

thing, because we will all, before long, be thanking our lucky stars that we had the vision to work with people from around the world to set up the international space station in the sky. From it we will explore vast new frontiers, chart unexplored seas, reach a little deeper into the vast final frontier.

In so many ways, your mission here at NASA reflects the spirit of America for every child who's ever tied a cape made of a sheet or a rag around his neck and dreamed of flying, for every mother who ever sang a child to sleep with "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," for every senior citizen who ever stared at the heavens in the wonder of what might be out there. You are the place where dreams are made real, where impossible missions are accomplished by remarkable people.

We have become a great nation in no small measure because our people have always recognized the limitless possibilities of the human spirit. I have every confidence that those of you

who work here at Johnson Space Center will always carry that conviction not only in your minds but in your hearts. When it comes to exploring space, we must never consider any mission impossible. The story of our space program is the story of barriers broken and new worlds uncovered. Let us make sure that is the story of our space program in the 21st century.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:55 p.m. in Building 9. In his remarks, he referred to George W.S. Abbey, Director, Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center; Houston Mayor Lee Patrick Brown; City Councilman Jew Don Boney, Jr.; City Controller Sylvia R. Garcia; Judge Robert A. Eckels, Harris County Commissioners Court; Lt. Col. Curtis L. Brown, Jr., USAF, STS-95 mission commander; and astronauts Chiaki Mukai, Japanese Space Agency, Pedro Duque, European Space Agency, and David A. Wolfe, NASA.

Remarks at the ESPN Townhall Meeting on Race in Houston *April 14, 1998*

[ESPN commentator Bob Ley, who served as moderator, welcomed the President and asked what such a dialog on race and sports could bring to the Nation at large.]

The President. Well, first of all, let me thank you and ESPN for doing this for the second time, and thank our panelists for being willing to put themselves on the line and be honest and open and accountable to the audience.

I'd like to say a couple of things I think we can achieve. First of all, America, rightly or wrongly, is a sports-crazy country and we often see games as a metaphor or a symbol of what we are as a people. So I think by dealing with both the positive things which have happened, in terms of opportunity for people of all races and people getting together and working together, and the continuing challenges in athletics, I think just by doing that we learn more about the rest of the country and what needs to be done.

Beyond that, I think that it's important that people see that in athletics in America, that the rules are fair, that people get their fair

chance, and I would hope, too, that the concern for the lives of the players off the field, off the court, and what they're doing when their athletic careers are over, and whether they still will be full and equal members of society, closing the opportunity gaps that have existed historically between the races in our country—whether there's something we can do about that, because that clearly will have larger implications for the society as a whole.

But all of us, as Americans, I think, should be both proud of how far we've come when we see what racial and ethnic and religious tensions are doing in other parts of the world, and at the same time should be very determined to continue to meet the challenges that still exist, because our country is becoming more and more racially and ethnically diverse. And if we can be one America, celebrating our diversity but knowing what we have in common, then it's the greatest asset I can imagine for us to take into the 21st century. But it's something we really have to work at, as I'm sure all these folks will tell us.

[At this point, Mr. Ley asked former football player and actor Jim Brown for his impression of the condition of race relations in sports since an ESPN program on race 14 months earlier. Mr. Brown said tremendous progress had been made and that white America had provided African-Americans with opportunities that should be taken advantage of economically. Georgetown University basketball coach John Thompson described the need for frank and open discussions about many college athletes' lack of competency outside of sports. Keyshawn Johnson, wide receiver for the New York Jets, stated that during his rookie year in the National Football League, contrary to what he had been told, he found that all players were not treated equally. Carmen Policy, president of the San Francisco 49ers, responded that the youth of the athletes entering professional sports had to be taken into consideration. Mr. Ley then asked about hiring practices in sports, particularly for head coaching positions in the NFL. Mr. Policy said that team owners would hire the best candidate for the job regardless of that person's race, but that the selection process itself was flawed. Mr. Ley then asked Minnesota Vikings head coach Dennis Green how he broke the racial barrier. Mr. Green referred to his accomplishment as jumping a hurdle and said that discussions like this would focus attention on the issue. He pointed out, however, that out of 15 coaching vacancies in the last 3 years, not a single position went to an African-American. Mr. Ley asked the President if a conclusion should be drawn from that statistic.]

The President. It says something. We just have to make sure we know what it says. For example, very often we assume that those numbers are there, there's some—maybe even an illegal practice, which may not be true. But if you go back to what Carmen said, one of the things that I've seen—or go back to what John Thompson said—and you know, Georgetown is my alma mater so I always try to cheer for John and try never to disagree with him. [Laughter] But there's some—let's assume that there is absolutely no conscious racism in any of these decisions. I have been now in an executive position—I've been President for 5½ years nearly; I was Governor of my State for 12 years. I've hired hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people. In every position I've ever held, I've always hired more minorities than my prede-

cessors. When I was Governor, I hired more minorities, appointed more than all my predecessors combined. No one ever accused me of giving anybody anything for which they weren't qualified.

But what I found out was, if that was a goal and you knew it was important, there was a certain network by which—the easy network by which those decisions are made, and you've got to break through the network and change the rules if you want to do it.

Mr. Ley. So the numbers are important then?

The President. Numbers are important. But my reaction was, when Keyshawn's book came out—and you know, I'm a big football fan, I follow this, and I saw him play in college—is, you know, if I were running his team, I'd just want to make as many touchdowns as I could, you know. And what I think you have to do is to kind of—Carmen went around here and he really prepared for this tonight. So I think that's what we need people to do for these coaching positions. We need to think if this is a problem, we want more minority coaches in the NFL, we want more minority coaches in the college ranks, you have to say—and we're making an honest effort to pick the most qualified people, why aren't we producing them?

I'd say there's something wrong with the recruitment system, with the pool, and you've got to rethink that and make a real effort. But my experience, my personal experience is, if you make a real effort there are lots of people out there. Since I believe intelligence and ability are evenly distributed across racial and ethnic groups, if you look at it, you can find it.

[At this point, Mr. Ley asked John Moores, owner of the Major League Baseball San Diego Padres, if he was satisfied with minority representation in administrative positions in baseball. Mr. Moores said he was not and noted that while baseball was the most ethnically diverse sport, well-qualified minority manager candidates had been passed over. Former baseball player and current ESPN baseball analyst Joe Morgan said he believed progress was being made and that equal interview opportunity should be given to all candidates for all types of vacancies. Mr. Ley asked Vince Dooley, athletic director at the University of Georgia, about the continuing predominance of white head coaches in Division I college football, where over half the players were African-American. Mr.

Dooley responded first by commending the President for the race initiative.]

The President. Thank you.

[Mr. Dooley said college football needed more examples like Mr. Thompson, Mr. Green, and Tubby Smith, head coach of the NCAA champion Kentucky Wildcats men's basketball team. St. John's University basketball player Felipe Lopez discussed the benefits of ethnic diversity in sports. Former track star Jackie Joyner-Kersey, administrator of a foundation in East St. Louis, IL, helping youth, discussed the need for action to follow up on the dialog, in order to provide more examples for minority youth and to combat the subtle racism in business networking that kept the upper strata exclusive. After a commercial break, Mr. Ley asked Mr. Johnson about racial stereotyping by professional athletes. Mr. Johnson replied that the media created stereotypes in their coverage but management and coaching often reinforced them. At this point, Mr. Ley called on audience member Michael Waters, a high school student body president, who asked Mr. Brown if the stereotype of blacks being more athletically adept than whites was a form of discrimination against whites. Mr. Brown dismissed the questions of stereotyping as missing the point of the discussion and then reiterated his emphasis on economics, saying that African-American coaches and athletes making millions of dollars in salaries should hire black lawyers, agents, and managers exclusively. Mr. Johnson said that his attorney and investment advisers were African-American, but were hired for their skills rather than their race. Ms. Joyner-Kersey added that in her foundation she tried to give opportunities to those who might not get them otherwise. Mr. Thompson responded that he would not terminate his relationships with whites who had helped him achieve his success, and that society caused individuals to think in such racially limited terms. He then stated that blacks didn't want to feel they had to be perfect to get the job, but only wanted the same opportunity to try. Mr. Dooley commented that he paid more attention to a candidate's history of success than to an interview. Mr. Ley then asked the President for his views.]

The President. Well, first of all, I appreciate the honesty of the interchange and that shows basically the—actually the progress that's been

made on this issue in athletics. Why? Because I basically—I agree with the point Jim Brown made, but I respect what John Thompson said. That is, if you have personal experiences with people who have helped you to achieve their goals, even if they're of different races, and you're not going to turn around and abandon your friends and abandon people who are doing a good job for you. And that's good.

The point Jim is making, however, is a different one, and I'd just like to sort of—because when we get to the last section, there's another issue I want us to get to, which is related to this—but what he's pointing out, there's still a huge opportunity gap in our society by race in terms of economic standing. That's the only point he was making—and that if we want a stable society, we want large middle classes among African-Americans, large middle classes among Hispanic-Americans, large middle classes among Asian-American immigrants—first generation immigrants. That's the point Jim's making. And that if a group, a certain group within the African-American community, let's say, has amassed this wealth and then has to reinvest it, to the extent that they can also help to create this larger middle class while helping themselves and doing something, that's a good thing.

I think you can say that and still respect John's decision, which I think we all do, and respect any other individual decisions that would cross racial lines. But the effort to create a middle class, people whose names will never be in the newspaper but who helped to build a big, stable society, I think that's a very important goal for us here.

Mr. Ley. Do you think athletes have a special responsibility to have a social conscience to act, to be involved in the communities, or is that unfair?

The President. No, I don't think it's unfair. I think—first of all, I think anybody with a special gift has a special responsibility. And if you've got a special gift, whatever the gift is—if you're a great singer, if you're great at making money, if you're a brilliant scientist—I think if you have a special gift, if God gave you something that other people don't normally have, and no matter how hard they work they can't get there, then you owe more back. That's what I believe. So, yes, I believe that.

[After a commercial break, Mr. Ley asked Mr. Green about access to the power structure elite

in the NFL. Mr. Green responded that there needed to be equal access and opportunity for ownership of teams. Mr. Brown suggested that acquiring ownership was simply a matter of amassing enough money, and that African-Americans needed to pool their economic clout to attain the power ownership provides. Mr. Thompson agreed, saying that the lack of strong relationships between financial institutions and the African-American community undermined participation at the ownership level. Ms. Joyner-Kersee noted that companies like Nike and sports celebrities Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods, who endorsed Nike products, used their wealth and fame to give back to the community. Mr. Brown reiterated his position, suggesting that African-Americans pool their resources to form a capital base. Mr. Ley then took a question from audience member Fernando Tamayo, a senior at Washington High School, who pointed out that Hispanic-Americans had not yet been mentioned, although they were the fastest growing minority in America. Mr. Lopez agreed and asserted that the more the Hispanic community worked together, the more opportunity they would get.]

The President. Let me make one observation about this. Hispanic-Americans are the fastest growing ethnic group in our country. Historically, they have done very well in America through an enormous work ethic and an enormous commitment to family.

There was a wonderful movie a couple of years ago with Edward James Olmos and a number of other Hispanic actors and actresses called “*Mi Familia*.” It was a wonderful movie; some of you may have seen it. But we have a problem today that athletics could play a role in solving with the Hispanic community, and I hope we’ll get into this a little more in the last section—that is, what about all the athletes whose names you never know, who play in junior high or high school or college or even in the pros? And what about the rest of their lives? I hope we can talk about that a little bit before we leave.

But last year, for the first time in modern history, the graduation rates from high school of African-Americans and white Americans were virtually identical—the first time ever. The graduation rates of Hispanics is much lower; the dropout rate is higher. Part of that is because there has been a heritage in Hispanic immigrant

families of kids dropping out of school and going to work to support the family.

The problem is, today if you don’t have a high school diploma and a couple years of college, it’s hard to get a job where your income grows over time. So one of the things that I’m hoping is that we’ll have more Hispanic young people in athletic programs and at least in high school; that will get more coaches to convince them and their brothers and sisters to stay in high school and hopefully go on to college. Because America is not going to function very well if we have a Hispanic dropout rate that’s 20 percent higher than the rest of society.

[Mr. Lopez agreed, saying that although basketball got him into college, he wanted his education to make him more than just an athlete and he hoped to use his education and success in ways that would give back to his community. Audience member Martin Garcia, a senior at Jesse H. Jones Senior High School, asked Mr. Moores why Little League baseball was not promoted in the inner cities. Mr. Moores responded that it was a good question and that the country would benefit from more support at that level. Mr. Morgan agreed and said that resources in the United States were not adequately tapped, as in foreign countries, for recruitment of baseball players. He noted the success of basketball and its outreach programs for inner-city youth and urged baseball to do the same.]

The President. I just wanted to follow up on something Joe said and something that the questioner said because he made a slightly different point. You know, we had one of the best World Series last year we’ve had in a month of Sundays. I mean, everybody loved the World Series—it goes down to the last game, at the end of the game. And everybody was thrilled with the story of the young Cuban pitcher and how his mother finally got out of Cuba to come watch him pitch. And he’s saying, “But I’ve got a brother at home who’s an even better pitcher than I am.” And as strained as our relationships with Cuba are, it’s virtually more likely that you can be a Cuban player in Major League baseball than a Cuban-American from Miami or New Jersey.

And so it’s not just African-Americans. You’ve got all these Hispanic-Americans here who are in inner cities. And we now have got some very exciting Asian—Japanese players in Major League baseball. But America is full of Asian

immigrants. And, the baseball folks who are here, I really think that we haven't answered it fully. The truth is that there are tens of thousands of kids in every State in this country who are not in any kind of athletic program unless they're in a football or basketball program.

Now, the mayor here and the former mayor, Mr. Lanier, who is also here, he started a program with thousands of inner-city kids in soccer and golf programs. And it may be that—I'm just saying that maybe one specific thing that could come out of this meeting is if we could actually bring baseball back to kids that aren't in the football or basketball programs, it might be a great gift to the future.

[After a commercial break, Mr. Johnson asked those on the panel in administrative or ownership positions why athletes had difficulty getting positions with the organizations after their playing days were over. He also asked if NFL owners would give an African-American-owned franchise equal opportunity. Mr. Policy responded that the Nation was awakening to problems in race relations, including inequities in the sports business, and was taking steps to correct them. Audience member Dennis S. Brown said that he recalled hearing a pro quarterback state that black and white players did not shower together, and he asked Mr. Johnson to respond. Mr. Johnson replied that his experience was that, for the most part, everybody mingled in the locker room and any racial comments there were made jokingly and understood that way as well.]

Mr. Ley. All right, we were at this point supposed to be wrapping things up, but the President has graciously agreed to spend a little bit more time with us this evening, so we'll have a chance to ask some more and answer some more questions.

The President. That little boy, you'd better ask him, that young man——

Mr. Ley. We're going there, sir.

[Jesse, a 13-year-old boy who introduced himself as half Mexican-American and half Irish, asked Mr. Morgan if he ever discouraged minority youths from focusing on professional sports as a goal and encouraged them to concentrate instead on school. Mr. Morgan answered that he felt it was good to encourage a mix of the two, that succeeding in both areas was not impossible. Mr. Thompson asserted that if opportunity was provided, people would be educated, but that

too many young people did not see opportunity ahead and therefore did not work hard in school. Audience member Tiffany Singleton, a senior at a high school in Houston, asked Ms. Joyner-Kersee if she felt doubly obligated to carry expectations as both a woman and an African-American. Ms. Joyner-Kersee said she put no added pressure on herself but hoped her achievements inspired others. Audience member Matt Sharp, a junior at Elks Lake High School, then asked the President if it was fair for minority athletes who were only average students and whose SAT's were low to get scholarships over white students who were not athletes but excelled academically.]

The President. Let me answer the question. I had a problem in California when they voted—and California has been very good to me, but the people and I disagree with these things—[laughter]. California voted to repeal their affirmative action admissions policy. And I made the argument that they would give a minority athlete a scholarship under the new system because of his or her athletic ability and have another member of a minority group who had higher grades and higher SAT scores, but no athletic ability, couldn't get a scholarship. So it wasn't just a race issue.

Let me say what I think about that. First of all, I think colleges and universities have a right to have athletic programs and they have to recruit if they want to have them. The real issue is we should have a system in America, since we now know that it is necessary to have at least 2 years of education after high school if you want to have even a good job with a growing income for younger people, and it's better—we have a vested interest of the Nation in seeing that every young person like you gets to go to college. What I've tried to do is make sure that money would never be an obstacle to anyone, and that's really ultimately the way to resolve that. Every college and university has to make up its mind; do they want to have an athletic program; then they'll want to compete for the best athletes—they're going to do that. But it should never, ever be at the expense of providing academic opportunities to people who are qualified.

Let me just say, since I've been in office, we passed a HOPE scholarship, which gives everybody a \$1,500 tax credit for the first 2 years of college, tuition and tax credits for junior and

senior year and graduate school. We've got more Pell grants, more work-study positions, more national service positions—we've got more opportunity. And, I think—I'll say this—for me, that's the answer. I don't think—otherwise, a college simply can't have an athletic program or recruit its athletes.

My view is they ought to be able to recruit athletes, but they ought to give enough scholarships so that every young, gifted person who can get admitted to the school should be able to go without regard to the money that they or their families have. That's what I believe.

[After a commercial break, Mr. Thompson responded to Matt's question, saying that students from wealthy families and children of alumni also received special preference from universities. Mr. Ley then asked the President to summarize his thoughts on the meeting.]

The President. Well, I feel better about my country than I did before we started. And I think all of you do, don't you? *[Applause]*

I want to applaud the panelists for their candor and their honesty. I want to thank the members of the audience for the questions that were asked.

I want to say just two things. Number one, I think it's obvious that athletics in a way is leading America toward a more harmonious,

united society, but we still have work to do—in the coaching ranks and the management and the scouting and all of that. We ought to keep working on it.

The second thing I'd like to say is, I hope that everybody who's in an athletic program also learns good life skills to make good choices, good decisions; can take something out of the teamwork, the rules of things that you get from being in athletics so that if they play in high school but not in college that they're still better off and they're better citizens.

The same thing if they play in college, not in pros. The same thing when they finish their pro career. We didn't talk much about that tonight, but I think that's important—that the lessons learned from athletics carry over into good citizenship, including attitudes about people of different races. If that happens, we're going to be a lot better off.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7 p.m. in the Cullen Theater at Wortham Theater Center. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Lee Patrick Brown and former Mayor Bob Lanier of Houston. The townhall meeting was broadcast live on the ESPN cable network as "Sports and Race: Running in Place?" The meeting was part of "One America: The President's Initiative on Race."

Exchange With Reporters on Tornado Damage in the Pratt City Neighborhood of Birmingham, Alabama April 15, 1998

Q. Mr. President, now that you've seen it firsthand, what do you think?

The President. It's horrible. But I'm glad so many people lived, like these people here. They were in the—they got warning, so they went in the bathroom and lay down. They have two 8-year-old twins. They had their children with them. So they're all unhurt.

We've just got to make sure that they get—they have no livelihood here. And the important thing is that we move this assistance as quickly as we can to them.

Q. What assistance are you bringing today?

The President. We have all kinds of personal assistance, and we're also going to try to help

them with the cleanup so they can get back to normal and also hire some people around here, while they're otherwise idle, to be part of the cleanup.

Q. What are you trying to say to these people? It's got to be so difficult to talk to people—

The President. I think the most important thing is that they—right now a lot of them are still almost in shock, but they're beginning to think—it's been a few days now—they're beginning to think about how they're going to live. And the important thing is that we work out all the practical problems of their lives right now—make sure everybody has got a place to