhoods offer no prospect for gainful employment. We refuse to fund drug treatment and mental health programs. We flood communities with so many guns that it is easier for a teenager to buy a Glock than get his hands on a computer or even a book, and then we tell the police, "You're a social worker, you're the parent, you're the teacher, you're the drug counselor." We tell them to keep those neighborhoods in check at all costs and do so without causing any political blowback or inconvenience. Don't make a mistake that might disturb our own peace of mind. And then, we feign surprise when, periodically, the tensions boil over.

We know these things to be true. They've been true for a long time. We know it. Police, you know it. Protestors, you know it. You know how dangerous some of the communities where these police officers serve are, and you pretend as if there's no context. These things we know to be true. And if we cannot even talk about these things, if we cannot talk honestly and openly not just in the comfort of our own circles, but with those who look different than us or bring a different perspective, then we will never break this dangerous cycle.

In the end, it's not about finding policies that work, it's about forging consensus and fighting cynicism and finding the will to make change. Can we do this? Can we find the character, as Americans, to open our hearts to each other? Can we see in each other a common humanity and a shared dignity and recognize how our different experiences have shaped us? And it doesn't make anybody perfectly good or perfectly bad, it just makes us human. I don't know. I confess that sometimes I, too, experience doubt. I've been to too many of these things. I've seen too many families go through this. But then I am reminded of what the Lord tells Ezekiel. "I will give you a new heart," the Lord says, "and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."

That's what we must pray for, each of us: a new heart. Not a heart of stone, but a heart open to the fears and hopes and challenges of our fellow citizens. That's what we've seen in Dallas these past few days. That's what we must sustain.

Because with an open heart, we can learn to stand in each other's shoes and look at the world through each other's eyes so that maybe the police officer sees his own son in that teenager with a hoodie who's kind of goofing off, but not dangerous; and the teenager, maybe the teenager will see in the police officer the same words and values and authority of his parents.

With an open heart, we can abandon the overheated rhetoric and the oversimplification that reduces whole categories of our fellow Americans, not just to opponents, but to enemies.

With an open heart, those protesting for change will guard against reckless language going forward, look at the model set by the five officers we mourn today, acknowledge the progress brought about by the sincere efforts of police departments like this one in Dallas, and embark on the hard but necessary work of negotiation, the pursuit of reconciliation.

With an open heart, police departments will acknowledge that, just like the rest of us, they are not perfect; that insisting we do better to root out racial bias is not an attack on cops, but an effort to live up to our highest ideals. And I understand, these protests—I see them—they can be messy. Sometimes, they can be hijacked by an irresponsible few. Police can get hurt. Protestors can get hurt. They can be frustrating.

But even those who dislike the phrase "Black Lives Matter," surely we should be able to hear the pain of Alton Sterling's family. We should—when we hear a friend describe him by saying that "whatever he cooked, he cooked enough for everybody," that should sound familiar to us, that maybe he wasn't so different than us, so that we can, yes, insist that his life matters. Just as we should hear the students and coworkers describe their affection for Philando Castile as a gentle soul—"Mr. Rogers with dreadlocks," they called him—and know that his life mattered to a whole lot of people of all races, of all ages, and that we have to do what we can, without putting officers' lives at risk, but do better to prevent another life like his from being lost.

With an open heart, we can worry less about which side has been wronged and worry more about joining sides to do right. Because the vicious killer of these police officers, they won't be the last person who tries to make us turn on one other. And the killer in Orlando wasn't, nor was the killer in Charleston. We know there is evil in this world. That's why we need police departments. But as Americans, we can decide that people like this killer will ultimately fail. They will not drive us apart. We can decide to come together and make our country reflect the good inside us, the hopes and simple dreams we share.

"We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." For all of us, life presents challenges and suffering: accidents, illnesses, the loss of loved ones. There are times when we are overwhelmed by sudden calamity, natural or manmade. All of us, we make mistakes. And at times, we are lost. And as we get older, we learn we don't always have control of things, not even a President does. But we do have control over how we respond to the world. We do have control over how we treat one another.

America does not ask us to be perfect. Precisely because of our individual imperfections, our Founders gave us institutions to guard against tyranny and ensure no one is above the law; a democracy that gives us the space to work through our differences and debate them peacefully, to make things better, even if it doesn't always happen as fast as we'd like. America gives us the capacity to change.

But as the men we mourn today—these five heroes—knew better than most, we cannot take the blessings of this Nation for granted. Only by working together can we preserve those institutions of family and community, rights and responsibilities, law and self-government that is the hallmark of this Nation. For, it turns out, we do not persevere alone. Our character is not found in isolation. Hope does not arise by putting our fellow man down, it is found by lifting others up.

And that's what I take away from the lives of these outstanding men. The pain we feel may not soon pass, but my faith tells me that they did not die in vain. I believe our sorrow can make us a better country. I believe our righteous anger can be transformed into more justice and more peace. Weeping may endure for a night, but I'm convinced joy comes in the morning. We cannot match the sacrifices made by Officers Zamarripa and Ahrens, Krol, Smith, and Thompson, but surely we can try to match their sense of service. We cannot match their courage, but we can strive to match their devotion.

May God bless their memory. May God bless this country that we love.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:46 p.m. at Morton H. Meyerson Symphony Center. In his remarks, he referred to former President George W. Bush and former First Lady Laura Bush; James Spiller, police chief, Dallas Area Rapid Transit; David O. Brown, chief, Dallas Police Department, who introduced the President; musician Stevie Wonder; Lorne Ahrens, Michael Krol, Michael J. Smith, and Patrick Zamarripa, Dallas Police Department officers, and Brent Thompson, Dallas Area Rapid Transit officer, who were killed in the shootings at a public demonstration in Dallas, TX, on July 7; Dallas Police Department Detective Katrina Ahrens, wife of Officer Ahrens, their children Sorcha and Magus, and her mother Karen Buckingham; Dallas, TX, resident Bill Connor; Susan Ehlke, mother, Marie Tijerina, girlfriend, of Officer Krol; Caroline and Victoria Smith, children of Officer Smith; Lyncoln and Dylan Zamarripa, children, and Kristy Villasenor, wife, of Officer Zamarripa; Dallas Area Rapid Transit Officer Emily Thompson, wife of Officer Thompson; Alton Sterling and Philando Castile, who were killed by police officers, respectively, in Baton Rouge, LA, on July 5, and Falcon Heights, MN, on July 6; Dallas Police Department Officers Maj. Lonzo Anderson, Jr., and Maj. Paul Junger; Garland, TX, resident Shetamia Taylor, who was injured in the July 7 shootings, and her sons Kavion and Jajuan Washington, Jermar Taylor, and Andrew Humphrey; Micah Xavier Johnson, suspected gunman in the Dallas shootings; and Dylann S. Roof accused gunman in the shootings at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, SC, on June 17, 2015.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Dallas, TX, shootings, memorial service for victims.

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Names: Ahrens, Katrina; Ahrens, Lorne; Ahrens, Magus; Ahrens, Sorcha; Anderson, Lonzo, Jr.; Biden, Jill T.; Biden, Joseph R., Jr.; Brown, David O.; Buckingham, Karen; Bush, George W.; Bush, Laura; Castile, Philando; Connor, Bill; Ehlke, Susan; Humphrey, Andrew; Johnson, Micah Xavier; Junger, Paul; Krol, Michael; Obama, Michelle; Rawlings, Michael S.; Roof, Dylann S.; Smith, Caroline; Smith, Michael; Smith, Michael J.; Smith, Victoria; Spiller, James D.; Sterling, Alton; Taylor, Jermar; Taylor, Shetamia; Thompson, Brent; Thompson, Emily; Tijerina, Marie; Villasenor, Kristy; Washington, Jajuan; Washington, Kavion; Wonder, Stevie; Zamarripa, Dylan; Zamarripa, Lyncoln; Zamarripa, Patrick.

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