

Ambassador Remarks

At SMU for

National African American History

Month

Wednesday, February 24, 2016

7:00 pm.

Thank you Professor De Meyer for the warm introduction. Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests, and friends...

It is so good to be back at SMU again. This past August U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry spoke here and SMU's support for his speech was nothing short of flawless. SMU had partnered with the U.S. Embassy in Singapore on frequent occasions. Our partnership is strong and marked by deep mutual respect and affection. I always enjoy coming here.

This evening, I am delighted to be able to speak to you here at SMU about one of my favorite topics, about how diversity leads to success and prosperity. I chose the month of February to speak here because it is National African American History Month in the United States and, given that my boss is the embodiment of the talent you would be missing if you ignored groups of people,

I feel it is essential that the U.S. Embassy in Singapore share and discuss the trajectory of our African American citizens that so richly inspired the United States but, more importantly, make America stronger, wiser . . . better. This is a special month to me. But it is also a special year, as we celebrate 50 years of official relations between the U.S. and Singapore.

So it is very fitting that I speak to you about "Prosperity through Diversity" in this month, in this year and in this place, one of the world's premier business schools, Singapore Management University.

When I toured SMU, I was impressed by its commitment to inclusivity and how Singapore's top business students and faculty clearly get how it just makes good business sense to

ensure that SMU prepares its students for a future professional life that seamlessly incorporates embracing diversity into everything they do.

SMU is leading the way, for example, in enabling students with disabilities to become fully participatory members of its community. They have also fostered a community that accepts and respects all of its members, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion or sexual orientation.

It is gratifying to see that SMU links success in business with diversity. Success and prosperity are enhanced and propelled by a commitment to valuing diversity.

And I think that both Singapore and the United States are nations that have proven diversity's value in creating vibrant and successful economies and inclusive societies.

I want to set the stage for this discussion with a video we put out from the Embassy.

[EMBASSY VIDEO]

Incorporating an appreciation of diversity as a natural way to do business in any organization sometimes requires struggle and necessitates overcoming many challenges. We need to be brave and forward leaning. It often seems human nature tends to seek the safety of groups made up of similar members.

In this increasingly globalized world, thinking just like everyone else around us is a trap that ultimately leads to failure.

Positive change and successful innovation in business and in life require the risks that come with reaching out to people who are different from us and accepting that we may have to try and fail over and over again before we finally prevail.

But this is the world we live in today. And tomorrow's competitive business climate is only going to trend more towards the need to make diversity and continual innovation central to a corporate success.

## TOLERANCE VERSUS ACCEPTANCE

50 years ago, both the United States and Singapore were in the tumultuous throes of massive social change.

In the 1960s Singapore was becoming a new nation emerging from a colonial past, while the United States was embroiled in a controversial military action in Vietnam, while at the same time going through the climactic peak of its 100 year struggle to finally fully realize just and fair Civil Rights for its African American population.

Only 50 years ago in many parts of the United States someone who looks like our current U.S. President Barack Obama would not have been able to enter restaurants, theaters, schools or even bathrooms reserved for whites. Now... just think about that for a second...

(PAUSE)

A brilliant man, highly educated, morally upstanding, a good decent family man, an extraordinarily gifted leader and patriot, the leader of the United States today... and yet,

just 50 years ago he could not even drink from the same water fountain reserved for someone who looks like me.

- But we are not done.

We have come a long, long way in the past 50 years. The civil rights movement of the 1960s finally abolished those ridiculously stupid barriers of segregation. But it did far more than that. It paved the way for providing equal opportunities for so many other members of society that were not offered a fair opportunity to compete on equal footing.

As a result, women's rights took a huge leap forward. Americans with disabilities have been offered opportunities never before seen. And most recently in the U.S. same sex marriages are now legal and the U.S. Military no longer discriminates based on sexual orientation.

- But, again, we are not done.

The roots of this massive societal change come from those events of 50 years ago. And the ensuing commitment to diversity in current times has made the U.S. better, more inclusive and better positioned for future success and prosperity in a globalized world.

I believe most young people today around the world instinctively understand that discrimination holds us back and that diversity propels us forward towards more success and heightened prosperity.

But understanding that diversity causes prosperity and acting on that knowledge may be two separate things.

It takes work and steady practice to ensure that all members of our society have equal access to success and prosperity. We cannot rest on our laurels. There is still much to be done to ensure inclusivity triumphs so that diversity can continue to spark prosperity.

Citizens who are equal make a society more just, more fair.

The civil rights triumphs apply to all members of society. Offering the promise of inclusivity to all citizens is essential. It fosters mutual respect, enables effective conflict resolution, enhances business reputations, increases exposure to new and better ways of doing things and allows all members of society to be valued stakeholders in the ultimate success of a business or a nation.

Civil rights for African Americans were certainly boosted by the courageous acts of African American leaders like Rosa Parks and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. But let us not forget that many other Americans also played a key role in producing those positive changes that have benefited all of society.

We have learned that we are better together.

And we are not done.

## AMERICA #2?

Harnessing diversity to achieve prosperity and success does not come from the struggles or concerns of just one group or the other. It comes from people of different backgrounds or ethnicities reaching out to each other, from Muslims and Christians breaking bread

together, from businesses now hiring types of people who they had never hired before into positions destined for leadership.

I was part of a small group of people who accomplished something that no one would have imagined possible as little as just 10 years ago. We believed that a relatively unknown African American man named Barack Hussein Obama could become President of the United States.

We said “Yes, we can!” And, yes we did!

E N D