

Bureau of Publicity, Democratic National Committee

766 National Press Building

Washington, D. C.

C-42
1936

ADDRESS DELIVERED BY THE HONORABLE W. FORBES MORGAN, SECRETARY OF
THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL COMMITTEE, TO A MEETING OF THE COLORED
NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC LEAGUE ON THE NIGHT OF APRIL 16, 1936.

COLORED CITIZENS AND THE NEW DEAL

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It is a pleasure to come here tonight and to have the opportunity of seeing with my own eyes the interest which members of the colored race are taking in vital problems which affect the future of our country. This is an important age, politically, in which we live. We find significant and far-reaching changes in sociology and economics taking place all around us, and whether we want them to or not, these changes materially affect our daily lives. The rule of life is growth and development and we may as well recognize that fact.

The very existence of an organization calling itself the Colored National Democratic League is a wholesome thing for the members of the colored race and a wholesome thing for the United States of America. To me it means that the colored race has come of age politically; that no longer may you be considered a sort of appendage to one of the major political parties, no matter what that party may happen to be.

It is not my purpose to inquire into the reasons or to scoff at the traditions which have bound so many of your race to membership in the Republican Party in the past. But I do say that any debt of loyalty you may have owed has been amply repaid, and that from now on it is your duty to yourselves and your duty to the country to examine with critical eye the claims of any and all political parties before announcing your allegiance. The presence of such a fine representative gathering here tonight is a visible evidence that you intend to pursue such a policy.

As a Democrat I have no hesitancy in urging those of you here tonight to consider fully the claims for your suffrage put forth by both major parties. It is my honest belief that your admiration for our great President Franklin D. Roosevelt will increase beyond measure if you study all the vital things that he has done in the short space of three years to better the lot of the common men and women in this country. I ask you to look at the record and to contrast it with the measure of empty promises now being broadcast by his political opponents.

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I suppose some of you are a bit skeptical; no doubt if you are accustomed to the ways of politics, you have in mind past experiences when men came before you in election years to pay lip service to the glories of the colored race and to mumble glib promises of what will be done for you at some future unnamed time. We are all more or less acquainted with tactics of that sort and if you are a bit doubtful of promise-makers I can hardly blame you.

There is only one acid test to apply to the words of any man who comes amongst you to discuss political happenings and political conditions in this country. There is no one who can get away from the implications of this simple question: "What is the record?" "What has your party done to fulfill its promises to the negro race in the past?"

I'm going to answer that question at the outset of my remarks and I am going to call as my first witness, the Honorable Arthur W. Mitchell, a member of the House of Representatives from the State of Illinois, a colored man and a Democrat who, in his public service, has compiled an unblemished record that reflects credit upon his race, his party and his country. Said Mr. Mitchell in a recent speech:

"Mr. Roosevelt has appointed more negroes to responsible governmental positions than the last three Republican administrations taken together." In support of that statement, Congressman Mitchell went on, in the speech to which I have reference, and he named the men and women of your race who have been appointed to public office by the present occupant of the White House. He headed the list with Dr. William J. Thompkins, the present Recorder of Deeds here in Washington, about whose fitness for that position, or any position of trust requiring ability and character, you are familiar through long personal acquaintance.

As Congressman Mitchell pointed out, President Roosevelt did not tell you one thing before election and pursue a different course after he had succeeded in winning your suffrage. He has proceeded without deviation to see that the colored man, as far as it lies in his power, is conceded his economic rights and is given equal opportunity with all others in the great work of rehabilitation.

You have been listening for years to academic discussions concerning the right of the members of your race to participate in every way, without fear or prejudice, in the civil, political and economic life of this country. The justice of that right is hardly ever questioned in the abstract, although very frequently, the matter of performance is far below what was promised. But matters of that kind, which go to the heart of the relations prevailing between men of different races, are hardly ever settled by argument or by words alone, however persuasive they may be. In the last analysis, it is a matter that depends upon
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performance and upon the good example of those in power.

In that connection I wish to point out a significant fact. It is my wish to call to your attention the manner in which the cause of the colored man has been advanced in the past few years by the dignity, the kindness and the rare tact exhibited by Congressman Mitchell, by Dr. Thompkins and by other colored men and women in the performance of their official duties. They have brought credit upon themselves and credit upon their people. This record of substantial accomplishment will do more than all the words ever spoken to justify the continuance and expansion of the policy, now employed by the Roosevelt administration, of recognizing colored men and women of ability in making appointments to office.

Once again, in order to demonstrate that what I say is something more than the usual political palaver handed to you in a campaign year, it is my intention to call unbiased witnesses and to listen to the evidence which they present. I am going to quote you now a resolution adopted on February 21 last by the Bishops' Council of the African Methodist Episcopal Church of the United States, Africa and the West Indies. This resolution, as reported in the Kansas/^{City}Times, said:

"We seek to cultivate inter-racial good-will and to resist all incitations to race hatred, prejudice and unrest. Without regard to political affiliation or party alignments we have noted the tendencies of the present administration at Washington to recognize merit without regard to race, color or condition.

"We hail with unfeigned pleasure the recognition extended to so many of our people by President Roosevelt and petition him to carry on his work so well begun, to keep open the door of hope, to insure social justice to every citizen, to give to one and to all equality of opportunity, full and complete enjoyment of all Constitutional guarantees -- equal and exact justice before the law."

In my opinion, the resolution adopted by the distinguished Council of Bishops' sets forth in convincing fashion the reason why the Roosevelt administration is entitled to the sympathetic support of every man and woman who believes in the fundamental principles of our government. The Bishops were thoroughly acquainted with the record of the administration when that resolution was adopted and they knew the praise heaped upon President Roosevelt was well-merited.

There is another significant fact in connection with the list of colored men holding responsible places in the federal government, which deserves special attention at this time. Congressman Mitchell revealed that colored men have been given positions of trust in the Commerce Department, the Labor Department, the Interior Department, the Agriculture Department, and in the Resettlement Administration. I want you to bear in mind that those Departments, in the main, have been given jurisdiction over the emergency spending policies of the federal government, over those funds which have been authorized to prevent starvation, to provide employment

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for those in need, and to begin the job of remedying old economic wrongs that should have been undone generations ago. In considering the speed with which it was necessary to establish new agencies, think how fortunate it was for the colored race to have its own members given places where they could make sure that no group was overlooked in the great task of rehabilitation and relief. Always there was a sympathetic person at hand, a man of your own race, who could say if necessary "Hold on a minute, please remember that the colored man, no matter how humble, is entitled in justice to receive the kindly aid of Uncle Sam in this great emergency."

There are many of your race in responsible positions whom I have not the time to mention but who command the respect and admiration of all good citizens. But I must say a word in honor of your President Dr. Williston whom you all love and admire. Dr. Williston has great and prophetic vision. He became a democrat in 1912, and at that time it was not so healthy for a man of his race to be a Democrat in N. C. His own people resented it at that time and showed their resentment on various occasions in a forceful manner. But those times are changing. Dr. Williston is a firm believer in the ideals of democracy and especially in its obligations. Never forget that the acquisition of Liberty carries with it responsibilities otherwise it soon degenerates into license. Remember that the right of citizenship is the greatest of all human gifts and must not be bartered away like a mess of pottage. I am glad to pay this short tribute to Dr. Williston whose enthusiasm and devotion to the democratic cause is appreciated by all of us.

We are all familiar with the fact that the heart-breaking economic depression through which this country passed placed an almost intolerable burden upon the poor folks who never earned enough to lay by a surplus for troubled times and who found themselves without employment when the depression was at its height. The spectre of starvation, of cold and misery, was an actuality in so many cases that we hate to dwell upon those facts. We know that discension and despair and rebellion live and prosper under conditions of that sort. Let it be said that, to the eternal glory of the colored race, despite the suffering which the poorer classes were compelled to endure, they bore themselves with a courage and loyalty to their government and to their fellow-men that won the admiration of all. The radical and extremist, who thought to profit by the misfortunes of the poor colored people, found himself greatly mistaken. The patriotism of even the humblest of your race was made of too stern a stuff to blow away in the face of a temporary calamity.

Let us turn now from a consideration of the specific things which the Roosevelt administration has done for the men and women of your acquaintance

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to the larger question of what has been done for the nation as a whole. I feel that you are too loyal to your country to feel that what the administration has done for you personally is the measure by which it must be judged. You feel as we all do that the present Democratic administration must stand or fall on its record of accomplishment upon behalf of the whole people, regardless of race, creed or color. Under the American system of government, it will never be possible for any administration to succeed unless it observes the fundamental truth that no man is too rich or too poor to be denied his essential rights.

The record made by the present Roosevelt administration in office is too well known to all of you to need repetition by me at this time. The memory of closed banks, of bread lines and soup kitchens, of unemployed men and women deprived even of hope, is too strong within you to need recalling. Even our Republican opponents have given up the job of trying to convince the American people that prosperity has been retarded by the New Deal. How can they even hint such a thing in view of what is taking place in this country? While the rest of the world lags behind, the United States has moved forward economically under the wise leadership of President Roosevelt until we are approaching the level of production and consumption which prevailed in 1928 and 1929. Factory chimneys are belching forth black smoke once again; railroads are doing a bigger business than they have in years; people have money to buy automobiles and radios and those other modern inventions which make life more enjoyable; the farmer is getting a living return for his products after many years of hard struggling -- in a word prosperity is on its way back in a great, big substantial way.

The spirit of the country has changed; optimism is replacing pessimism and even our great industrial leaders, who somehow always seemed worried when you did something for the poor people, are predicting that good times will continue and that the volume of business will continue to increase. Many companies including the great General Motors, are making more money than ever before in history. The duPont Company made more than \$55,000,000 last year although the duPont family members who control it are doing their best to discredit the achievements of the Roosevelt administration through the activities of the misnamed American Liberty League. It is my recollection that everything the League stands for we had in 1932. Do you wish to return to that kind of Liberty? Do you wish to go back to the days when no one was making money, when half our people were starving without even the prospect of obtaining work? I know you don't and I doubt very much if the duPonts and their allies would return to those days, even if they could. Now that President Roosevelt has brought the country back, they would like to dismiss him from office and turn over the reins of government to some lesser man whom they can control. Ingratitude seems to be one of the chief products of the duPont

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Company. But I feel these men are in for a rude awakening if they think that the American people are going to dismiss a great leader merely because he refuses to knuckle down to the wealthy and powerful.

The sober fact is that I doubt very much if the eminent gentlemen who control the Liberty League, and who are fabulously wealthy, would rest very easily if they actually thought their campaign to get rid of President Roosevelt was going to be successful. There was a time -- and only a couple of years ago -- when they needed him badly and I suspect that they are wise enough to know that they may need him for a few years more. Of course they scream about government spending, and quite naturally they hate to see the President courageously going to the aid of poor people who are unable to help themselves, but these Liberty Leaguers are a bit wiser than they pretend to be. They realize that government spending has done more to ensure their own prosperity than it has that of any other class. But now that the war against the depression has been won, they simply don't want to pay the cost. They complain about paying taxes. They remind me of our European war debtors; those countries were willing to borrow the money but after victory was theirs, they declined to pay us back. That's just the way certain wealthy folks are acting today.

It's extremely difficult for any one connected with the Roosevelt administration to answer our political opponents because no one yet has discovered what it is they are complaining about. The country is better off, people are happier, and we face the pleasing prospect of contentment at home and peace with foreign nations. A few months ago spokesmen for the Republican Party were shouting that the President was a Socialist and a Communist. That worked well for a few weeks until someone pointed out that practically all the Republicans in Congress voted for the measures which President Roosevelt advocated. And on top of that, it was pointed out that most of the Republican candidates for President were advocating the same policies so the issue of Socialism and Communism had to be dropped. Then someone suggested that the administration was attacking the Constitution. The only trouble with that argument was that it was pretty hard to convince laboring men and farmers that the administration was attacking their rights by trying to give them a living wage and decent hours of work. The average man is too smart to believe nonsense like that. Next the Republicans shouted that Mr. Roosevelt was endangering the nation's credit by his spending policies. Very obviously if the nation's credit was in danger, the Republicans were in a good position to announce that if they came into power, all emergency and relief spending would stop. Did they do that? Of course not precisely because this country would never stand for such a policy. We have moved too far ahead in the last couple of years to consider such a cruel policy as that. As long as millions of honest and decent men and

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women are without work in this country, the government must find some way of ensuring them at least enough food and shelter to meet their minimum requirements. That policy is so just that even the Republicans conceded it. So then their argument against government spending ended in nothing.

For the past couple of years the Republican press and G.O.P. orators have been having the time of their lives poking fun at certain advisers consulted by President Roosevelt whom they delighted to call the "brain trust". For some reason, the Republicans professed to see grave danger to the country in this habit of the Chief Executive's of consulting intelligent and well-informed men when he wished to formulate a policy. The Republicans apparently were dead set against intelligence in government. Seldom using intelligence themselves while in office they seemed to fear what would happen if President Roosevelt pursued such a course. We were solemnly assured that the country was going straight to Moscow merely because a couple of professors had been asked their opinion on current problems. The gag worked perfectly until last week Chairman Henry Fletcher of the Republican National Committee announced the formation of a new Republican "brain trust" of more than 50 members. In other words, the very thing they condemned, they are now attempting to do.

Naturally the newspapers had a lot of fun with the Republicans for forming its own Brain Trust. But what else could Mr. Fletcher do?

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His party faces a national election without an outstanding candidate for the Presidency and without anything that even slightly resembles an issue. Unless this new "brain trust" can write a platform between now and the time when the National convention assembles in Cleveland early in June, the Republican party is sunk beyond all hope of recovery. In any event the outlook is bad enough. The Republican Party, even with its brain trust, faces the unhappy prospect of placing its stamp of approval upon every major policy advocated and adopted by the Roosevelt administration. The Republican party must endorse aid for agriculture or disband; it must urge the continued expenditure of funds for the unemployed; it must endorse some form of social security; it must promise the continuance of those great public works inaugurated by the Roosevelt administration to tide the country over the depression. In other words, the Republicans, in effect, must find new words in which to endorse the New Deal program of the Democrats. What further proof do you need of the wisdom of President Roosevelt's policies?

To augment their miseries and their woes, a Republican chairman of the United States Tariff Commission, Mr. Robert Lincoln O'Brien, has informed the leaders of his party that the Democratic program of reciprocal trade agreements is so good they might as well come out and give it their endorsement. Mr. O'Brien's statement made one Republican Congressman so mad that he announced if the eminent chairman of the Tariff Commission goes to the Cleveland convention, he won't even be given a hearing. I can't blame the Congressman for feeling hurt, but, after all, facts are facts and Mr. O'Brien merely recognized early what they must all realize sooner or later, namely that the Democratic program is right and they may as well admit it. In seeking an available candidate for the Presidential nomination who will have national appeal, the Republicans are just as badly off as they are in trying to frame a platform. Dozens of prospective candidates were mentioned but the public refused to respond to any of them. Most of these hopeful candidacies bloomed and withered on the same day. A few remain and I ask you to take each man now being mentioned as a possible Republican nominee for President and to decide for yourself how his qualities of leadership compare to those of President Roosevelt. The fact is that the present Chief Executive towers over his prospective opponents like a mountain over a mole hill. He has experience; he has courage; he has vision; -- he has every primary qualification which we like to see in a Chief Executive.

I think it is significant that the most favored candidate today for the Republican Presidential nomination is a man whom you never heard of two years ago. I refer to the Kansas Governor whose supporters are now working like beavers at

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the time-honored task of trying to "build up" their man to the status of a national figure. Their object, of course, is apparent; their last forlorn hope is that people will merely vote against President Roosevelt instead of voting for some positive candidate on the opposing ticket. Isn't the Landon candidacy a confession of guilt on the part of the Republicans? Aren't they virtually conceding in advance that the American public will never stand for those Republican leaders who did such a sorry job of running this country prior to 1933? I think you will agree with me that it is a confession of guilt. An editorial writer for the New York Times said that Governor Landon can thank the map of the United States for the fact that he is now being boomed for the Presidency. The Times pointed out that the leaders of the G.O.P. decided to get a candidate from the Mid-West and the Kansas Governor happens to fit the bill. If it were not for that accident of geography, you and I probably never would have known that Governor Landon even existed.

The Republican cause is hopeless today precisely because President Roosevelt has had the courage and vision to sponsor a program that appeals to every class and every group in this country. While others were preaching democracy and doing nothing about it, he has put his preaching into practice. There is no forgotten class under the Roosevelt administration. The policies which he has adopted are intended to help everyone from the great captains of wealth down to the humble and poverty-stricken sharecroppers in the cotton fields of the South. He is attacked and ridiculed for having the courage to pursue such a policy but no one has ever had the power to make him retreat.

The Democratic Party is going forward to a great triumph this November, an overwhelming victory that will mean success not only for the party but success for the nation. We are fortunate indeed in having a candidate for the Presidency who has proved his worth, a statesman who stands unrivaled, a humanitarian whose sympathies are broad enough to include all his fellow Americans.

We are going to re-elect President Roosevelt and when we do, the members of the Colored National Democratic League will have the satisfaction of knowing that by their efforts they helped advance the cause of the colored people and at the same time helped advance the cause of the American people as a whole.

(THE END)