

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks on the 70th Anniversary of the United States Supreme Court Decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*

May 17, 2024

The President. Hello! My name's Joe Biden—[*laughter*]*—and I'm a lifetime member of the NAACP. But I said that a little earlier to the president, and he said, "Are your dues paid up?" I've got to check. [Laughter] Oh, my Lord.*

So many—so many—people here today. You changed the world. Seventy years ago, you changed—I say "the world." That's not hyperbole. I'm not exaggerating. You not only changed the United States, you changed our role in the world in a fundamental way. I know there's a lot more to do.

President Johnson, that introduction—thank you for your leadership. But most importantly, for the NAACP.

It's an honor to be with all of you here at the National Museum of American—African American History and Culture. Remember we were trying to get this built for years? It's pretty neat, isn't it? [*Applause*] Huh?

And by the way, I want to thank the staff who runs this place. They do an incredible job.

Together, the NAACP and this museum are monuments to the power of Black history. And Black history is American history. It's American. No, I—[*applause*]. It's a really important thing to continue to—we have a whole group of people out there trying to rewrite history, trying to erase history.

It's a tribute to heroes known and unknown who pursued our Nation's North Star.

We're unique among all nations in the world, and I mean that. Every other nation is based on ethnicity, based on religion and other things, but we're the only one based on an idea: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, and should be treated equally their whole lives—throughout their life.

We've never fully lived up to that idea, to state the obvious, but we've never walked away from it either because of so many of you in this room and so many more.

Seventy years ago, when the Supreme Court ruled on *Brown* versus *the Board of Education* that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional, a prayer was answered in a long struggle for freedom.

Yesterday I welcomed the family of plaintiffs of that landmark case to the White House, to the Oval Office—their office. Once upon a time, they were excluded from certain classrooms. But 70 years later, they're inside the most important room of all, the Oval Office, where they belong.

They're a living reminder that "once upon a time" wasn't that long ago. And all the progress we've made is—still have more to do. And there are still groups that are trying to erase it.

You know, one of the cases that led to the landmark decision was in my home State of Delaware. A Black mother from Hockessin, Delaware, joined by parents of eight other students in the—in Claymont, the town I moved to when we—work ran out in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and we moved back in third grade—moved here in third—to Delaware in third grade. All in

Claymont—they just wanted a simple proposition: They wanted their kids to be able to attend a school and be treated with dignity and respect.

They asked a man who I looked up to and really admired and helped me out as a young public defender, Louis L. Redding. He was the first man—the first Black man ever admitted to the practice of law in the State of Delaware—to say—and that—think about that.

Here's the first man—this guy was brilliant, and he didn't get admitted till after the fifties in Delaware to the—I mean—well, he enlisted a young Jewish lawyer from the NAACP named Jack Greenberg to help him devise a legal strategy to get rid of the racial segregation in Delaware schools.

In 1952, in Delaware, for the first time in our country's history, in *Bulah versus Gebhart* and *Belton versus Gebhart*—and, by the way, any Delawareans here today? [Applause] Great. All right. First time ever, segregated White public schools were ordered to admit Black children.

Louis L. Redding's argument in those early Delaware cases laid the legal framework for *Brown versus the Board*. His story, a timeless truth about America: When we make real the promise of America for all Americans, the Nation changes for the better. Everything from the economy to everything grows—everything grows.

After *Brown versus Board* decision, the public schools gradually and often much too slowly were integrated. Graduation rates for Black and Latino students increased significantly though.

The *Brown* decision proves a simple idea: We learn better when we learn together.

That's why my administration is increasing funding for schools to bring together students from different backgrounds. My Department of Education is investing \$300 million, including another \$20 million announced today, to support diversity in our schools.

We're also funding efforts to increase diversity in the teaching profession itself because, as the president said, Black students—but especially young Black men—react to Black teachers. Black students who have Black teachers are significantly more likely to graduate from high school and enroll in college. It makes a difference, and it matters.

My Department of Education provided an additional almost half a billion dollars—\$450 million to ensure teachers in our schools reflect the diversity in our country, and we're just getting started. This money is going to go toward training the next generation of teachers at HBCUs, Tribal colleges, and minority-serving institutions.

And by the way, not because I'm married to one, but we need to give teachers a raise. I mean it.

Another lesson from *Brown* is that every child deserves a quality education. How can we—think of this just in simple terms: How can we have the strongest economy in the world without the best education in the world? I mean, it's not possible. That taps into the full talents of our entire nation.

And the answer starts with childhood—early childhood education. Because of the Nation's legacy of discrimination, the Black children start school with an average of 7 months behind their White peers in reading. But 1 year of universal, high-quality pre-K could eliminate 98 percent of that gap. Just 1 year. And children who go to preschool are nearly 50-percent more likely to finish high school and go on to earn a 2-year or 4-year degree no matter what their background is.

That's why my administration is working to support Black children. And as soon as I came into office, I signed the American Rescue Plan. And I'm going to be political by just saying this, because we're having problems: Not one Republican voted for it—not one. But the American

Rescue Plan expanded childcare tax credits that delivered monthly checks to working families that cut Black child poverty in half.

My Republican friends let it expire. Well, I'm going to keep fighting to reestablish it. We're going to get it reestablished.

And I'm going to keep fighting to make sure preschool is universal for every 3- and 4-year-old in America. We can afford to do this. It's not hard.

Instead of giving multibillion-dollar breaks to the superwealthy, let's make the wealthy begin to pay their fair share of taxes. We can afford all this.

I'll just slow up for just one second here and ad-lib a little bit here because I'm going to get in trouble for doing it, keeping you longer, but—[*laughter*]*—*you know, we have a thousand billionaires in America. A thousand. I'm a capitalist. If you can make all that money, fine. Just pay your fair share.

But here's the deal, do you know what the tax—Federal tax rate is for a billionaire in America? Eight-point-three percent. If we just raised it to 25 percent, we'd raise 400 billion—billion dollars over the next 10 years. That could pay for all of this, cut the deficit, and do so much more. Just being—just pay your fair share.

Look, it's not only good for children, it's good for the country when we have early education, and it grows the economy.

We're also working to ensure every child, no matter what their ZIP Code, has access to a quality education experience in K through 12. The American Rescue Plan delivered \$130 billion to American schools, the most ever in funding public education in our Nation's history.

And we added another 200—\$2 billion annually to title I funding to support school students that are most in need. These dollars help for things like tutoring; paying teachers are for—what they deserve; providing more advanced casework and courseworks as well.

While college degrees are still a ticket to the middle class, that ticket is becoming too expensive. Too many—too many—young people, Black students are dealing with unsustainable debts in exchange for a college degree. That's why my administration has taken the most significant action, notwithstanding the Supreme Court tried to stop me, to provide student debt relief—the most supreme—ever.

I've been able to relieve \$160 billion in student debt for over 4.5 million Americans, including a significant number of Black borrowers. That means they can now start a family, buy a home, save for their children's school, give back to their communities.

It also increased the maximum Pell grant to—by \$900, the largest increase in a decade. And it matters because over 60 percent of Black students rely on Pell grants to go to college.

And something I'm really proud of: We're making historic investments in Historic Black Colleges and Universities.

Now, I'm from Delaware, so I go along with Delaware State being the best HBCU. [*Laughter*] Kamala keeps saying it's Howard. [*Laughter*] And I'm going now—I'm going Sunday to make a speech at that other place, that men's college—More—is it? Morehou—[*laughter*]*—*Morehouse! [*Laughter*] I've got more Morehouse Men in my administration than Morehouse. [*Laughter*]

But regardless of loyalties, it's clear HBCUs are vital to our Nation's progress. [*Applause*] I mean it. That's not hyperbole. HBCUs are responsible for 40 percent of Black engineers in America, 50 percent of Black teachers, 70 percent of all Black doctors and dentists, 80 percent of

all Black judges—and by the way, I put more on the bench than anybody ever has—and 100 percent of Black Vice Presidents. *[Laughter]* You've got it.

HBCUs also don't have endowments like other colleges and universities that are able to fund research labs and so much more. Well, Kamala and I made a commitment to lift HBCUs up, and we're keeping that commitment.

Today I'm proud to announce, as was mentioned earlier by the president, that we've invested over \$16 billion in HBCUs, by far the most ever of any administration—in combination of almost all administrations.

This investment has helped HBCUs do everything from build student housing to study climate science to create health research labs, prepare Black students for labs in industries of the future, because they don't have the endowments to do it themselves now.

But let's be clear, I know real power when I see it.

Later today, in the Oval Office, I'll be meeting with the presidents of the Divine Nine. You all think I'm kidding, don't you? Well, I'm proud that we are the first——

Audience member. Woo-woo!

The President. You've got it.

Audience member. *[Inaudible]*

The President. *[Laughter]* I can tell there's no—anyway. *[Laughter]*

We're the first administration in history to have a working group from the Divine Nine in the White House. And I asked them to do that from the very beginning.

But we know, 70 years after *Brown* versus *Board*, there are some forces trying to deny freedom of opportunity for all Americans.

A few minutes ago, I talked with some of the Little Rock Nine, who were determined to integrate a public school in Little Rock, Arkansas, 67 years ago. I'd like to recognize them for their courage and—if they can, would you—if you're able, please stand and rise so we can all see you.

And thank God Eisenhower was President. Thank God we had someone who stood up.

The Little Rock Nine were met with vitriol and violence.

Today, the resistance comes in other insidious forms. An extreme movement led by my predecessor and his MAGA Republican allies, backed by an extreme Supreme Court, gutted affirmative action in college admissions.

My predecessor and his extreme MAGA friends are now going after diversity, equity, and inclusion all across America. They want a country for some, not for all.

And let's not kid ourselves, folks. This is the God's truth what I'm saying.

My predecessor and his extreme MAGA friends are responsible for taking away other fundamental freedoms, from the freedom to vote to the freedom to choose. But I've always believed that the promise of America is big enough for everyone to succeed. And I mean that: everyone to succeed. That's what *Brown* is all about. And that's what we're all about. That's what America is about.

Let me close with this. On Sunday, I'm attending the commencement at Morehouse College, one of our Nation's most important institutions. Morehouse was founded after our Nation's Civil

War to help prepare Black Americans who were formerly enslaved to enter the ministry, earn an education, and usher them from slavery to freedom.

The founders of Morehouse understood something fundamental: Education is linked to freedom. Because to be free means to have something that no one can ever take away from you. And that's the power of an education. That's why the *Brown* decision we commemorate today is so important.

The work of building a democracy is—of possibility, of a democracy worthy of our dreams starts with opening the doors of opportunity for everyone without exception. And we can do it.

We just have to remember who we are. We are the United States of America. There's nothing beyond our capacity when we decide to work together.

May God bless you all. And thank you all for all the bravery you've demonstrated over the years. And may God protect our troops.

Thank you, thank you, thank you. Proud to be with you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:43 a.m. at the National Museum of African American History and Culture. In his remarks, he referred to Derrick Johnson, president and chief executive officer, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); Vice President Kamala D. Harris; Elizabeth Eckford, Carlotta Walls, Terrence Roberts, Minnijean Brown-Trickey, and Gloria Ray Karlmark, members of the "Little Rock Nine" students who initially desegregated Central High School in Little Rock, AK, in 1957; and former President Donald J. Trump.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : 70th Anniversary of U.S. Supreme Court Decision in Brown v. Board of Education.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Brown-Trickey, Minnijean; Eckford, Elizabeth; Harris, Kamala D.; Johnson, Derrick; Karlmark, Gloria Ray; Roberts, Terrence; Trump, Donald J.; Walls, Carlotta.

Subjects: Abortion; Child tax credit; Civil rights movement; College costs and affordability; Diversity, equity, and inclusion, improvement efforts; Early childhood education and literacy; Education equity, improvement efforts; Federal court nominations and confirmations; Federal student loans, partial forgiveness; Georgia, Morehouse College in Atlanta; Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs); National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); National Museum of African American History and Culture; Pell grants; Poverty reduction efforts; Racial equality, improvement efforts; School support services and after-school programs, strengthening efforts; Tax Code reform; U.S. Supreme Court Decision in Brown v. Board of Education, 70th anniversary; Vice President; Voting rights, protection efforts.

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