

TEXT OF SPEECH GIVEN BY BILL RUSSELL-PLAYER COACH OF BOSTON CELTICS, AT THE
FREEDOM GRADUATION CEREMONIES, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 22, 1966

THE SITUATION WE FIND OURSELVES IN TONIGHT REMINDS ME OF A STORY I ONCE HEARD, OF A CIRCUS. THE STORY GOES THAT A CIRCUS CAME TO TOWN AND BECAUSE THERE WAS NO ROOM INSIDE THE CITY FOR SETTING UP ITS TENT AND OTHER EQUIPMENT IT SET UP ON THE VERY OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN. WHILE THE CIRCUS WAS STILL IN THE PROCESS OF GETTING ITSELF TOGETHER SOMEONE DISCOVERED A FIRE ON THE CIRCUS GROUND. THEY REALIZED THAT HELP HAD TO BE OBTAINED FROM THE CITY OR ELSE THE FIRE WOULD DESTROY THE CIRCUS AND SPREAD TO THE CITY. AS THEY LOOKED AROUND FOR SOMEONE TO SEND TO THE CITY THE ONLY ONE PREPARED TO GO TO THE TOWN WAS A CLOWN. HE WAS THEREFORE SENT TO BRING BACK THE NECESSARY HELP FROM THE CITY. HE RAN TO THE CITY, GATHERED THE CITIZENS AROUND HIM AND BEGAN TO TELL ABOUT THE FIRE AT THE CIRCUS AND HE TOLD HOW UNLESS HELP ARRIVED IMMEDIATELY THE FIRE WOULD CONSUME THE CIRCUS AND SPREAD TO THE TOWN. THE CLOWN HOWEVER WAS IN FULL DRESS AND BECAUSE PEOPLE ARE ACCUSTOMED TO LAUGHING AT CLOWNS AND BEING ENTERTAINED BY THEM THEY DID NOT TAKE THE CLOWN, OR HIS STORY SERIOUSLY. THE MORE HE TALKED, BEGGED. OR CRIED, THE MORE THEY LAUGHED AND ENJOYED THIS CLOWN. HE WARNED THEM THAT UNLESS THEY SENT HELP IMMEDIATELY THEIR CITY WOULD ALSO BURN DOWN. BUT HE WAS A CLOWN AND WHILE THE FIRE RAGED, THEY LAUGHED.

I REMEMBER A MAN WHO IN 1935 WENT BEFORE THE WORLD AND BEGGED AND PLEADED FOR ASSISTANCE IN PUTTING OUT A FIRE, WHICH IF NOT CHECKED WOULD SPREAD TO THE REST OF THE WORLD. THE MAN WAS HAILE SELASSIE, EMPEROR OF ETHIOPIA. THE WORLD BEFORE WHICH HE SPOKE WAS THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS THAT HAD BEEN ORGANIZED FOR THE SPECIFIC PURPOSE OF KEEPING WORLD PEACE.

THE RECEPTION WHICH HE RECEIVED BEFORE THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS WAS THE SAME TYPE OF RECEPTION THAT THE CLOWN RECEIVED IN THE TOWN. THEY LAUGHED AT HIM AND PAID NO ATTENTION AND THE FIRE SWEEPED EUROPE. THE NATIONS THAT LAUGHED THE LOUDEST SUFFERED THE MOST.

THERE ARE SMALL FIRES ALL OVER THE UNITED STATES AND THERE'S A FIRE HERE IN ROXBURY AND NOBODY IS LISTENING, AND THE FIRE THAT CONSUMES ROXBURY WILL ALSO CONSUME BOSTON.

A FEW WEEKS AGO I WAS INVITED TO WASHINGTON BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES TO TAKE PART IN A CONFERENCE ENTITLED "TO FULFILL THESE RIGHT" AND I HAD HOPED SOMEONE WOULD SEE THE FIRE RAGING, BUT I WAS HOPING AGAINST HOPE. I WAS HOME TWO DAYS AND I RECEIVED ANOTHER INVITATION FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES TO COME TO THE WHITE HOUSE FOR A RECEPTION IN HONOR OF THE "PRESIDENTIAL SCHOLARS". THERE WERE 121 YOUNG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS PICKED FROM 50 STATES OF THE UNITED STATES AND PUERTO RICO. OUT OF THIS NUMBER 6 WERE NEGRO AND I WAS PROUD THAT ONE OF THEM WAS A NEGRO FROM BRIGHTON, CRAIG YORKE. I WAS ALSO A LITTLE DISAPPOINTED THAT NONE OF THEM CAME FROM ROXBURY, EVEN THOUGH THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN EXPECTING A GREAT DEAL-NOT BECAUSE THE STUDENTS AREN'T INTELLIGENT ENOUGH, BUT BECAUSE THE SCHOOLS IN ROXBURY STUNT THEIR INTELLECTUAL GROWTH. A WEEK AFTER THAT THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES AGAIN SPOKE TO ME AND TO OTHER PEOPLE IN AMERICA, PARTICULARLY THE CITIZENS OF BOSTON, WHEN HE NAMED 10 OF THE POOREST SECTIONS IN THE COUNTRY. ROXBURY WAS ONE OF THE 10.

LATELY WE HAVE HEARD A GREAT DEAL ABOUT THE "NEW BOSTON": THE PRUDENTIAL CENTER: THE NEW GOVERNMENT CENTER: TURNPIKE EXTENSION ETC. BUT IT SEEMS THAT AS PART OF A CONTINUING PATTERN THE NEGRO IN BOSTON IS BEING SYSTEMATICALLY ELIMINATED FROM THE MAINSTREAM OF THE ECONOMY. DEMANDS ARE MADE OF THE CITIZENS OF ROXBURY TO BE GOOD CITIZENS, CIVIC MINDED CITIZENS THAT ARE PROUD OF THEIR CITY, BUT THEY ARE NOT TREATED AS CITIZENS OF OUR CITY. WHERE IS THE NEGRO'S "NEW BOSTON"?

WE HAVE BEEN INSULTED BY CERTAIN MEMBERS OF THE CITY GOVERNMENT BUT WE ARE NOT EXPECTED TO REACT. TO EXPECT THIS IS

ASKING TOO MUCH EVEN OF THE PEOPLE OF ROXBURY FOR MANY REASONS, ONE OF WHICH IS IF THEY USE SOME PEOPLE IN ROXBURY THIS YEAR FOR WHIPPING BOYS, WHO WILL THEY USE FOR WHIPPING BOYS NEXT YEAR, OR THE YEAR AFTER THAT? THE FIRE WILL SPREAD. I ASK MYSELF WHERE ARE THE OTHER VOICES CRYING OUT FOR CHANGE? EVERY DELAPIDATED, ANTIQUATED, RAT-INFESTED FIRE TRAP OF A SCHOOL IN ROXBURY HAS ITS COUNTERPART IN SOUTH BOSTON, CHARLESTOWN, EAST BOSTON. I WOULD ADVISE ALL CITIZENS OF BOSTON TO TAKE A LONG, HARD LOOK AT ALL THE SCHOOLS IN BOSTON.

WE ARE HERE IN A CHURCH TONIGHT BECAUSE WE COULDN'T BE IN A SCHOOL. WHY? OUR 3rd SENATOR FROM MASSACHUSETTS, MR. ROBERT KENNEDY, JUST FINISHED A TOUR OF AFRICA WHICH INCLUDED SOUTH AFRICA. SOUTH AFRICA IS A COUNTRY WHICH DOESN'T EVEN PRETEND TO BE AS DEMOCRATIC AS THIS COUNTRY. HE WAS ABLE TO GO TO SOUTH AFRICA, SPEAK IN NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES AND THEY KNEW WHAT HE WAS GOING TO TALK ABOUT. BUT THE CITIZENS OF ROXBURY ARE NOT PERMITTED TO USE ONE OF THESE PREVIOUSLY DESCRIBED SCHOOLS TO HONOR STUDENTS WITHIN THEIR COMMUNITY.

IN SOUTH AFRICA THE SENATOR FROM NEW YORK SPOKE ABOUT THE FIRES THAT WERE SWEEPING THE CONTINENT OF AFRICA BUT WERE BEING IGNORED BY THE UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA. 2 YEARS AGO THE GOV. OF ALABAMA, GEORGE WALLACE, CAME TO HARVARD TO SPEAK AND SHOWED THAT HE WAS IGNORING THE FIRES SWEEPING HIS HOME STATE. AND MONDAY NIGHT THE BOSTON SCHOOL COMMITTEE SHOWED THAT ^{IT TOO,} JUST AS SOUTH AFRICA AND ALABAMA, REFUSED TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE FIRE WITHIN ITS MIDST BY DENYING THE CITIZENS OF ROXBURY A TAX SUPPORTED PUBLIC SCHOOL AS A PLACE IN WHICH THEY COULD HONOR THEIR YOUNG PEOPLE. WHEN CITIZENS OF ROXBURY ARE TREATED LIKE THIS, IT REMINDS THEM THAT THEY ARE MERELY TOLERATED-BY A WHITE MAJORITY-EVEN IN THEIR OWN COMMUNITY.

I THINK THAT WE THE CITIZENS OF BOSTON HAVE PLACED THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE IN A VERY UNFORTUNATE AND UNFAIR POSITION. THEY MUST RUN A SCHOOL SYSTEM WHICH ONCE WAS ACKNOWLEDGED AS THE BEST IN THE COUNTRY,

BUT NOW FACES ALL THE PROBLEMS THAT PLAGUE URBAN CENTERS OF THE COUNTRY, SUCH AS OVERCROWDED SCHOOLS, INADEQUATE FINANCING, RACIAL IMBALANCE AND SUBURBAN COMPETITION. NONE OF THESE PROBLEMS, HOWEVER, IS THEIR MAJOR PROBLEM. THEIR MAJOR PROBLEM IS THE NECESSITY OF CAMPAIGNING FOR RE-ELECTION EVERY TWO YEARS. THEY SPEND AS MUCH TIME CAMPAIGNING FOR RE-ELECTION AS ADMINISTERING THE SCHOOL SYSTEM. DR. JAMES CONANT, FORMER PRESIDENT OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY AND ONE OF THE MOST WIDELY RESPECTED EDUCATORS IN AMERICA CONTENDS THAT NO CITY OF OVER 200,000 POPULATION SHOULD EVER HAVE AN ELECTED SCHOOL COMMITTEE. BOSTON HAS A POPULATION OF 650,000. I UNDERSTAND THAT A BILL HAS BEEN SUBMITTED TO THE LEGISLATURE TO MAKE THE SCHOOL COMMITTEE APPOINTIVE BY THE MAYOR FROM AMONG A LIST OF APPLICANTS SUBMITTED BY A BLUE RIBBON PANEL OF EDUCATORS.

BUT THE SCHOOLS ARE NOT OUR ONLY PROBLEM AND THE PROBLEMS ARE NOT JUST IN ROXBURY. THEY ARE ALL OVER THE CITY AND THE STATE. I THINK THE BIGGEST PROBLEM LIES IN ECONOMICS. I THINK THAT THE BIG BUSINESS LEADERS WHO CONTROL THE ECONOMY OF THE CITY, THE STATE AND THE NATION HAVE LED IN MANY WAYS BUT ARE NOT LEADING IN THIS FIGHT. THIS FIGHT IS AN AMERICAN DILEMMA. NOONE CAN CALL IT A NEGRO PROBLEM OR A WHITE PROBLEM ANYMORE. IT IS NOT AS CONVENIENT AS THAT. IT IS AN AMERICAN PROBLEM. THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY WILL HAVE TO STEP FORWARD AND BE WILLING TO EXPOSE THEMSELVES BECAUSE OF THE GREAT AMOUNT OF RESPONSIBILITY THEY HAVE TO THE CITY, THE STATE AND THE NATION.

BECAUSE OF THE LACK OF REAL COMMUNICATION, A POLLUTED ATMOSPHERE HANGS OVER OUR CITIES, AN ATMOSPHERE OF HATE, DISTRUST AND IGNORANCE, A COMPLETE LACK OF KNOWLEDGE OF EACH OTHER. I DO NOT SAY THAT WE HAVE TO LOVE EACH OTHER, BUT WE MUST TRY TO UNDERSTAND AND RESPECT EACH OTHER.

AS YOU KNOW, I LIKE TO THINK OF MYSELF AS AN INDIVIDUALIST WHO FIRMLY BELIEVES IN THE FREE ENTERPRISE SYSTEM. BUT IF THE

RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS COMMUNITY DOES NOT REACT TO THIS CALL TO ARMS THEN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT MUST CONTINUALLY STRIVE TO FILL THE VACUUM. BY TRYING TO DO THIS THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT BECOMES LARGER AND MORE CLUMSY, AND THERE IS A CRY ALL OVER THE NATION BY BUSINESS LEADERS ABOUT FEDERAL INTERFERENCE AND BIG GOVERNMENT.

WHEN BIG BUSINESS ACCEPTS ITS RESPONSIBILITY IT CAN DO THE JOB MUCH MORE EFFICIENTLY, MORE QUICKLY AND WITH A MUCH MORE WHOLESOME ATMOSPHERE THAN THE GOVERNMENT CAN. SO I CALL ON THOSE CAPTAINS OF INDUSTRY TO STEP FORWARD AND BE COUNTED.

WHEN ROBERT KENNEDY WAS ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES HE SAID THAT IN 40 YEARS HE THOUGHT THAT A NEGRO COULD BE ELECTED PRESIDENT. BUT WHEN THE ATMOSPHERE IS AS IT IS TODAY, THIS WONT HAPPEN FOR 400 YEARS.

IS THERE ANYONE OF YOU YOUNG PEOPLE HERE TONIGHT WHO WANTS TO BE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES? IS THERE ANYONE WHO WANTS TO BE SECRETARY OF STATE OF THE UNITED STATES? WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED NATIONS? WHY NOT?

REMEMBER, YOU CAN DO ANYTHING YOU WANT TO DO, IF YOU WANT TO DO IT BADLY ENOUGH.