

Harold Burson

Anti-Defamation League
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Ladies, Gentlemen,
My Friends from Many Places and Multiple Incarnations:

The text of my message tonight is from one of the great poets of the 20th Century
-- Oscar Hammerstein II.

"You've Got to be Carefully Taught"

*You've got to be taught
To hate and fear,
You've got to be taught
From year to year,
It's got to be drummed
In your dear little ear
You've got to be carefully taught.*

*You've got to be taught to be afraid
Of people whose eyes are oddly made,
And people whose skin is a diff'rent shade,
You've got to be carefully taught.*

*You've got to be taught before it's too late.
Before you are six or seven or eight,
To hate all the people your relatives hate,
You've got to be carefully taught!*

SOUTH PACIFIC. Words by Oscar Hammerstein II. Music by Richard Rogers.
Opening night, Broadway, April 7, 1949. Based on the book by James Mitchener,
"Tales of the South Pacific."

And, shame on all of us, a problem as relevant today as it was a half century ago.

(pause)

I am here tonight not because I wanted to be honored. I consider myself sufficiently honored on awakening every day, knowing that I have had a part in creating jobs and careers for 2200-plus people in 35 countries on five continents.

I consider myself honored in knowing that literally thousands of others, former associates at Burson-Marsteller, owe some portion of their success to the lessons learned in an organization that I had a part in birthing and nurturing.

I consider myself honored in knowing that the firm that bears my name is working with the world's greatest corporations and other world class institutions in bringing about a better understanding with their numerous disparate publics.

(pause)

The truth is, I am here tonight because I want to honor Abe Foxman and all those at the Anti-Defamation League who follow his charismatic and purposeful leadership. They are the heroes. We, individually and collectively, to one degree or another, at one time or another, are the beneficiaries of their commitment and their resolve to foster greater tolerance among the peoples of the world.

In the wake of a new millennium, we talk idealistically of a world at peace, a civilization that has put humans on the Moon and near-human scientific instruments on Mars. We stand on the brink of cures for cancer, even as we foresee the day when diseases will be treated before they even start.

But we cannot escape the reality that we live in a world and at a time when hate abounds. In a macro sense, we have never had fewer major threats to peace. But in a micro sense, hate and bigotry are at a historical peak. What we euphemistically describe as "ethnic pride" has replaced the coming-together goals of the "melting pot." Terrorism and wars are carried on in the name of religion. What constitutes "patriotism" is causing sharp schisms even among a people dedicated to the proposition that "they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

At its mildest, incivility has become the norm for persons of opposite points of view. At its worst, thousands of people find themselves homeless, many injured or maimed, with hungers that will not soon be satisfied, deprived of shelter and devoid of warmth, no longer capable of either hope or faith.

In the face of diminished confidence in government institutions and solutions, we -- those of us who care -- look to organizations like the Anti-Defamation League and to people like Abe Foxman not only to alert us to the dangers of division but to energize us as citizens to lead the way to some resolution of what the Nuremberg prosecutors called "crimes against humanity."

My faith in the right-minded people of the world is without bounds. I believe strongly, after a lifetime of studying public opinion, that in most countries, the collective judgment of the total body politic is sound. It is middle-of-the-road, seldom totally polarized or unreasonably extreme. The problem is either to get people to care enough to express themselves or to remove the shackles that prevent them from expressing themselves.

Solving those problems is for another day. But I have faith that if it can be done, that you, Abe Foxman and the ADL, will play a large role in doing it.

(pause)

In closing, let me express my heartfelt thanks to each of you who are here tonight. Having attended more dinners that "honor" men and women of so-described extraordinary accomplishment than I care to remember, I appreciate your sacrifice. At least, I tried to make it easier by insisting on business attire and demanding a brief agenda.

Foremost, I want to express my thanks to a family that has been loving and caring and supportive and responsible as individuals and as members of the greater society. To my wife, Bette, who has shared the journey with me, come tomorrow, for 51 years, I am most thankful. Not only has she borne the burden of humoring me for more than half a century, she had thrust upon her the dual role of caring for our family during the growing up of our two sons and supporting me throughout the growing up of Burson-Marsteller. With great distinction, she has also been the principal caretaker of our three (serially) West Highland White Terriers, a task I regard, as you know, as demanding and of "above and beyond" trust and responsibility.

Our two sons are here and I thank them for their understanding and support, especially during those years of their childhood when my travels frequently took me to Europe one month and to Asia the next, and to Chicago and Washington and the West Coast in between. There's Scott, an attorney for the National Labor Relations Board in Boston and a strong believer in primogeniture and, therefore, the family spokesperson at this dinner. And there's Mark, who traveled from Simi Valley in California to be here. Mark is executive director of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation after twelve years with Burson-Marsteller in Los Angeles. He enrolled at the University of Southern California in 1973 and went native three weeks later.

Both of our sons were born on May 28, which shows what creatures of habit his parents are (or were) and also that we once had great company picnics in August. Our two sons make me very proud to be a father. They were of the boomer generation that coped with the Vietnam War and with the growth of the drug culture. The way they have comported themselves, then and now, leaves their Mother and me with a strong sense of accomplishment.

My sister, Bettye, is here from Memphis. My cousin, Charles Burson, counsel to Vice President Al Gore and former attorney general of Tennessee, is here from Washington.

Next, I am most grateful to the chief executive officers of four Burson-Marsteller clients with whom I have had close relationships and who agreed to be co-chairmen for this event. Geoff Bible of Philip Morris, Chad Holliday of DuPont, Doug Ivester of Coca-Cola and David Komansky of Merrill Lynch. Geoff and Chad do me great honor in being here. Who would have thought that a poor country boy from Memphis, Tennessee, who worked his way through the University of Mississippi, would have ever ended up in that kind of company.

I want to take cognizance of and express my gratitude to the several thousand Burson-Marsteller men and women whose achievements have reflected so favorably on me.

And I especially want to thank the clients of Burson-Marsteller who entrusted me and my associates to work alongside them. A number are here tonight and I thank each and every one of you. You have given my life meaning and purpose and a sense of accomplishment and belonging.

I want to recognize three other people who have been and continue to be important in my life. The first is my physician, Dr. Marianne Legato. Her mission is to keep me healthy -- and so far, her record has been impeccable. I keep reminding her that if she fails in her mission, she loses a good patient. Marianne is a caring and close friend.

Next is my long-time associate Elias "Buck" Buchwald who joined me in 1951. His influence on Burson-Marsteller has been enormous. Our culture reflects his high standards of professionalism, his integrity and his uncompromising commitment to excellence. Buck is here with his wife Gloria.

And, there's my "assistant" which, for you old timers, translates into secretary -- but on the advice of counsel, I use "assistant" in order to avoid a sexual discrimination suit. Diana Ross has been with Burson-Marsteller 25 years and with me for 14. Every place I go, the first question I usually get is "how is Diana." She's the only person I know who can cancel a lunch or dinner date three times and make you think she's doing you a favor. She's here with her husband, Livingston.

The evening would not be complete without my paying tribute to the person who's hounded me the better part of ten years to participate in a dinner like this. He's Hy Friedman and, to me, he's a great unsung hero. Hy and I share the experience of having visited Normandy in 1944. I got there as a soldier in an engineer combat group a couple of months after D-Day. Hy got there six hours before D-Day started. He jumped with the 82nd Airborne Division. That, based on what I have seen first-hand, makes one a hero in every sense of the word.

Finally, my thanks to my associate of eight years, Tom Bell. Tom, until recently, was one of my successors as Chief Executive Officer of Burson-Marsteller. A few weeks ago, he was named Chairman and CEO of Y&R Advertising. Tom is a great executive, but he has been an even greater friend. And he certainly proved it tonight!

Once more, my thanks to each and every one of you for being here tonight.

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