

Dr. Bob Frankin
July 23, 2004

Introduction: We are really proud to have for our prayer breakfast, one that is not a stranger to this kind of setting. I would imagine that many of you know him. And I have four quick things I want to tell you about him so that you can be prepared to receive his message this morning. He is another Chicagoian. He is from Chicago by way of Grenada in Mississippi. And he is also another Moorehouse man. You know, Emmett was a Moorehouse man. 1975 was really a good year for him. Not only did he graduate from Moorehouse but he was ordained to preach the gospel that year. The third thing is that he is, in addition to the president of Moorehouse he's also has his Master's in Deity Work from the University of Chicago. He served on the faculty of at least four institutions including his Alma matta, University of Chicago and Harvard and some other schools of divinity, and he's also published. If you've not received any of his books, try to figure out some way to get them. He has three books and all three of them are really good publications. You see him after, he might be able to tell you after the Caucus is over. Speaking is Dr. Robert Michael Franklin, who is the President and distinguished Professor of Social Studies at Emerson University in Atlanta. We're proud that he was able to take time and come and be with us this morning. So would you receive him in a warm Louisiana welcome, by giving him applause?

Speaker: Thank you very much. I want to thank Raymond for that very generous introduction and say what a privilege it is for me to join this conversation and be in the presence of so many pioneers in African American philanthropy, so many outstanding executives, founders of non-profit organizations and community development corporation. So many women and men who are committed to serving and uplifting humanity, inspired by faith and it is a blessing for me to be here, to see so many old friends and colleagues who have really plowed this ground for a long time. And to see now the harvest that comes forth from diligent labor, labor back in the day when this work was not as popular as it has been. And one might argue that it is, even now fading into obscurity relative to other enterprises. And so you're gathering to focus on the art and the practice of voluntary giving and action to serve the common good. One common definition of philanthropy is the comment of voluntary action and giving to serve the common good is exceedingly important at this moment in history.

I would get in trouble if I did the usual preacher thing and started trying to, you know, acknowledge everybody that I recognize and know in the room. This isn't that kind of room because I recognize over 30 to 40 percent of the folks in this room so, I can't do that and my friends will

understand why that is not possible. It is so good to see each of you all. I do want to acknowledge this distinguished platform and the extraordinary leadership that has been provided by each of the persons here. And a special word of thanks to Carol Blackman and Vetta Hatten for the leadership of the Foundation for the Mid-South for making possible my presence.

I regret deeply that I was not able to be present yesterday. I left the house early yesterday morning, leaving Atlanta and making my way to through the crowds gathering in the Atlanta airport. As thousands were arriving for the Mega Fest, Bishop TB James, gathering a nation of people in Atlanta for these three days. And so I was conscious of enormous anticipation and excitement coming into Atlanta as I was leaving, or at least trying to leave, because they then postponed my flight for an hour and then another hour and you know how the game goes. They keep pushing it back and saying we think we'll be able to leave and finally they told us in fact it was not due to weather but rather due to mechanical difficulty, the PA system in the plane was broken, they tried to repair it and were unable and decided it could not fly without the system working. And so, finally at 4:45 I boarded the plane last evening, but consequently I missed my good friend Loretta Gilbert and Emmet Carson and the other workshop so let me offer that word of apology.

There is a special elder here who I must acknowledge named June Fairfax, she has been a pioneer. One of the things in her biography and those of you who don't know her should certainly get to know her better, because you touch history when you touch her hand, and she served among a many responsibilities as the Dean of Women at Tuskegee. That always stood out to me because of how special Tuskegee was in the history of African American ecology in the United States. I'll share a word about that in a moment. But Tuskegee was unique in the vision of Booker T. Washington and those who succeeded him. Unlike the other historically black colleges and university when it was founded in 1881, all of the buildings on campus were constructed by the students. They didn't ask us to do that at Moorehouse...or Spellman or Fisk, you all know you'd be in bad shape if you had to live in the buildings that you and your friends had to construct. But at Tuskegee the vision is different and I really commend what happened and I think there is still much for all of us to learn in the 21st century from what our friends were up to in Tuskegee, Alabama.

Well I am working with Freeman on a little book right now and he is tentatively calling it "Crisis From the Village: Restoring hope to American communities". And I want to call attention to four, let's call them zones of institutional crisis. And when I use the language of crisis, crisis in the village, I refer not to uncertainty or confusion, the usual sense of disability that accompanies crisis, but rather institutions and people

need the undergoing rapid transition. So crisis defined as transition requiring strategic leadership and decision-making. The first of them is in the arena of education. And in particular I want to look what is happening in the state of historically black colleges and universities. We have many of them here in Louisiana, certainly in Mississippi, Arkansas, all of our southeastern states where most of our colleges are located. And them humbling to reflect that in 1854 two years before the Civil War concluded, 1854, there were only two historically black colleges and universities in the United States. One hundred years later there were over one hundred. That is to say that in this historic 50th anniversary of Brown vs. board of education, by 1954 there were over a hundred HBCU's, Historically Black Colleges and Universities. I always pause in respect to our elders when I reflect from 1854 to 1954 the kind of philanthropic vision and sacrifice and financial investment and what Loretta Gilbert talks about, the kind of hope that was underwriting the activism and the organization of our people is truly extraordinary. And so all of this was accomplished under their watch.

Today there are roughly a hundred ten, a hundred twelve historically black colleges and universities depending on what you accredit them into the plan, but according to outgoing United Negro College President Bill Gray, at least ten percent of those institutions will close their doors in the next decade. At least ten percent of them will close their doors. Georgia's only HBCU founded by African American's and specifically by the African Methodist Episcopal Church, you know the school, Morris Brown College, last year lost it's accreditation and today we see about 50 or 60 students on a campus where just two years ago there were nearly 3000 students. So right there under our nose in historic Atlanta University Center, one of our institutions is now beginning, is really, frankly has shrunken to the point where is it almost unrecognizable as one of the sister institutions.

Black colleges and universities are facing, and here is where I want to talk about the crisis in our black college community, a crisis of relevance and pertinence. Crisis of relevance and pertinence. During the era of segregation, the mission of these institutions and their purpose was clear. They thrived in part because of the racist society that excluded talented young people. They hired and retained black, brilliant black faculty, whose vocation opportunities in majority institution were severely restricted. These schools embodied W. B Dubois keen insight into the double consciousness of black folks. They educated people who would be bi-cultural and able to function effectively in the dominant culture and within the particular idiom and norms of black culture. But today those institutions are facing crisis.

Now the financial crisis that faces many of those schools is, I want to argue, systematic, it is not causal, it is the financial dimension of the crisis, is but a symptom not a cause. Something else has occurred to render more and more black colleges marginal to the educational market place. New opportunities in the cultural mainstream have opened access to talented people of color, while simultaneously draining our HBCU's of a significant portion of talent. By fault of institutional racism, HBCU's have rarely been regarded as community assets, where the entire city or county or community embraces them as institutional assets. Consequently, state and county legislatures, business and philanthropies have bypassed black institutions for grants and contracts that would have given them a competitive edge and the resource base to attract more first class scholars. So black colleges face a crisis of relevance and pertinence. We now have to make our case in the market place of educational institutions of why our best and brightest young people should come to our institutions verses any other.

Second, I'd like to call attention to a crisis in the non-profit sector, especially the civil rights organizations. Now I want to argue that civil rights organization today face an identity crisis. During the Jim Crew era the voluntary organization created by African American civil society, played an extraordinary role in transforming America. This included fraternities, sororities, community organizations, youth serving organizations, and traditional civil rights organizations, especially those stronger horses like the NAACP, the National Urban League, FCLC and others. This thick matrix of political activism, care of mutual support of moral guidance and financial investment was a source of hope to struggling people of color just a generation ago. But today these groups are struggling to re-engineer themselves for a new social context. This is evident in the way the NAACP is trying to broaden its ____ now to reflect a more multicultural profile. And during the recent tenure of Hugh Price at the National Urban League, we saw effort to increase the focus upon a community wide revalorization, a revaluing of education and mentoring. But in this post-civil rights movement era, many of the non-profit organizations that served us well in the past are adrift amidst the transition into a global economy. Many African Americans have withdrawn their active support from those organizations that served us so well in the past. Marginally because they perceive those organizations today, to simply be echoes from an era long gone. Some friends argue that the civil rights organizations in particular are attempting to fight a 21st century struggle with the armaments of the 1960's.

The non-profit sector needs to retool and reengineer for a new phase of an ever-widening global struggle for economic justice and human rights. Dr. King was on this in 1968 in a way that few of our major leaders have ever quite grasped, because he saw in his last essay, and I'd like to give that

assignment to leaders of our _____. Dr. King's last book was titled, "Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?" published in 1968. For the last chapter in that last book is titled "The World House". Urge all of the young people you know to go back and read that essay and then write an essay about what they think Dr. King would say to us today. Just 28 pages long, "The World House", in it, Dr. King talks about the fact that we are all indebted now and linked to people on the other side of the globe. He has this wonderful story when you go in to, you're waking in the morning, you go into your kitchen and you have a cup of tea that was produced by the Chinese, or hot cocoa produced by west African or coffee produced by South American. You use the soap produced by someone in Europe and you reached for a sponge produced in the Pacific Islands. He said "before you even leave your house in the morning you already indebted to one half of the world. And yet this is largely obscured in the way we think about our American sense of self-sufficiency. So Dr. King was linking the Southern civil rights struggle to a larger global economic predicament. And I would argue that one of the weaknesses of contemporary civil rights analysis is to fear you to follow precisely, that sense of the local link to the global. And so our leaders have to become less peripheral and far more global in their outlook.

The third zone, African American families. Here I want to talk about a crisis of commitment, the black family crisis of commitment. As I develop the argument I will be alluding to the larger American situation because the struggles I point to here are not _____ to the black community. These are the challenges facing white communities and Latino and Asian and Native American communities as well. It's a larger national and indeed global struggle. But I want to highlight for our purposes, it's happening in our community. Family crisis. In 1890, two parent African American households numbered 80%. 1890 after the Civil War, after reconstruction, two parent households in the black community numbered 80%. It was almost a rush to get married, to have children, to establish the necessities of survival and of course largely in the sharecropper economy for most black folk in the south. One hundred years later in 1990 only 39% of African American children live in married couple households. 39% a hundred years later. In 1970, 68% of African Americans were married, 1970 68% of us were married. By 1994 that number had dropped to 48%. Now this happened under our watch so we have to ask, if we step back and ask "How did this happen?" and "What precisely occurred?"

The non-marital birth rate in African American communities today is 70%. We know how some of our less generous conservative radio talk show hosts and politicians make use of this information, but quite a part from the way in which they may wish to use and belittle...we, have to have an honest conversation about the future of our families. May of you know today there is a hot debate with respect to the role of the government