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Thank you for that gracious introduction.

Vice-Chancellor Jansen, Deputy Vice Chancellor Dean Botes, Department Head Luwes, Acting Head Venter, other dignitaries, colleagues, friends, comrades, brothers and sisters, and you, students, the *sine qua non* of our university, of our Africa, and of the future, welcome and thank you for coming.

I must admit I am pleasantly surprised that all of you came. I know that some are required to be here. First year students, there will be an exam afterwards. That's a joke!

However, there is one person here who I knew would be. Because, for the past 43 years, she has always been there. Through struggle and trial, good times and bad, through the joy of raising four children and the pain of burying one. As my partner, most of the time, she has been by my side. But sometimes circumstances have dictated that I lead and she follow. Then she has always had my back. In our leap frog lives, sometimes she has taken the lead and has always led us in the direction of God's plan, following the fixed North Star. I will introduce her the way that Coretta Scott King, Dr King's widow, once did when calling her to the stage; "Brothers and sisters, there could be no Charles Dumas without Mrs Charles Dumas," she said. Brothers and sisters, Dr Josephine Ann Dumas.

This is my inaugural lecture, which implies that it is an introduction. But, this is my third and final year on the faculty of the university. So this is more of a farewell address, a last chance for an old man to speak to a captive audience. A chance to share a few stories, describe a journey and give a couple of opinions. My theme is:

I, too, am an African.

I am descended from the millions of Africans taken from their homeland during the slave trade. This is often forgotten by many of our brothers and sisters on the continent.

I was at conference a few years ago at the University of Accra. One of the scholars started his lecture talking about all of the Africans in the room, on the continent, and in history. He added that we must not forget those who were on the slave ships and who suffered through the middle passage. "They too were Africans," he declared. I and a few other African-American academics looked at each other. Our colleague seemed to be implying that those ancestors were Africans until

their feet touched the shores of the new world. Then somehow they became transformed into something else.

His confusion probably had to do with the disturbing fact that those African ancestors did not get on those ships by themselves. And it was not just the Europeans who put them there. Before that same trip to Ghana, Madiba's son-in-law gave me a drum.

He said, "I want to say something which you never hear in Ghana. My ancestors sold your ancestors into slavery and I want to say that I am sorry. Please take this drum, which comes from my family, as inadequate reparation and forgive me."

That drum still hangs in my kitchen. When I am home I see it every morning. It helps me remember that I am an African. My ancestors came from Africa, rode the ships through the middle passage, landed on a foreign shore and survived. They had their language taken, their religion and kinship connections erased. They were sold as chattel but they remained African

Past President Thabo Mbeki once said, "I am an African. I am born of the peoples of the continent of Africa. The pain of the violent conflict of the peoples of Liberia, Somalia, the Sudan, Burundi and Algeria is a pain I also bear. The dismal shame of poverty, suffering and human degradation of my continent is a blight that we share. The blight on our happiness that derives from this and from our drift to the periphery of the ordering of human affairs leaves us in a persistent shadow of despair. This is a savage road to which nobody should be condemned."

I, too, bare the pain of violent conflict. It is out of that conflict that my people were captured and enslaved. It is out of that shadow of despair that we, as people, had to emerge. That savage road is the one on which we as African-Americans must travel to return home. Mbeki spoke of that return when he spoke at the celebration of the re-internment of Saartjie (Sahr-kee) Baartman.

He said, "Today, the gods would be angry with us if we did not, on the banks of the Gamtoos River, at the grave of Saartjie Baartman, call out for the restoration of the dignity of Saartjie Baartman, of the Khoisan, of the millions of Africans who have known centuries of wretchedness. Saartjie Baartman should never have been transported to Europe. Saartjie Baartman should never have been robbed of her name and "re-labeled" Sarah Baartman. Saartjie Baartman should never have been stripped of her native, Khoisan and African identity and paraded in Europe as a savage monstrosity." And allow me to add no African, no human being, should have had to suffer so. But, our African- Americans ancestors did.

But, does that answer the question what is an African? The renowned African scholar, Ali Mazrui – who I had the privilege of meeting at this university a couple of years ago – said there are two types of Africans: Africans of the blood and Africans of the soil.

He said, "Africans of the blood are defined in racial and genealogical terms. They are identified with the black race. Africans of the soil are defined in geographical terms. They are identified with the African continent in nationality and ancestral location." He continued, "Most communities of enslaved Africans in the US, the Caribbean or Brazil are Africans of the blood but not of the soil"

He went on to say, “However, most African-Americans are descendants of the Middle Passage. They are not in contact with relatives in Africa, are not native speakers of any African language and are seldom socialised into African cultures.” He seems to imply that African-Americans having lost cultural contact with their people on the continent have thinned out their blood link to their Africanness.

A poet pondering the Helmsman in Marlowe’s *Heart of Darkness*, who had fought against his fellow Africans to save the Europeans wrote, “You closed our heart and open the shutter to shoot at those brothers attacking the invader’s boat. Your blood split not in battle with fierce lions or struggle to free your people, runs through the cracks of that foreign ship. But, at least, your discarded carcass found home finally in the quick moving blood stream of OUR land.”

How strange that a man who sided with colonialist, betraying his African brethren is considered by some to be an African in blood and soil. But, those ancestors who were betrayed by their fellow Africans and sold into slavery and forced into a three hundred year exile are not considered Africans of the soil or blood.

Yet, I lay claim to my ancestral birthright not just by reasoned deliberation, or blood relationship to an identifiable ethnic group, or birthright on the continent. Rather, I say I am an African because of what my friend, John Houseman used to say, “I earned it.”

I suggest another way that one is an African is through trial and struggle to be reborn an African in spirit. It is a ritual journey that may be taken by anyone. For after all, if we are to believe the anthropologists who tell us that human life began as we know it in the Olduvai Gorge, genetically we are all African in origin. But, I lay claim to an Africanness of more recent vintage. To explain, I must take you on a journey, my journey. It begins in, and is now ending in Africa.

NARRATIVE

I first came to South Africa in 1978 as an observer. In my past life as a lawyer, I had worked at Centre for Transnational Corporations at the United Nations developing a code of conduct for multinationals and a research study on the tragic effects of apartheid regulations on traditional, customary and international law. For over a month I drove through the country, from Johannesburg to Durban through old Transkei down to Cape Town and back. I talked to dozens of people and observed hundreds more. There were many stories. Let me share a few.

For the first few days I lived in Jo’burg in what was referred to as The Rand International Hotel which allowed me and a few Nigerians the “privilege” of remaining inside the city after dark as long as we didn’t leave the hotel premises. But there were still limits to our “privilege”. The first morning I woke up in South Africa I went downstairs to the restaurant right next to the hotel. It was half full. I had been standing, waiting to be seated, for about ten minutes, when one of the servers whispered to me, that the take away line was over there. He pointed to a line of Black folks, waiting patiently. They were staring at me. Probably wondering what I would do.

“Welcome to South Africa.”

I had spent many years in America, fighting against racism and segregation. So in my mind there was no question what I would do. I stood my ground and waited to be seated. For over an hour. My spontaneous “stand-in” was interrupted when the car appeared to transport me to Soweto for an interview.

I have reason to remember that encounter these days as I walk through the New South Africa. People sit, stand, drink, eat, dance, party and entertain in any club, restaurant or bar without regard to race not remembering or even being aware that a short time ago, such basic human association and interactions had been denied to a majority of the population because of their color.

The next day the car arrived to take me to Pretoria. I sat outside the main office of the Prime Minister waiting for an arranged interview which never materialized. I did see him hastily leaving for the evening through an outside corridor. Then I was told that “Prime Minister Vorster is not in.”

A few years ago in 2003, we were at the ANC convention in Stellenbosch. It was open and accessible. As State President, Thabo Mbeki was talking, Madiba came into the hall. People by the hundreds, welcomed him, celebrating, touching him, praising him, shaking his hand. He was among the people on the ground sharing in their joy. Here at the Free State a few years ago we had the opportunity to sit and converse with another Nobel Prize winner, Bishop Tutu, about the state of things in South Africa. These great men were accessible to the people. They are “in”.

After a couple of days of being chauffeured around to places I was being allowed to see, I decided I needed to be on my own. So with some difficulty I arranged to rent a car for the rest of my trip. I was now able to go places and meet other folks, all kinds of folks. I asked questions, they answered. Some were political, many were not. Most were black or so-called colored but not all. Most were against the system of apartheid. Others tried to justify apartheid based on the notion that “the Blacks are not like us.” They were implying that the indigenous Africans were a different species. Ironically enough the proponents of this wrong-headed thinking often included me, a progeny of Black Africa, in their definition of “US.” Trevor Noah often jokes that as so-called colored man he has to go to America to be Black. As a Black American, in those days, I had to come to South Africa to become one of “us”.

On one of my last nights in Jo’burg, I was returning to the City and I noticed a group of black men gathered around a fire burning in a metal garbage can. Such sights were common on the outskirts of the City in those days. I decided to stop and talk to them. As I approached a couple of them walked away eyeing me suspiciously. One of the remaining men asked me something in Afrikaans. When I replied in English, he said, “English?”

“American,” I responded

“Muhammed Ali, Martin Luther King, Andrew Young, Jesse Jackson,” he said smiling.

“Yes,” I said. Taking advantage of being placed in such august company, I told him I was in South Africa to observe what was really going on. He gripped my arm tightly, looked into my eyes sternly and said, “You look. You observe?” I nodded. “Then tell them how much we are suffering.”

A few days later I was staying with some students in Rand Coloured College for Teachers. They took me to a rock concert being held in an open field not far from the college. There were

several hundred young people, almost all nonwhites. But, there were a few groups of young, white kids walking around as if they owned the place, which come to think of it, in those days they did. One group of 6 or 7 had taken an older black man's hat and were tossing it around, "playing keep away." The old man's eyes were fixed on the ground pleading for his cap, "please, mi bossi ..." I was infuriated. In the fifties I had seen my grandmother, who worked as a domestic, have to put up with similar disrespect from white teenagers. Forgetting where I was, I walked over to the kid who had the hat and grabbed him by the shirt. Staring angrily I growled, "Give him back his hat."

The response was curious. I was ready for a fight but the kids eyes teared up with incomprehensible fear. I have seen such a look only when my children have awakened from a nightmare. He shuddered, seemingly convinced that he was about to die. It wasn't just me. He had obviously become aware that he was surrounded by many hundreds of people who did not look like him and didn't like him very much. The band was so loud that he hadn't heard me or recognized my accent. But, his friend had.

"American?" he asked.

I was having none of it.

"Give him back his hat," I growled.

With the confirmation of my foreign identity and corresponding conclusion that the Black revolution had not just spontaneously begun, the kid in my grip slipped it and returned the hat to the old man.

"We were just joking," he said as I walked away, "we love America."

When I returned to my group of Rand students, I said, "I'm sorry. I just got so mad. Why didn't you guys do something?"

David looked at me seriously. "It's the wrong time. This is not the place." He said.

I was reminded of this a few weeks ago when I went to a carnival at St Andrews High School. I saw hundreds of young people from the rainbow nation enjoying each other's company as they danced, ate, played games, listen to the same rock music (which seemed to have gotten louder over the years). They were huddling as young people do in their gender specific groups eyeing the other gendered groups. But, their groups were as racially mixed as jelly beans in a goodie bag. Some of us old folks were still carrying the baggage of old memories. But the children were busy building the new South Africa.

A week or so later I understood more of what David meant.

I was waiting at a court house with some of parents of the Soweto children. The trials from the 1976 uprising had begun. Some of the parents had not seen their children for two years. The scene was sombre as one might expect, fearful, apprehensive. No one knew what condition the children were in. As the buses carrying the children approached I could hear muffled singing. The closer the buses came, the louder and more militant, even joyous the music became. The kids were singing Struggle Songs! As they got closer the parents joined in and began to toyi-toyi. The police were perplexed and somewhat intimidated. It was at that moment that I came to understand that

these were a people that who would not long be subjugated under apartheid. I had no idea how long it would be or what road to freedom they would take, but these were a people who would struggle to be free. And it was at that moment that I also realized that I, as a conscious human being committed to justice, as an African, had to do whatever I could to help in that struggle.

There were many other stories and encounters on that first trip, too numerous to report here. But, everyone, I talked to, black or white, young and old, rich and poor, left and right were convinced that there was going to be a total armed conflict in South Africa. Pretty much as many of you are convinced that the economy or the government or the social experiment of the rainbow nation is doomed to fail. Everybody then knew there was going to be a race war. They differed as to what would be the outcome, who would win but they were convinced that there was going to be a bloodbath.

When I returned to the states, the President of the company I worked for asked me to brief him on what I had observed. Our company at the time was one of the largest technology suppliers in the world, supplying much of the essential equipment to the South African government and military. But, there was a congressionally-imposed embargo which prohibited American companies from providing such equipment to South Africa. President Carter and UN Ambassador Andrew Young were sympathetic to these anti-apartheid resolutions. The Company President was on the horns of a dilemma. He had to comply with US laws. But, what commercial impact and more importantly, what human impact would result from such compliance? Millions of dollars and thousands of jobs would be lost, by mostly non-white workers. Also companies from other countries which did not have restrictive policies would rush to fill the void. For an hour, I gave him my report, answered his questions. I suggested that as difficult as his position was, it would be in even more difficult after the transition. He was surprised.

“You think there is going to be a transition?” he asked.

“Without question,” I responded.

But, that is not the end of the story. A year or so later the Company was holding its annual meeting when 5,000 stockholders gathered to question the Board of Directors and management about company policy. I was assigned to the lawyer who oversaw the legal aspects of this ritual. A stockholder resolution had come up, which suggested that the Company consider divesting itself of its South African holdings. Normally stockholder resolutions are opposed by management as a matter of course. The South Africa resolution was presented without comment. It had no chance of passing despite this neutral posturing because management controlled over 90% of the deciding vote.

Within this same time frame a well known American civil rights activist visited South Africa. He talked to some of the same people I had spoken with. They told him that at least six major US corporations were in violation of the Congressional embargo. He was going to call a press conference and name them. One of them was my company. Among these multinationals, the practice was to sell or distribute the embargoed products to their European outlets and then the European branches would deal with the South African government and military. It was not technically illegal, since there was no direct connection between the American company and South

African entities. But, it certainly wasn't in the spirit of law. Time went on and the press conference never materialized. When I made inquiries I was told that there had been a change of heart.

Stockholders' meetings are management's most vulnerable moment, having to face thousands of people, not all of whom were friendly. As I passed the microphone to people who had questions, issues and comments, the South African stockholder resolution came up. When the CEO of the company was asked why the company wasn't divesting its South Africa interests, the CEO replied that the company abhorred apartheid and racial segregation and it was doing everything it could, within the law, to combat it.

I was stunned. I literally saw red. Mainly I saw the face of that man outside Jo'burg,

"Tell them we are suffering," he said.

The rest of my life and career hung in the balance. I was a rising corporate lawyer, one of the few Blacks to receive a Juris Doctorate from one of the top law schools in the country. In the next twenty years, three out of four Presidents of the United States, and two Supreme Courts justices would come from Yale. One of them would be a classmate. Dozens of other Yale grads would go on to attain positions of power and prestige. I had aspirations of being part of that select group. I had no intention of being a whistle blower. Lawyers are not whistle blowers. Your loyalty is to your client, no matter what.

"Tell them we are suffering," he had said. I raised the mike. Nervously identifying myself as one of the company's lawyer, then glibly and accurately I said, "At least, I will be for another five minutes." The CEO joked that this was a strange way to turn in my resignation.

"Yes, sir" I said, "But can you guarantee that all parts made by our company and sourced in the United States do not find their way to the government or military of South Africa."

With that question, with those few words, my career as a corporate international attorney was over. No one will ever trust a lawyer who turns on their client. Particularly in front of 5 000 witnesses and the press. Ironically few understood what had transpired. I had asked a question that was far too technical. Later a reporter from one of the tech magazines came over and asked if I would go on the record about what I seemed to be implying. I declined. But my boss was real clear about what had happened.

"The only reason we don't have a rule about our lawyers speaking at the annual meeting is that we never thought any would be stupid enough to do it", he said. Several of the company's lawyers spent the next week trying to figure out if my joke about not being an employee constituted a legitimate resignation. I couldn't be fired outright. It might be too great a PR exposure. I saved everybody the grief and resigned.

Something else had happened in that moment with those few words. In my heart I had come to realize that my career, my ambition, my prosperity was not the paramount reason for being on earth. In that moment, I realized, as many others had before me, that we have a higher obligation to what is right, what is good, what is true. I also realized that we were all connected on a cosmic and spiritual plane. I had experienced Ubuntu without ever having heard the word.

“Tell them we are suffering,” he had said.

Though I had failed in my attempt to ‘out’ the company’s policies by articulating a technical question in legalese, I had at least tried to do what was right. . In trying I had changed my life and its purpose forever. By risking everything for the truth, for the freedom of my people in Africa, my spirit was re-connected to and became once again African.

The epilogue to that tale. Not long after, the company did divest itself of its South African holdings by selling to its local partners. I would like to think it was because management finally saw the light. More than likely a cost benefit analysis indicated the potential exposures were too great.

I have of course, returned to Africa, particularly South Africa, many times since that company stockholder meeting. I have lived and worked in Mali, Egypt and Senegal and worked in half dozen other African countries. In Senegal, one of the last two remaining slave forts exists on Goree Island. The fort has a door through which captive African slaves would be dragged as they were taken to ships for transport. It is called the “Door of No Return”. It has become a ritual for African-Americans who have the means, to travel to Goree and pass through that door, the other way. I have taken many young people from the States to Goree including some of my children, returning them through the door of no return. I was even blessed to guide my mother through before she passed. We Africans in America have created these rituals because these things matter to us. They reform our spirits.

I was a Fulbright fellow for a year down at Stellenbosch. In addition to directing shows, I taught young people how to tell their own African stories using theatre and film techniques with the intent of bringing some of the treasures I had gathered in America home to Africa, trying to help in the construction of the world’s newest and most advanced democracy.

This is my third year at the University of The Free State. I have been blessed to work under a person who I believe is the most progressive thinker in education in the country, and one of the finest in the world, Prof. Jansen. I have been fortunate to work with people in the drama department led by Nico Luwes and Pieter Venter who have allowed me to continue to share what skills I have with students in the University and with learners from the community. I have been privileged to work with the staff at The Institute for Reconciliation and Social Justice now led by Andreas Keet. We were able to produce together OUR FATHERS DAUGHTERS at the beginning of the Reconciliation and Forgiveness Conference a couple of years ago and a dance narrative piece called RACE, RECONCILIATION AND THE REITZ 4 at the end of it. Now we are in the second year of the Easter Project, which sends professional theatre folks into high schools to help learners create, write and perform their own stories. At the conclusion of this lecture you may stay to watch a video from that project. You will see 11th grade learners telling their own stories through theatre.

I am proud of my work in Africa. I am most proud of the work that I have done with my fellow Africans. It is clear to me that though the naysayers and negatives seem to have the ears of the populace, it is those who roll up their sleeves and keep struggling to build the new nation who holds the hearts of the people. I have come to learn that this generation, this one now, is the most important. Committed to learning about each other and from each other, with their hopes and aspirations they earnestly desire to live in the new South Africa that we promised them. We must support them in their efforts. It’s time we stored our old baggage in the closet.

I am tired of hearing about how bad things are. If you think things are bad now then you weren't here before. If you really think things are bad, then as an elder I say to you, get up and make them better. If you are Xhosa, Zulu, Sesotho, find yourself a purpose for which to fight for like Madiba did when he stood in the docket, on trial for his life and declared, "I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to see realised. But if needs be, my lord, it is an ideal for which I am ready to die." If you are an Afrikaner, then be a true Afrikaner patriot like Bram Fischer and fight to support every people's right to self-determination and freedom. If you are an artist, use your talents to entertain and make a living but while doing it don't forget to teach, to share, to tell the true and full African story like Hugh Masekela, Mariam Makeba, Fugard, Paton, Nadine Gordimer, John Kani and countless others. If you call yourself a political activist, get off your high horse and out of your Maseretti and have the courage to speak truth to power like Denis Goldberg, who keeps on keeping on. And do not let your youth be an excuse for disgruntled pessimism. Consider the sacrifice of the Soweto Children who sang in the buses on their way to jail.

In conclusion let me return to something else that past President Mbeki said in his closing at the ceremony for Saartjie Baartman. Ironically he quoted an African-American, when he said, "Fellow South Africans, thank you for coming to this important day and occasion in our national life. The mortal remains of Saartjie Baartman lie beside the Gamtoos River. Another African who lived in the Diaspora, this time in the United States of America, his forebears having been transported out of Africa as slaves, sang of rivers. This is the great African-American poet, Langston Hughes, who sang:

"I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went

down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers."

He concluded with, "May the soul of Sarah Baartman grow deep like the rivers".

And here I would add - May the souls of all Africans, lost and found in the diaspora, grow deep like the rivers. May the Africans betrayed and sold as chattel to foreigners, torn from their

motherland by the savage system of oppression called slavery, reduced in the eyes of the world to little more than beasts, exploited as labor, bred like cattle, may their souls grow deep like the rivers.

I call for the restoration of THEIR dignity, For those millions of Africans who have known centuries of wretchedness. For those who should never have been transported out of their homeland. For those who should never have been robbed of their names and re-labelled with the names of their property owners. For those Africans who should never have been stripped of their native, African identities and paraded in the new world as savage monstrosities, may their souls deepen like the rivers.

Yet somehow through it all, those diasporic Africans, wretched in the eyes of the world, drew on their ancestral spirits, embraced their conscious and unconscious memories of beloved Africa, and found the strength to survive. Found the hope to keep the dream of liberation alive. Rekindled their love and brought new life into the world, nurture it, and raised their children with a sense of hope in a seeming hopeless situation. They learned to read and write and even think in a new language when theirs was ripped from their throats. They kept their eyes and voices fixed on a God who seemed to have forgotten them. Yet they stood like the tree planted by the river's edge repeating to themselves - we will get freedom by and by.

Then these people, these glorious people began to do more than survive. With the help of a reawakened God and other lovers of freedom they began to thrive. What they did not know- they self taught themselves. What they needed they created. Treated as chattel they learned to be citizens. Thought of as beasts of burden, they learned to be artists, and composers and writers and actors. Drawing upon their internalized tradition of griots and sangomas they learned to re-tell their own stories and transformed the world with their spirit and shouts of freedom. They remembered the toyi-toyi and created bebop. They turned the crooning soulful sounds of Sophiatown into Motown, giving the world R & B.

Yes I say let us celebrate the return of our sister, Saartjie Baartman, But, let's also take a moment to celebrate these other diasporic people, these African people, and say welcome home. For whether it be by ancestry, by blood, soil, or spirit or through some unknown manifestation of divine transcendence – We, too, are African. Amandla – Thank you.