

7-1-1981

Equal Opportunity For All Americans

George H.W. Bush

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dh.howard.edu/newdirections>

Recommended Citation

Bush, George H.W. (1981) "Equal Opportunity For All Americans," *New Directions*: Vol. 8: Iss. 4, Article 5. Available at: <https://dh.howard.edu/newdirections/vol8/iss4/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Howard @ Howard University. It has been accepted for inclusion in New Directions by an authorized editor of Digital Howard @ Howard University. For more information, please contact digitalservices@howard.edu.

Equal Opportunity For All Americans

By George Bush

Howard [University] is unique among American universities, not only as a great national resource but as a citadel of higher education and free expression in the heart of our nation's capital.

Indeed, Howard isn't simply a national resource, it's an international resource, for [Howard's] tradition of free expression is shared by students from 50 states, the territories, and no fewer than 89 nations of the world.

Howard can take justifiable pride in the fact that it is the most racially and culturally integrated institution of higher learning on the face of the earth . . . it is a rallying point and a crucible for ideas and social action.

It's said that all who come to [Howard] — from whatever part of the country or the globe, whatever their background, politics, or the controversial nature of their opinions—are not simply allowed but are in fact encouraged to speak their minds. . . .

I want to share some of my thoughts and feelings regarding the new direction I believe American society must take to meet the challenges facing us, as individuals and as a people, in this decade of the 1980s.

Let me say at the outset—there's no point in closing my eyes to this and pretending it doesn't exist—that I know that many members of America's Black community, along with other minority communities, have serious concerns about the philosophy of the Reagan administration on the paramount issues of civil rights and equal opportunity.

I've said this before, as has the President—but so long as those concerns linger, it cannot be repeated too often: Let there be no doubt among minority Americans regarding the commitment of this administration to our nation's civil rights laws and to the principle and practice of equal opportunity for all our citizens.

President Reagan and his administration are totally, wholeheartedly and irrevocably committed to seeing to it that the civil rights of every American—including that most precious right of free Americans, the right to vote—are safeguarded.

We have seen the President's commitment to minority rights by his use of Executive powers to provide financial and manpower resources to local authorities in Atlanta, a community gripped by a tragedy so cruel as to be beyond comprehension. As head of the administration's task force assigned to assist Atlanta in coping with this tragedy, let me assure you that this President and this administration are not going to relent in these ongoing efforts until this senseless waste of young lives comes to an end.

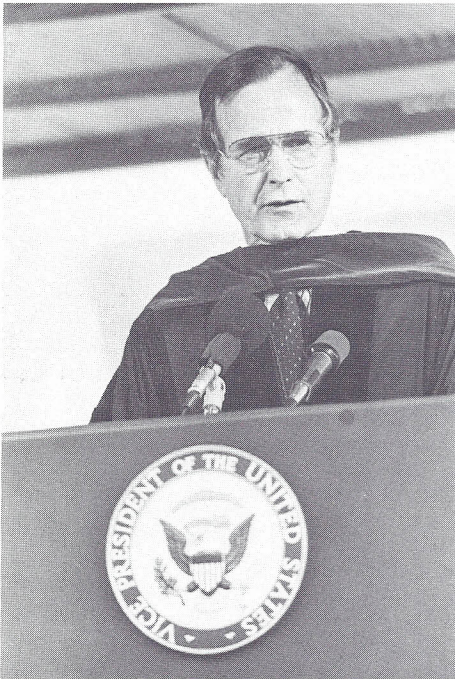
Further, we not only condemn but will vigorously carry out the law against those misguided members of society who, by violence or the threat of violence or coercion, would deny minority Americans their God-given right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, as guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States.

Let the white hood and the swastika . . . be buried in the past. There is no room for racial or religious intolerance in the United States.

We have come a long way in this country since Langston Hughes, in *The Black Man Speaks*, wrote the lines:

*I swear to the Lord
I still can't see
Why Democracy means
Everybody but me.*

A long, long way—and we're not going to turn back. Let the white hood and the swastika—those ugly symbols of hatred and bigotry—be buried in the past. There



is no room for racial or religious intolerance in the United States.

In the area of equal opportunity, the administration is committed to that concept, not only as a matter of social right and justice, but as a condition of our country's economic recovery.

We have seen in recent years that while government plays a crucial role in providing the legal framework for equal opportunity, government is not the entire answer to minority hopes and aspirations to convert that opportunity into jobs.

That answer lies in the private sector. And just as we look to the private sector to provide the cure to America's overall economic ills, it is the private sector that can and must provide minority Americans the jobs they need, want and fully deserve. Jobs for all.

In Pittsburgh, [May 8] I addressed an audience of graduating students at Duquesne University, and as I looked over that audience I saw a great reservoir of talent, ready, willing and eager to take its place in the mainstream of the American economy.

At Howard, I see another reservoir of talent, equally ready, willing and eager to move on to the challenge offered by our free economy.

One campus is predominantly white; the other predominantly Black. But the common denominator is the same. What I have seen is young Americans who have a contribution to make to our society and economy—young Americans who have demonstrated their talent, their dedication, their ability, by earning degrees at two of our country's finest universities.

One of those institutions is a private institution founded for the education of young Catholics. The other university was founded for the education of young Black students. And just as Duquesne and other Catholic institutions of higher learning continue to serve a vital function in our country's educational community, so do Howard University and America's other Black institutions of higher learning.

America's Black colleges and universities are . . . vital to our country. . . .

I say this because there are some [people] who now argue that in an age of integrated education, the function and purpose of America's historically Black universities and colleges are not as important as they once were. . . . That is not the position of the Reagan administration.

In fact, America's Black colleges and universities are considered so vital to our country's educational, social and economic structure that it is this administration's intention not to cut, but to increase funding to these irreplaceable institutions.

Think of the many leaders in American public life, industry, law, medicine, science and technology who have been part of the Howard tradition. To name but a few: Justice Thurgood Marshall, Charles Drew, Kenneth Clark, Edward Brooke, Vernon Jordan.

These leaders in their fields are all an integral part of the Howard tradition—just as the members of the graduating class of 1981 are now part of that tradition, and will take their place not only in the mainstream but in the forefront of their local and national communities.

I have in mind one particular member of this graduating class who, though he isn't present today, in a very real sense epitomizes all that Howard stands for in terms of its contribution to our society.

That graduating student is Roderick Royall. And the reason he isn't here is because he's traveling across Europe, having spent his final year at the Sorbonne in Paris, studying journalism in French—a language he learned at Howard University.

He is a product of inner city Washington. And because of the educational opportunity he had at Howard, he has expanded the frontiers of his knowledge and understanding of the world in which

he lives—and in fact there are really no limits to such frontiers.

That is the kind of young American that Howard is producing today, thanks to the excellence of its faculty, just as it has through the decades. That is the kind of young American who has much to contribute to our free society and free economy, as do his fellow graduates of the Class of '81.

"New Direction" is the title given to Howard's ongoing fund drive aimed at helping the school to meet the challenge of the 1980s and beyond. It could well be the title of what President Reagan and his administration are trying to achieve in terms of the future of this country.

As the President said in his Inaugural Address, our purpose is to "renew ourselves here in our land"—to put America on a course toward true and lasting peace overseas and freedom and prosperity here at home.

"Our objective," said the President, "must be a healthy, vigorous, growing economy that provides equal opportunities for all Americans with no barriers born of bigotry or discrimination. Putting America back to work means putting all Americans back to work."

That is the new direction promised by the President and his administration. . . .

Let us join hands and walk the road together. □