

APPEAL OF CONSCIENCE FOUNDATION

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It is a pleasure to be with you today. Being selected as the recipient of your Appeal of Conscience award is a great honor. I also take it as a direct challenge from all of you -- a challenge to continue my commitment to some pretty important American institutions -- our schools, our workplace and our families.

If that is your charge -- and I believe it is -- then there is much work to do.

To start, we need to find a focus. It is time to reacquaint ourselves with America's single strongest advantage ... that is our diversity.

Former Citicorp chairman Walter B. Wriston writes about diversity as a national treasure. The United States, he says, "is the only country in the world that renews itself every day. The world is America's talent pool."

We are a productive melting pot. But today we need to find more ways to work together as one.

You might recall Aesop's tale of a quarrelsome family, and how a father uses sticks to teach the value of unity.

In the fable, the father asks his sons to tie a number of sticks together in a bundle. Then one after the other each boy is asked to break that bundle. They cannot.

After untying the sticks, the father gives every son just one to break. As you would expect, each stick snaps easily.

The father's lesson is our lesson. He says: "My sons, as long as you remain united, you are a match for all your enemies; but differ and separate, and you are undone."

Are we doing all we can to hold together our diversities? We need to ask that question.

Like the brothers in Aesop's story, sometimes we forget that by working together we can all be stronger.

This year, racial strife has re-emerged as a national concern.

In May, over a thousand Latinos in Washington D.C. rose up to avenge the police shooting of a young immigrant.

In August, Crown Heights was the scene of rock and bottle throwing between African Americans and Jews. The spark -- an incident where a black youth dies under the wheel of a car.

Despite these cases, America's mix of people remains at the core of our nation's best hopes.

Many different skills, talents, and ideas built this country. These same qualities can make the difference again.

What we need though is to ensure that our diversity is a strength-- and that all parts of our society work together and succeed together.

This, of course, will not be achieved without real effort. As Americans we must learn to ask as much of ourselves as we do of others.

As one writer (Charles Lane writing for New Republic magazine) recently put it: Unity can only come about in America by treating people as "individuals who have responsibilities as well as rights."

We can do this. But we will need to return to our roots -- foundations which have never failed us.

For myself, I am grateful for three influences in my early life. From my mother, I discovered the value of education. From my father, I learned about hard work. From a religious belief, I found self worth -- the value of individual initiative.

Are these influences present today? Statistics suggest they are not. The very make up of our workforce often requires both parents to be out of the home. And finding extra time to nurture children is more challenging now than ever before.

Minority Americans face their own battles. The National Center for Health Statistics recently reported that very soon 60 percent of all African American children in America will be born out of wedlock. It's difficult to teach family values under such circumstances.

Despite all this, we must still find ways to build character in today's children. The good news is that we can succeed.

In Rochester, we are proud of our efforts to upgrade the quality of education and to help more students remain in school. Our elementary grade students are performing at higher standards. Early intervention by parents and teachers are preparing these youngsters for all types of learning.

In the high schools, more students are taking scholastic aptitude tests and scoring higher. These kids are learning to try without fear of failure.

We have done this by bringing parents, the schools, community agencies and businesses together. The next challenge will be for educators to grapple with problems well beyond the school. Children who are hungry, sick, homeless or abused can not learn. We must solve these problems as well, so that all children can reach their highest potential.

We have no choice but to confront these issues. Changing demographics tell us an integrated workforce will be needed in the new global marketplace. Over the next ten years, the greatest growth in the job market is expected to come from women, minorities and immigrants. By the year 2000, African Americans and Hispanics are expected to account for 26\percent of the U.S. population. Their purchasing power alone will exceed one trillion dollars.

We must bring every American into the process. While some have argued that the homogeneity model is the better way -- I disagree. Free competition and the free flow of ideas still provide the key ingredients for innovation and progress.

And the key is quality education.

By focusing on education, we can provide every child with a sense of the possibilities, a sense of self worth -- and a desire to work hard and take part. And in the end, we will end up with a workforce that is not only diverse but truly successful.

I am encouraged about our future. I have the proof right here.
(Hold up drawing)

This is a coloring assignment by seven year old Linda Phommanirat. (Pom-i-lat)

She is a Laotian first grader in one of Rochester's city schools. Linda is part of the LEAP program, a special class teaching children from all over the world how to learn in American classrooms.

Linda gets a lot of support. Her mother works until 2\ a.m. each morning -- but by six she is up giving her daughter a hot breakfast and plenty of advice.

In class, Linda learns from a teacher named Christina Bunnell. Christina came to the U.S. from Mexico, hoping to start a new life of her own, as well.

All these forces are coming together in a single classroom. The result is just one more step towards a better America.

Linda put it best herself: "I want to work hard and please my parents."

Our diversity can be our richest blessing. It can make our future.

We just need to encourage every American to make their individual effort to bring us all together.