

## Bill Cosby “The Pound Cake Speech”

*On May 17, 2004, the NAACP staged a gala celebration at Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C. to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court Decision in Brown v. Board of Education. Comedian, actor and philanthropist Bill Cosby was asked to deliver the main address. Cosby unexpectedly used the occasion to deliver a controversial speech that profiled current African American social, economic and cultural deficiencies. His speech ignited a firestorm of protest and debate.*

Transcript provided by Bill Cosby's public relations representatives.

Ladies and gentlemen, I really have to ask you to seriously consider what you've heard, and now this is the end of the evening so to speak. I heard a prize fight manager say to his fellow who was losing badly, “David, listen to me. It's not what's he's doing to you. It's what you're not doing.” (laughter).

Ladies and gentlemen, these people set, they opened the doors, they gave us the right, and today, ladies and gentlemen, in our cities and public schools we have fifty percent drop out. In our own neighborhood, we have men in prison. No longer is a person embarrassed because they're pregnant without a husband. (clapping) No longer is a boy considered an embarrassment if he tries to run away from being the father of the unmarried child. (clapping)

Ladies and gentlemen, the lower economic and lower middle economic people are not holding their end in this deal. In the neighborhood that most of us grew up in, parenting is not going on. (clapping) In the old days, you couldn't hooky school because every drawn shade was an eye (laughing). And before your mother got off the bus and to the house, she knew exactly where you had gone, who had gone into the house, and where you got on whatever you had one and where you got it from. Parents don't know that today.

I'm talking about these people who cry when their son is standing there in an orange suit. Where were you when he was two? (clapping) Where were you when he was twelve? (clapping) Where were you when he was eighteen, and how come you don't know he had a pistol? (clapping) And where is his father, and why don't you know where he is? And why doesn't the father show up to talk to this boy?

The church is only open on Sunday. And you can't keep asking Jesus to ask doing things for you (clapping). You can't keep asking that God will find a way. God is tired of you (clapping and laughing). God was there when they won all those cases. Fifty in a row. That's where God was because these people were doing something. And God

said, "I'm going to find a way." I wasn't there when God said it. . . I'm making this up (laughter). But it sounds like what God would do (laughter).

We cannot blame white people. White people (clapping) . . . white people don't live over there. They close up the shop early. The Korean ones still don't know us as well . . . they stay open 24 hours (laughter).

I'm looking and I see a man named Kenneth Clark. He and his wife Mamie . . . Kenneth's still alive. I have to apologize to him for these people because Kenneth said it straight. He said you have to strengthen yourselves . . . and we've got to have that black doll. And everybody said it. Julian Bond said it. Dick Gregory said it. All these lawyers said it. And you wouldn't know that anybody had done a damned thing.

Fifty percent drop-out rate, I'm telling you, and people in jail, and women having children by five, six different men. Under what excuse, I want somebody to love me, and as soon as you have it, you forget to parent. Grandmother, mother, and great grandmother in the same room, raising children, and the child knows nothing about love or respect of any one of the three of them (clapping). All this child knows is "gimme, gimme, gimme." These people want to buy the friendship of a child . . . and the child couldn't care less. Those of us sitting out here who have gone on to some college or whatever we've done, we still fear our parents (clapping and laughter). And these people are not parenting. They're buying things for the kid. \$500 sneakers, for what? They won't buy or spend \$250 on *Hooked on Phonics*. (clapping)

A Kenneth Clark, somewhere in his home in upstate New York . . . just looking ahead. Thank God, he doesn't know what's going on, thank God. But these people, the ones up here in the balcony fought so hard. Looking at the incarcerated, these are not political criminals. These are people going around stealing Coca Cola. People getting shot in the back of the head over a piece of pound cake! Then we all run out and are outraged, "The cops shouldn't have shot him" What the hell was he doing with the pound cake in his hand? (laughter and clapping). I wanted a piece of pound cake just as bad as anybody else (laughter). And I looked at it and I had no money. And something called parenting said if get caught with it you're going to embarrass your mother. Not you're going to get your butt kicked. No. You're going to embarrass your mother. You're going to embarrass your family.

If knock that girl up, you're going to have to run away because it's going to be too embarrassing for your family. In the old days, a girl getting pregnant had to go down South, and then her mother would go down to get her. But the mother had the baby. I said the mother had the baby. The girl didn't have a baby. The mother had the baby in two weeks. (laughter) We are not parenting. Ladies and gentlemen, listen to these

people, they are showing you what's wrong. People putting their clothes on backwards. Isn't that a sign of something going on wrong? (laughter)

Are you not paying attention, people with their hat on backwards, pants down around the crack. Isn't that a sign of something, or are you waiting for Jesus to pull his pants up (laughter and clapping). Isn't it a sign of something when she's got her dress all the way up to the crack . . . and got all kinds of needles and things going through her body. What part of Africa did this come from? (laughter). We are not Africans. Those people are not Africans, they don't know a damned thing about Africa. With names like Shaniqua, Shaligua, Mohammed and all that crap and all of them are in jail. When we give these kinds names to our children, we give them the strength and inspiration in the meaning of those names. What's the point of giving them strong names if there is not parenting and values backing it up.

Brown vs. The Board of Education is no longer the white person's problem. We've got to take the neighborhood back (clapping). We've got to go in there. Just forget telling your child to go to the Peace Corps. It's right around the corner. (laughter) It's standing on the corner. It can't speak English. It doesn't want to speak English. I can't even talk the way these people talk. "Why you ain't where you is go, ra," I don't know who these people are. And I blamed the kid until I heard the mother talk (laughter). Then I heard the father talk. This is all in the house. You used to talk a certain way on the corner and you got into the house and switched to English. Everybody knows it's important to speak English except these knuckleheads. You can't land a plane with "why you ain't..." You can't be a doctor with that kind of crap coming out of your mouth. There is no Bible that has that kind of language. Where did these people get the idea that they're moving ahead on this. Well, they know they're not, they're just hanging out in the same place, five or six generations sitting in the projects when you're just supposed to stay there long enough to get a job and move out.

Now look, I'm telling you. It's not what they're doing to us. It's what we're not doing. Fifty percent drop out. Look, we're raising our own ingrown immigrants. These people are fighting hard to be ignorant. There's no English being spoken, and they're walking and they're angry. Oh God, they're angry and they have pistols and they shoot and they do stupid things. And after they kill somebody, they don't have a plan. Just murder somebody. Boom. Over what? A pizza? And then run to the poor cousin's house. They sit there and the cousin says "what are you doing here?" "I just killed somebody, man." "What?" "I just killed somebody, I've got to stay here." "No, you don't." "Well, give me some money, I'll go..." "Where are you going?" "North Carolina." Everybody wanted to go to North Carolina. But the police know where you're going because your cousin has a record.

Five or six different children, same woman, eight, ten different husbands or whatever, pretty soon you're going to have to have DNA cards so you can tell who you're making love to. You don't know who this is. It might be your grandmother. (laughter) I'm telling you, they're young enough. Hey, you have a baby when you're twelve. Your baby turns thirteen and has a baby, how old are you? Huh? Grandmother. By the time you're twelve, you could have sex with your grandmother, you keep those numbers coming. I'm just predicting.

I'm saying *Brown vs. Board of Education*. We've got to hit the streets, ladies and gentlemen. I'm winding up, now, no more applause. I'm saying, look at the Black Muslims. There are Black Muslims standing on the street corners and they say so forth and so on, and we're laughing at them because they have bean pies and all that, but you don't read "Black Muslim gunned down while chastising drug dealer." You don't read that. They don't shoot down Black Muslims. You understand me. Muslims tell you to get out of the neighborhood. When you want to clear your neighborhood out, first thing you do is go get the Black Muslims, bean pies and all (laughter). And your neighborhood is then clear. The police can't do it.

I'm telling you Christians, what's wrong with you? Why can't you hit the streets? Why can't you clean it out yourselves? It's our time now, ladies and gentlemen. It is our time (clapping). And I've got good news for you. It's not about money. It's about you doing something ordinarily that we do get in somebody else's business. It's time for you to not accept the language that these people are speaking, which will take them nowhere. What the hell good is *Brown vs. Board of Education* if nobody wants it?

What is it with young girls getting after some girl who wants to still remain a virgin. Who are these sick black people and where did they come from and why haven't they been parented to shut up? To go up to girls and try to get a club where "you are nobody . . ." This is a sickness ladies and gentlemen and we are not paying attention to these children. These are children. They don't know anything. They don't have anything. They're homeless people. All they know how to do is beg. And you give it to them, trying to win their friendship. And what are they good for? And then they stand there in an orange suit and you drop to your knees, "(crying sound) He didn't do anything, he didn't do anything." Yes, he did do it. And you need to have an orange suit on too (laughter, clapping).

So, ladies and gentlemen, I want to thank you for the award (big laughter) and giving me an opportunity to speak because, I mean, this is the future, and all of these people who lined up and done . . . They've got to be wondering what the hell happened. *Brown vs. Board of Education*, these people who marched and were hit in the face with rocks and punched in the face to get an education and we got these knuckleheads walking around who don't want to learn English (clapping) I know that you all know

it. I just want to get you as angry that you ought to be. When you walk around the neighborhood and you see this stuff, that stuff's not funny. These people are not funny anymore. And that's not brother. And that's not my sister. They're faking and they're dragging me way down because the state, the city and all these people have to pick up the tab on them because they don't want to accept that they have to study to get an education.

We have to begin to build in the neighborhood, have restaurants, have cleaners, have pharmacies, have real estate, have medical buildings instead of trying to rob them all. And so, ladies and gentlemen, please, Dorothy Height, where ever she's sitting, she didn't do all that stuff so that she could hear somebody say "I can't stand algebra, I can't stand . . . and "what you is." It's horrible.

Basketball players, multimillionaires can't write a paragraph. Football players, multimillionaires, can't read. Yes. Multimillionaires. Well, Brown vs. Board of Education, where are we today? It's there. They paved the way. What did we do with it. The white man, he's laughing, got to be laughing. Fifty percent drop out, rest of them in prison.

You got to tell me that if there was parenting, help me, if there was parenting, he wouldn't have picked up the Coca Cola bottle and walked out with it to get shot in the back of the head. He wouldn't have. Not if he loved his parents. And not if they were parenting! Not if the father would come home. Not if the boy hadn't dropped the sperm cell inside of the girl and the girl had said, "No, you have to come back here and be the father of this child." Not "I don't have to."

Therefore, you have the pile up of these sweet beautiful things born by nature raised by no one. Give them presents. You're raising pimps. That's what a pimp is. A pimp will act nasty to you so you have to go out and get them something. And then you bring it back and maybe he or she hugs you. And that's why pimp is so famous. They've got a drink called the "Pimp-something." You all wonder what that's about, don't you? Well, you're probably going to let Jesus figure it out for you (laughter). Well, I've got something to tell you about Jesus. When you go to the church, look at the stained glass things of Jesus. Look at them. Is Jesus smiling? Not in one picture. So, tell your friends. Let's try to do something. Let's try to make Jesus smile. Let's start parenting. Thank you, thank you (clapping, cheers)