[MS-0436.005.009.010]

THE BLACK EXPERIENCE

I want to talk today about an experience - a black experience. An experience that has traveled four hundred years, from the time our ancestors were stolen from the rich lands of Africa and brought to this country in chains as slaves, to the dedication of Martin Luther King Memorial Park in York, Pa. What an experience! The whole world knows about us. They know us and our experience. They know us as a formidable people - who fought our way out of slavery as witnessed by the slave "uprisings", were really "freedom fighters". From slavery to the mightiest group of Black people in the world. We have defied the most powerful military nation in the world, who fried its best to destroy us - if not physically than psychologically. Although the war is not over and this country has not given up on racism, we are to be commended for our victories.

Now - here in 1970, we are honoring ourselves - through one of our leaders who gave his life to achieve a better life for us. What a way to die! If they can print the words "Give me liberty, or give me death", then one day I know, history, at least world history, will print the words, "I know of no better way of dying than to die fighting for my people".

This is a proud day. It is symbolic of the pride that Black people have, have always had, and will fight to keep. It took us a long time to use the world Black to describe ourselves but we have just about made it. The acceptance of that word Black, alone is symbolic of the victory against the people who tried to destroy us, because they are the ones who taught us to hate the word Black when referring to ourselves. But with victory comes rejoicing. And we can rejoice at this occasion and give honor to our dead heroes and our living heroes. And we can look forward as our experience continues, to seeing a beautiful day - a Black day. A day when Black people will be looked upon by the world as the mightiest warriors of them all. They will have to say this because we will have fought the greatest battles of mankind. From the clanking chains of slavery, through the hot sun of the cotton and sugar plantations, and up through the ghettoes, to claim the crown that we so justly deserve. And we shall do this through love and respect for each other, through educating our minds to compete with the best minds of the world, and through the adceptance of all people.

The Black experience - no matter how hard it gets sometimes - is a wonderful experience - a beautiful experience. And I wouldn't want to be anything else. For I would rather be oppressed than an oppressor. I would rather be killed than be a killer, and I would rather starve than starve children.

So mothers and fathers - sisters and brothers, and wonderful guests who have the faith and confidence in our cause, I thank you for the privilegte of speaking to you today. And as they say in the African country that I love so dearly, hlotso! pula! nala ! Peace, rain and plenty.