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Remarks at the National Museum of African American History and Culture
February 21, 2017

The President. Thank you very much, everybody. It's a great honor to be here. This was some beautiful morning, and what a job they've done, like few others have been able to do.

I am very, very proud of Lonnie Bunch. The work and the love that he has in his heart for what he's done is—I always talk about you need enthusiasm, you need really love for anything you do to do it successfully. And, Lonnie, you are where? Come on. Where's Lonnie? You should be up here, Lonnie. Come on.

And David—we have to get David up here too. David Skorton is tremendous, and he was singing Lonnie's praises all morning long. So you two should at least be here. So we appreciate it very much.

And David Rubenstein, who is here someplace, he is—come on, David, you have to get up here, David. You certainly deserve it. He's a very, very successful guy who spends money doing great things, and he's been a great help to so many different groups and this one in particular.

Thank you. It's a privilege to be here today. This museum is a beautiful tribute to so many American heroes: heroes like Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, Rosa Parks, the Greensboro students, and the African American Medal of Honor recipients, among so many other really incredible heroes.

It's amazing to see. I went to—we did a pretty comprehensive tour, but not comprehensive enough. So, Lonnie, I'll be back. I told you that. Because I could stay here for a lot longer, believe me. It's really incredible.

I'm deeply proud that we now have a museum that honors the millions of African American men and women who built our national heritage, especially when it comes to faith, culture and the unbreakable American spirit. My wife was here last week and took a tour, and it was something that she's still talking about. Ivanka is here right now. Hi, Ivanka. And it really is very, very special. It's something that, frankly, if you want to know the truth, it's doing so well that everybody is talking about it.

I know President Obama was here for the museum's opening last fall. And I'm honored to be the second sitting President to visit this great museum. Etched in the hall that we passed today is a quote from Spottswood Rice, a runaway slave who joined the Union Army. He believed that his fellow African Americans always looked to the United States as the promised land of universal freedom. Today and every day of my Presidency, I pledge to do everything I can to continue that promise of freedom for African Americans and for every American. So important. Nothing more important.

This tour was a meaningful reminder of why we have to fight bigotry, intolerance, and hatred in all of its very ugly forms. The anti-Semitic threats targeting our Jewish community and community centers are horrible and are painful and a very sad reminder of the work that still must be done to root out hate and prejudice and evil.

I want to thank a great friend of mine, Dr. Ben Carson, and his beautiful family—Candy and the whole family—for joining us today. It was very special to accompany him and his family for the first time seeing the Carson exhibit. First time. I'm so proud of you. I love this guy. He's

a great guy, really a great guy. And he can tell you better than me, but I'll tell you what, we really started something with Ben. We're very, very proud of him. Hopefully, next week he'll get his approval, about 3 or 4 weeks late, and you're doing better than most, right? [*Laughter*] But the Democrats, they'll come along. I have no doubt they'll come along. But Ben is going to do a fantastic job at HUD. I have absolutely no doubt he will be one of the great—ever—in that position.

He grew up in Detroit and had very little. He defied every statistic. He graduated from Yale, and he went on to University of Michigan's medical school. He became a brilliant—totally brilliant—neurosurgeon, saved many lives, and helped many, many people. We're going to do great things in our African American communities together. Ben is going to work with me very, very closely. And HUD has a meaning far beyond housing. If properly done, it's a meaning that's as big as anything there is, and Ben will be able to find that true meaning and the true meaning of HUD as its Secretary. So I just look forward to that. And what—I look forward to watching that. He'll do things that nobody ever thought of.

I also want to thank Senator Tim Scott for joining us today, friend of mine, a great, great Senator from South Carolina. I like the State of South Carolina. I like all those States where I won by double, double, double digits. You know, those States. But South Carolina was one, and Tim has been fantastic how he represents the people. And they love him.

I also want to profoundly thank Alveda King for being here, and as we saw her uncle's wonderful exhibit, and he certainly deserves that. Mrs. King—and by the way, Ms. King, I can tell you this personally because I watch her all the time, and she is a tremendous fighter for justice. And so, Alveda, thank you very much.

Alveda C. King, niece of Martin Luther King, Jr. Thank you, sir.

The President. Come up here for a second.

Ms. King. Yes, sir. Thank you.

The President. I have been watching you for so long, and you are so incredible. And I wanted to thank you for all the nice things you say about me.

Ms. King. Wow. Thank you, sir.

The President. Not everybody says nice things, but she's special.

Ms. King. I love you and your family. You're the best. You're great.

The President. Thank you. Come here.

Ms. King. Thank you. Thank you.

The President. Thank you, darling. Appreciate it.

So with that, we're going to just end this incredible beginning of a morning. But engraved in the wall very nearby, a quote by the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. In 1955, he told the world, "We are determined . . . to work and fight until justice runs down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream."

And that's what it's going to be. We're going to bring this country together, maybe bring some of the world together, but we're going to bring this country together. We have a divided country. It's been divided for many, many years, but we're going to bring it together. I hope every day of my Presidency we will be honoring the determination and work towards a very worthy goal.

And for Lonnie and David and David and Ben and Alveda and everybody, I just want to—I just have to say that what they've done here is something that can probably not be duplicated. It was done with love and lots of money, right Lonnie? [*Laughter*] Lots of money. We can't avoid that. But it was done with tremendous love and passion, and that's why it's so great.

So thank you all very much for being here, I appreciate it. And congratulations. This is a truly great museum. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:54 a.m. in the Main Atrium. In his remarks, he referred to Lonnie G. Bunch, Director, National Museum of African American History and Culture; and Secretary of Housing and Urban Development–designate Benjamin S. Carson, Sr., and his wife Lacena.

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