

Statement on the Death of Representative Steven Schiff March 26, 1998

I was deeply saddened to hear that Congressman Steve Schiff has died after a courageous year-long battle with cancer. Hillary and I extend our sympathies to his wife, Marcia, and their two children. Steve's constituents in the First Congressional District of New Mexico and

people across America have lost an effective legislator and an honorable public servant.

His work on behalf of this Nation will long be remembered. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family during this difficult time.

Interview With Tavis Smiley of Black Entertainment Television in Cape Town March 26, 1998

President's Visit to Africa

Mr. Smiley. Mr. President, nice to see you. Thanks for talking to us. Let me start by asking you how you're holding up. I'm having—it's my first time traveling in the White House press pool; I'm tired of trying to keep up with you. You must be tired.

The President. Yes, I have a couple periods during the day still where I get a little tired or jet-lagged. We've been traveling at night a lot. But the trip is so exciting it kind of keeps the adrenalin flowing.

Mr. Smiley. Let me ask you, if I can, Mr. President, to share your impressions of Africa. You at this point have now visited three African countries, three quite diverse African countries. I'm wondering if you can share your impressions; is Africa what you expected it to be upon your arrival?

The President. Yes, it's what I expected it to be, but it's even more interesting, more fascinating than I thought it would be. It's a place that's just brimming with energy and, I think, basic good will on the part of the citizens of the countries that I met. I think it's a place of great opportunity for the United States. I think it's a place that we should be far more concerned about than we have been in the past and a place that can be a good partner for us in dealing with the challenges of this new century we're about to enter.

Mr. Smiley. And to move, if I can, from talking about the continent to the content of some of what you've had to say—and I'm wondering specifically, Mr. President, how you think some

of your remarks are going to play back home, particularly to those outside of the African-American community? You've made some rather provocative statements; many African-Americans have been pleased by those remarks. You said in Ghana that we all came out of Africa; folks were surprised to hear you say that. In Uganda, you said that everyone—that European-Americans, rather, had benefited from the fruits of the slave trade and that we were wrong in that as well. In Rwanda, you said we didn't move fast enough to deal with the genocide happening there. Some provocative statements, again, pleasing the African-American community in large, I think, but how do you think those provocative statements are going to play outside of the black community?

The President. Well, I would hope that they would play well. At least, I hope that they would prompt all my fellow Americans to think. What I said about us all coming out of Africa is, as far as we all know, absolutely accurate. That is, the oldest known species of humanity from all the archaeological and anthropological studies are people who were in Africa. We just—I just read an article about two people walking upright, where they found footprints that are 2 million years old right near where we're doing this interview. So that's just a simple fact.

When I talked about the slave trade, I meant that when I was in Uganda. The Europeans basically organized the slave trade. They yanked Africans out of their lives and turned them into slaves. But Americans bought them, and therefore, we were part of the slave trade. Quite