



JAMES A. BAKER III INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY
RICE UNIVERSITY

REMARKS AT THE BAKER INSTITUTE'S 15TH ANNIVERSARY GALA DINNER

BY

THE HONORABLE CONDOLEEZZA RICE

66TH SECRETARY OF STATE
OF THE
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JAMES A. BAKER III HALL

RICE UNIVERSITY

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SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much. Well, it's really great to be here at Rice University and here in the state of Texas. As a matter of fact, when I told the President, with whom I was in New York earlier today, that I was on my way to Texas, he said to say hello to all of you. He said he's going to be coming back soon. (Laughter.)

I'm going to be going back soon, too, but not to Texas. I'm going to be headed back to California, which has become my home over the last 25 years. And I don't want to leave the impression that I'm in a hurry to get out of Washington. I'm not. After all, Washington and California have a lot in common. There are some difference, like the great weather in California, the great food in California, the great people in California – (laughter) – Pac-10 sports. On second thought, maybe I am in a hurry to get back to California. (Laughter.)

But in all seriousness, change is a good thing. And I do think that the time comes when it is time for new people and time for new ideas. And the wonderful thing about our country is that it has a way of renewing itself through a democratic process that we all respect and that indeed has the respect of the world. And I just have to say that the election that we just had last Tuesday is one that has been watched around the world. It has been watched in far corners, where people suddenly know what the Iowa Caucus is, and it's been watched because it is an election that is historic. (Applause.)

For a country that has come so far – a country that has come so far in overcoming deep differences, differences that were so severe that a girl like me, grew up in segregated Birmingham, Alabama, to now elect an African American President is an extraordinary matter, and it says to the world that differences can be overcome. And in a world in which difference is still a license to kill, that's an awfully important message. And so, to the American people, I want to just say how proud I am and how proud I am to have represented this great country.

I'm delighted to be here tonight. I'm especially pleased to be here with my good friend and mentor and predecessor Jim Baker, with the great founding director of this institute Ed Djerejian. It's great to be at this terrific university. I want to thank President Leebron for his wonderful leadership of Rice. And he has, in fact, been involved in a university presidents leadership forum

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that we have had at the State Department. It's really just great to be here, because this Institute is, indeed, doing great work. And it's only fitting that it is doing the work of bridging theory and practice, of bridging domestic and foreign, because it is named for someone who has done all of that with great eloquence and elegance, with great skill, with great integrity, with great commitment and dedication, and with great success, and that is Jim Baker. (Applause.)

I was fortunate indeed to, as Jim mentioned, to be the White House Soviet specialist at the end of the Cold War. And frankly, it doesn't get much better than that, because the Soviet Union was indeed collapsing, Eastern Europe was being liberated, Germany was unifying. But it was not an easy time. It was a time at which the world seemed to be turned on its head. And it was a time when skillful diplomacy and statecraft were demanded. And America was very fortunate at that time to have Jim Baker as its chief diplomat, working for George H.W. Bush, a man committed to American values.

Jim Baker, I think, engaged in some of the greatest statecraft of the 20th century in bringing about the peaceful collapse of the Soviet Union. And just think about it, one fine December night – as a matter of fact Christmas night in 1991 – a country with 30,000 nuclear weapons, with 5 million men under arms, spanning 12 different time zones, that had been an implacable enemy of the United States for decades, suddenly, just quietly went away. It didn't. It had to be shepherded that way, and Jim Baker was the chief shepherd. And Jim, it was a great pleasure and honor to work with you. (Applause.)

But as incredible as those times were, we have to recognize that they teach us something about other tumultuous times. Because indeed, 1989 and 1990 and 1991 were reassuring and reaffirming about our values that, indeed, no matter how powerful the Soviet Union looked, it was weak when it came to the ability to speak to the needs of its people and to feed their deep desire for human dignity and freedom.

But of course, that had not always – it had not always looked as if it would turn out that way. Indeed, yes, the United States enjoyed great military strength, and it enjoyed great economic might, and it enjoyed alliances like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. But more than

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anything, it enjoyed the perch of a system of values that turned out just to be too strong for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe to resist. But what it teaches us about tumultuous times is that you have to stay true to those values even when it looks as if perhaps they are not triumphing.

I very often go to work in the State Department, and I think about the people who were there at the end of World War II, people like Marshall and people like Kennan and people like Nitze, and down the street of course, President Truman. And I wonder what it must have been like to go to work between 1946 and 1950, to go to work in 1946 when the French Communists won 46 percent of the vote and the Italian Communists 48 percent of the vote, and the question wasn't would there be communism in Eastern Europe. The question was would there be communism in Western Europe.

When in 1947, 2 million Europeans were still starving after World War II; when civil conflict broke out in Turkey and civil war in Greece; when in 1948, President Truman recognized Israel against the advice of his Secretary of State George Marshall, and war broke out in the Middle East; when the Soviet Union snuffed out the last free state in Eastern Europe, Czechoslovakia; and in 1949, when the Soviet Union exploded a nuclear weapon five years ahead of schedule, and the Chinese Communists won; and in 1950 the Korean War broke out.

It must not have seemed that Western values and democracy were going to triumph at that time. Indeed, it must have seemed quite far-fetched that just a few years later Secretary Baker would, in Moscow, sign a document that unified Germany completely on Western terms. It must have seemed impossible to think that in 2006, President Bush would go to a NATO summit in the Baltic states. It must not have seemed possible.

And I'll tell you, it reminds us that today's headlines and history's judgment are rarely the same, that it is important to stay true to our strengths and to our values, even in the most tumultuous of times when it seems that all is lost.

I've returned to Washington, after the great halcyon years of 1989 to 1991, to a quite different kind of historic transformation, one at which we are, in fact, at the beginning, not the end, a story

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that is still being written about how the world will look. That historical transformation began, in many ways, on September 11th, a bright blue day in which America learned for the first time, really in its history, but certainly in the memory of anyone still alive, that it was not protected by the great oceans surrounding it when 19 evil men managed somehow to turn commercial airliners into missiles. And from then on, for those of us who were in positions of authority on September 11th, every day since has been September 12th. And the question is how to make certain that the country will remain safe.

But it was also a challenge not just to look to the threat, but rather to the opportunity that an earthquake of that proportion in international politics could bring. And indeed, in doing so, to go back to some verities, some truths of managing in historical times, first, to be certain that you do have good friends and good allies. And indeed, the United States is blessed with good friends and good allies. Sometimes we talk about the Europeans, we talk about them as if they can't do this and they can't do that, but just think about this fact: Today, in Afghanistan, NATO fights alongside us to try and bring freedom to an Afghan people who've known nothing but war and deprivation for 30 years. And we have good allies in Asia, Japan, and South Korea, countries themselves that are a demonstration of the fact that democracy is not a system only for those who speak the languages of the West and come from those cultures.

Secondly, as you sustain alliances, it is important to sustain values. And America must never be neutral, as we were not during the Cold War, never be neutral about what system is best. Indeed, democracy is the only system that can fully be a way for human beings to reach their potential and dignity. And so championing that cause, as difficult as it sometimes is, is extremely important to the core of American foreign policy. And by the way, it always has been. Our interests and our values are linked, because in the final analysis, when America exists in a world of likeminded democratic states, it is also a safer world, and a world in which not just our values but our interests can be defended.

But freedom from tyranny and freedom from oppression are not the only challenge. There's also the challenge of freedom from poverty, freedom from disease. And so America in this new world has tried to draw on the great and tremendous generosity of this country to let people know that

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we care about issues of social justice, about educating their children, about giving healthcare to the poorest. And so under President Bush, foreign assistance has increased dramatically. It has quadrupled in Africa; it has tripled worldwide; it has doubled in Latin America. And we have also championed, as a part of that economic freedom, free trade and economic openness.

To be sure, this economic model that insists on openness of the economy on free trade is being sorely tested. And we will come out of this latest global crisis. But I hope that when we do, we will come out of it with the values intact that recognize that only open economies, only free economies, only economies that encourage the entrepreneurial spirit of people and their creativity are indeed the economies that can deliver. It is too easy to say that what we are going through is sometime – somehow a fault of our free enterprise system. It is not. Our free enterprise system will ultimately be the one that will help us to overcome the difficulties in which we find ourselves.

Now I am quite certain that America, if we maintain our alliances, particularly those with our friends who share our values; if we are certain to stand up for democracy because it is right and because it is in our interest; if we continue to support those who are poor and less privileged than we are so that they have a stake in a stable and better future; and if we defend economic openness and trade, that we will lay a foundation for the historic transformation that is now underway to end just as well as the Cold War did.

But I will tell you that in order to do that, it is going to require continued American leadership. And much of what places like the Baker Institute do is to remind us constantly that American leadership is at the core of a better world. That is not to say that we don't have friends and partners, but I can tell you, having represented this great country as its chief diplomat now for almost four years, that the world craves American leadership. And I am sure that we're going to give it.

But in order to give it, we have to be confident. We have to be confident in ourselves and confident in our values. And I want to tell you that I am concerned about two matters when it comes to our confidence. First of all, the United States of America is, of course, respected for its

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military power; admired, maybe even envied a little bit for its economic strength. But what America is really loved for is the endless – the sense of endless possibility that we represent. That's why the election on Tuesday has caught the world's attention. It is because it shows America as a place where anything is possible. It shows America as a place where people want to go, whether or not they are crawling across the desert in order to make five dollars rather than 50 cents, or whether they come, as Sergey Brin did from Russia, to found Google because it was in America's creative environment that that was possible.

That is what is admired and that is why people still seek to come here. But frankly, we have unfinished business on that score, and that is to finish the business of comprehensive immigration reform. Because America cannot continue to be a place where some people live in the shadows contributing to our country, contributing to our economy, but somehow afraid even to go to an emergency room to treat their children.

Immigration is what built this country. It is the source of our great strength. It does not matter whether you are African American or Mexican American or German American or Korean American, you're American. And you're American not by blood, not by nationality, not by religious faith, but because of an ideal. And unless we can renew that spirit of wanting to be open to those who want to be a part of us, we will lose a part of who we are.

The other great concern that I have comes from perhaps my own background and also what I have seen as Secretary of State. I've said that America is an ideal. But what's at the center of that ideal? We have a great national myth. Now, a myth is not something that is not true, but it is something that's a bit outsized. And what is our great national myth? The log cabin. It doesn't matter where you came from; it matters where you're going. It doesn't matter how you got there; it matters where you go next. And it should be the same whether you came from the poorest community in America or the wealthiest community in America. And by the way, even if you're not very well off, well, your kids will be. That's who we are as Americans. And the greatest threat to that sense of who we are is the state of our educational system, the state of public education in this country.

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You know, as an educator, it bothers me because I come from a family that was absolutely a set of educational evangelists. There wasn't any question that you were going to go to college. The question was where. And why? Because I was fortunate enough to have a forefather, my father's father, John Wesley Rice, Sr., who in 1919 or so, living in Ewtah – that's E-w-t-a-h, Alabama – decided that he was going to get book learning. And Granddaddy Rice asked where a colored man could go to college, and he found out that there was a little college called Stillman College about 60 miles down the road, so he saved up his cotton and he made his way to Stillman College. And he made it through a year of college, and then they said, "All right. So how are you going to pay the second year of college?" He said, "Well, I don't have any more cotton." They said, "Then you'll have to leave."

So Granddaddy Rice said, "Well, how are those boys going to college?" And they said, "Well, you see, they have what's called a scholarship. And if you wanted to be a Presbyterian minister, then you could have a scholarship, too." And Granddaddy Rice said, "Well, that's exactly what I had in mind." (Laughter.) And my family has been educated and Presbyterian ever since. (Laughter.)

I would not be here tonight as Secretary of State without Granddaddy Rice. I would not be here without his understanding of what education could do. But I wonder how much we are doing to make sure that that dream is alive for our children who come from modest circumstances. So it breaks my heart as an educator. But you know, as Secretary of State, it terrifies me. Because if we are not able to educate our people, I can assure you we will turn inward, we will protect, we will be afraid of the world; we will not believe, as we Americans have believed, that there is an endless international economic pie to be built, we will instead decide that we have to protect that little piece that we have. And that will be a disaster for the world because America will not lead if we are not confident that our people are able to compete.

And it will also ultimately erode who we are in that sense of that log cabin myth. Because you see, for a country that is made up of people from everywhere, from every station of life, from every religious background, what holds us together is that we're strivers. But strivers have to be able to succeed.

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And so I believe that in many ways linking, as the Baker Institute does, this domestic issue and this foreign policy, is key. It is absolutely the case that perhaps our greatest national security challenge right now is to make sure that that dream, that myth, that belief that Americans can do anything and it really doesn't matter where you came from, it really matters where you're going. If we can make certain that that is available to generations to come, America will lead. It will lead alliances, it will lead from values, it will lead from economic strength, but most importantly, it will lead from a sense of what is possible. And as we have seen time and time again, what seemed impossible one day will seem inevitable the next. That is the calling of America in the world. And I want to thank you for what you do each and every day to help us bring together our ideas and our ideals. Thank you. (Applause.)