

Statement on the Fire in Mina, Saudi Arabia April 15, 1997

I was deeply saddened to learn today of the tragic loss of life in Saudi Arabia among the pilgrims performing the Hajj. I have sent condolences to King Fahd on behalf of the American

people and extend our deepest sympathy to the families of those who were killed or injured in the fire.

Exchange With Reporters in Queens, New York April 15, 1997

Jackie Robinson Commemorative Coins

The President. Mark [Mark Knoller, CBS Radio], did you give out any autographs today over at the school?

Q. Thank you, sir, that was very kind of you.

The President. It's a great school, isn't it? Very impressive.

You all know this is the design for the Jackie Robinson coin. And Mrs. Robinson and her family consulted on it—do you want to just tell them?

Rachel Robinson. Yes. The gold coin represents the total man, and we wanted that because we have been trying to impress people with Jack's life in its totality. And we think that's going to be a very rare piece. We're very excited about it. We love the design, and we love the concept, and we're very happy to have it. The silver coin will represent the baseball period and that, of course, he's had an illustrious career. So of course we're proud of that. But we wanted to commemorate both aspects of him—or total aspects of him. And we will sell out. [Laughter] We are already marketing and——

The President. We're hawking the coin. Anybody in our press corps would like to buy one, we can make one available. [Laughter]

Q. What denomination is it? How much money is it worth? What is the face value of it?

The President. What's the sale price?

Mrs. Robinson. The final price hasn't been determined. It's around \$250 on the gold and about \$35 on the silver. And the Jackie Robinson Foundation will receive surcharges from the coins, which we will invest in our permanent endowment fund.

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Q. Mr. President, what do you think of all the attacks on your Attorney General? What do you think of all the attacks on your Attorney General for the decision she made yesterday on the independent counsel? Newt Gingrich said today he likened that position to something that John Mitchell would do.

The President. That cries out for an answer, I guess. Let me say, I think that—I don't have anything to add to what I've already said. She had to make a legal decision on a legal question. And as I understand it, she consulted her career staff people there and made a decision. And that's all I know. So I don't have any other comment about it. It should not be a political matter; it should be a legal matter. And that's the way everybody ought to leave it.

Q. Thank you.

Jackie Robinson 50th Anniversary Cap

Mrs. Robinson. On behalf of the Jackie Robinson Foundation, we would like to present you with our anniversary cap, since we know that you wear caps——

The President. I do.

Mrs. Robinson. ——we hope to see this on your head. [Laughter]

The President. I hope you see me running and playing golf.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 6:40 p.m. at Shea Stadium during a meeting with Rachel Robinson, widow of Jackie Robinson, and other family members. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Interview With Chris Berman of ESPN in Queens April 15, 1997

[*The President's remarks are joined in progress.*]

The President. And if he hadn't done what he did and Branch Rickey hadn't done what he did, PeeWee Reese hadn't run the team like he did, it would have been a very different world. But Jackie Robinson—you know, someone—maybe fate has a way of doing that in history, but he was—he had the unique blend of talent and character to do what he did. And it's made a real difference.

It made a real difference to the way people thought about race. I think that's more important than the fact that he was a great baseball player because baseball really was our national pastime then, too, and there was no competition from highly televised pro basketball or pro football or anything else. It was the thing. And so it was—as important as it was, and 3 years later basketball was integrated and other things happened—this was a huge deal. Most Americans now can't even imagine how big a deal it was.

This was the year before President Truman signed the order to integrate the Army. This was a huge deal.

Mr. Berman. It was really 15 years plus before marches in the sixties. I mean, it was so far ahead of its time—

The President. Almost a decade before Rosa Parks. And it was baseball, so it was a statement about America. Anything you said about baseball in the forties and the early fifties, it was a statement about America.

Mr. Berman. By the way, Olerud is at first base with a single; one out. But Bernard Gilkey is up.

The President. He's doing better in New York, isn't he, although—

Mr. Berman. Well, he's in another—

The President. But he's hitting well again, and it's good. It's been a good move for him.

Mr. Berman. It kind of got a little stale for him in Toronto.

The President. Yes. It's good for him.

Mr. Berman. Did you ever get up to see Jackie Robinson play? I don't know how many Cardinal games you went to. Arkansas was a good drive from there.

The President. Only one time when I was a child. My father took me on a train to St. Louis to watch a game, but they weren't playing the Dodgers. But we didn't get a television until 1956, but it was right after the '55 season, right after the Boys of Summer. So for 2 years I sat transfixed in front of my television set. And tonight we had a contest in the place where I'm sitting to see how many people could remember the names of people on the '55 team—how many names you could remember. I quit at seven. And I hadn't even thought about it since. And I still remember the first time I saw Jackie Robinson, with that hitch in his swing and the way he ran sort of almost—on television it looked almost like he was bent over. It was an amazing thing. I remember just being transfixed by it.

Mr. Berman. Well, you have these images all—the old crystal set, right, which was how you followed your baseball. And so many people did, certainly, in the fifties. When you finally saw him, or now that you've seen him afterwards on the old newsreels, et cetera, was that the image you had of him as a boy listening on the radio, or was he more impressive in person?

The President. More impressive in person. But I used to do my homework at night listening to the Cardinals games on the radio. So I—I probably shouldn't say, it's a bad example for students of today.

Mr. Berman. We all did it; we all did it.

The President. But I did. And so, he was better than I thought he would be. He was beautiful. He was fabulous, watching him.

Mr. Berman. You're excited about this evening, aren't you?

The President. I am, it's very important. I think that it's also good for baseball. This night will capture the attention of America and make everybody forget about some of the things they didn't like that happened the last 2 years and make people fall in love with baseball again, I hope.

Mr. Berman. As we did the night of the Cal Ripken thing.

The President. Yes, we did.

Mr. Berman. I have to ask you this. It's April 15th. Are your taxes done?