

Clinton says America must 'clean house'

In an Austin, Texas speech on Oct. 16, President Clinton said that racism "is tearing at the heart of America," focused on the economic disparity, and praised the Million Man March; unfortunately, he felt compelled to attack Minister Louis Farrakan, saying: "One million men are right to be standing up for personal responsibility, but 1 million men do not make right one man's message of malice and division. No good house was ever built on a bad foundation. Nothing good ever came of hate." Other excerpts from the speech follow.

Today we face a choice. One way leads to further separation and bitterness and more lost futures. The other way, the path of courage and wisdom, leads to unity, to reconciliation, to a rich opportunity for all Americans to make the most of the lives God gave them. This moment in which the racial divide is so clearly out in the open need not be a setback for us. It presents us with a great opportunity, and we dare not let it pass us by.

In the past, when we've had the courage to face the truth about our failure to live up to our own best ideals, we've grown stronger, moved forward, and restored proud American optimism. At such turning points, America moved to preserve the Union and abolish slavery, to embrace women's suffrage, to guarantee basic legal rights to America without regard to race, under the leadership of President Johnson. . . .

Abraham Lincoln reminded us that a house divided against itself cannot stand. When divisions have threatened to bring our house down, somehow we have always moved together to shore it up. My fellow Americans, our house is the greatest democracy in all human history. And with all its racial and ethnic diversity, it has beaten the odds of human history. But we know that divisions remain and we still have work to do. . . .

White America must understand and acknowledge the roots of black pain. It began with unequal treatment first in law and later in fact. African-Americans indeed have lived too long with a justice system that in too many cases has been and continues to be less than just. The record of abuses extends from lynchings and trumped-up charges to false arrests and police brutality. . . .

Still today, too many of our police officers play by the rules of the "bad old days." It is beyond wrong when law-abiding black parents have to tell their law-abiding children to fear the police whose salaries are paid by their own taxes.

And blacks are right to think something is terribly wrong when African-American men are many times more likely to be victims of homicide than any other group in this country, when there are more African-American men in our correction system than in our colleges, when almost one in three African-American men in their 20s are either in jail, on parole, or otherwise under the supervision of the criminal justice system—nearly one in three. . . .

And there is still unacceptable economic disparity between blacks and whites. It is so fashionable to talk today about African-Americans as if they had been some sort of protected class. Many whites think blacks are getting more than their fair share in terms of jobs and promotions. That is not true. That is not true.

The truth is that African-Americans still make on average about 60% of what white people do and more than half of African-American children live in poverty. And at the very time our young Americans need access to college more than ever before, black college enrollment is dropping in America. . . .

Imagine how you would feel if you were a young parent in your 20s with a young child, living in a housing project, working somewhere for \$5 an hour with no health insurance, passing every day people on the street, selling drugs, making 100 times what you make. Those people are the real heroes of America today. . . .

Finally, both sides seem to fear deep down inside that they'll never quite be able to see each other as more than enemy faces, all of whom carry at least a sliver of bigotry in their hearts. Differences of opinion rooted in different experiences are healthy, indeed essential for democracies, but differences so great and so rooted in race threaten to divide the house Mr. Lincoln gave his life to save. As Dr. King said, "We must learn to live together as brothers or we will perish as fools."

Recognizing one another's real grievances is only the first step. We must all take responsibility for ourselves, our conduct and our attitudes. America, we must clean our house of racism. . . .

White racism may be black people's burden, but it's white people's problem. We must clean our house.

To our black citizens, I honor . . . hundreds of thousands of men in Washington today committed to atonement and to personal responsibility. . . . I call upon you to build on this effort to share equally in the promise of America. But to do that, your house, too, must be cleaned of racism.

Long before we were so diverse, our nation's motto was "*E pluribus unum*"—"Out of many, we are one." We must be one as neighbors, as fellow citizens, not separate camps, but families—white, black, Latino, all of us, no matter how different, who share basic American values and are willing to live by them. . . .

Here in 1995, on the edge of the 21st century, we dare not tolerate the existence of two Americas. . . .