

Ernest A. Logan, AFSA Speech 2018

Brothers and Sisters

Thank you for putting your faith in me to lead this great organization for the next three years. Together we can take AFSA to the forefront in being the National Voice for PUBLIC EDUCATION and the workers we represent and the families and children we educate.

I am honored and humbled to stand before you today guided by the spirit of Diann Woodard. She would have cherished the opportunity to be with all of us in our nation's capital, facing down those who challenge the right of every child to a public education. She would have confronted them with her quiet grace and her nerves of steel. You all know what I mean. No one ever embodied this expression better than Diann did: "An iron fist in a velvet glove."

Diann would have cherished the meaningfulness of us gathering together yesterday at the American Museum of African American History, on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King's death. I think of Dr. King's words: "No one really knows why they are alive until they know what they'd die for."

Diann knew why she was alive. Diann lived and died in the service of public education. She was very sick and very tired, but she didn't stop fighting for us, her union brothers and sisters . . . and she didn't stop fighting for all children to get a quality education. . . . She didn't stop fighting until the moment she literally ran out of life.

Diann, every word I say today, I dedicate to you.

AFSA's 15<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Convention couldn't be more important than it is at this moment. Belonging to AFSA couldn't be more urgent and meaningful. We are in a bad environment for public education. We are school leaders, a great thing to be, but now we can be even more. We can be the leaders of public education itself – the spokespeople, the advocates, the saviors who say, “No, you're not going to deny our children the right to a free quality public education.”

And we should be the saviors! We should become one of the dominant forces in defense of public education. AFSA and our locals can dedicate ourselves to reminding America that every child has the right to a quality

education and that the survival of our democracy depends on this. That's right: the survival of democracy depends on this.

Are you ready? Are you ready to become that voice for our children and our democracy?

It won't be easy. If you've been listening to the President, his Secretary of Education and the Supreme Court, you know our public schools are in peril. With their words, they hint that public schools might really not be so important. . . . Maybe public schools aren't so good for the country. . . . Maybe there shouldn't be such a thing as "separation of church and state" and maybe religious schools should be supported by our taxes at least as much as public schools. And maybe, just maybe, getting a quality public education isn't even a constitutional right.

The President has said, "Our public schools have grown up in a competition-free zone, surrounded by a very high union wall. Why aren't we shocked at the results?" He suggests that all public schools are failures and proposes to shift funding from public schools to private schools through voucher programs.

Of course, voucher schools directly take money from public schools and do not improve opportunities for disadvantaged children and are largely unaccountable to the public. And he vowed to pick his Education Secretary from a roster of pro-privatization candidates. And he sure delivered on that promise! He sure did!

He hand-picked Betsy DeVos to carry out his vision. It's no exaggeration to say that every AFSA member in this room is more qualified to be the U.S. Secretary of Education than Betsy DeVos is! DeVos has zero experience in the classroom or in any area of public education.

She's qualified for only one thing: to be a privatizer. She spent millions of dollars of personal wealth to try to dismantle public education in her home state of Michigan. Her stated goal is to do the same on the national level – divert funding from public schools to charter and private schools. She has declared public schools to be a “dead end.”

Now, we also have a Supreme Court whose vested interest is in de-unionizing teachers and school leaders and the rest of the American work

force. In the Janus vs. AFSCME case, the Court recently capitulated to a well-funded corporate attack by groups with names like “The Right to Work Foundation.” Well, it should really be called “The Right to Work for Less Foundation”! I’ll get to that in a few minutes.

These are extreme right-wing groups who mean to silence the collective voice of unions. And that’s not because they love the little guy and gal.

You already know that this disastrous Janus ruling means that non-union workers can’t be compelled to pay their “Fair Share” of union dues, but they can still reap the benefits of collective bargaining and union representation. This kind of court-approved freeloading is meant to empty union coffers until we have to shut our doors. The hope is that we will lose our ability to improve working conditions and wages for our people. This way, the very few at the top can get even richer than they already are.

Look out, folks, with the Supreme Court about to swing even further right, it is not impossible that the constitutional right to a quality education for all will be challenged and declared unconstitutional. Do you think I’m exaggerating?

On June 29, we saw a Michigan Federal District Court judge rule that a “minimally adequate education” was **not** a fundamental American right.

What do we think will happen if this case makes it all the way to the Trump Supreme Court? What are the odds that the “Supremes” will recognize a “minimally adequate education” as a fundamental right?

Under a court like this one, you, as educators, might eventually lose your means of livelihood. But if public schools deteriorate and disappear, no one will suffer more than ordinary children – the ones who aren’t wealthy, and especially African American and Latino children.

We’re in the battle of our lives! Because of the power of their office, the president, Secretary of Education and the Supreme Court have all the odds in their favor when it comes to an anti-public school agenda. But we have to beat the odds! We’re strong people with strong personalities and loud voices; we wouldn’t be principals, assistant principals, school supervisors and central office administrators unless we weren’t so loud and strong-willed. We are fierce warriors !

- We are warriors and that's why we're here in Washington.
- That's why we belong to AFSA.
- That's why we belong to our locals.
- That's why we have such strong bonds with NAESP and NASSP, and AASA (American Association of School Administrators).
- And that's why we will also stand with the teachers' unions, trade unions and the entire AFLCIO as a united front.
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AFSA and all these groups have to speak up and speak out with one voice.

Let's use our united voice here in the nation's capital where we have our headquarters – here in the heart of the action.

But let's also be warriors in our towns and districts and speak out against every local effort to privatize our community's schools, siphon funding to private schools, and undermine educational equity. Let's win friends in our

communities and get them to do battle with us. Start with the parents. They love their schools.

Remember, my brothers and sisters, we also have the proud history of unionism to make us stronger. AFSA members are highly educated and know their history. Not only did unions bring about the 40-hour work week, the concept of weekends and the end to child labor . . . Wait! Stop!

Stop! Remember, in May, many newspapers, including the conservative *New York Post*, reported that the Trump administration's Department of Labor intends to relax current child labor rule. For one thing, they intend to roll back the laws that prevent 16- and 17-year-olds from toiling for long hours in hazardous workplaces. For another they intend to roll back the law that provides these kids with intensive training for dangerous jobs!

We also know the history of what happens when unions are devastated by the Right to Work movement, which is funded by people like the Koch Brothers and others of their ilk. We know what happened when Scott Walker's campaign succeeded in breaking the Wisconsin teacher's union



four years ago. Salaries went down by nearly 3%, the cost of benefits went up by 21%, and teachers moved to other states and retired in droves.

“Right to Work” is just an obscene phrase that has nothing to do with your right to work. The visionary Dr. Martin Luther King spelled that out as long ago as 1961, when he said, “Right to work laws aren’t about the right to work but about working for less. . . In our glorious fight for civil rights, we must guard against false slogans like ‘right to work’. It is a law to rob us of our civil rights and job rights.”

If you get discouraged about our power to save our labor unions and our right to collectively bargain for better wages and working conditions, take heart! Four years after Wisconsin, teachers from the most conservative states in the union suddenly banded together, organized and said, “Not us! You’re not going to defeat us!”

The first of this new crop of teachers -- mostly Republicans and Independents-- walked out in West Virginia. Then the protests spread like wildfire across Arizona, Colorado, Kentucky and Oklahoma. They were Republicans, Independents, Democrats and women, and they fought to

bring their salaries up to the national average, save their benefits and increase per student spending. Some were unionized and others unionized themselves. And they won!

I know you felt solidarity with them. We take it for granted in the day to day, but we know we've fought hard through our union to win salaries and benefits that put us securely into the highest level of the middle class and allowed us to live the good life.

Frankly, if we stand together both as unionists and as educators, I don't see how we can lose the battle to preserve and protect public education. By and large, families love our schools and they are going to stand with us. We've come very close to the precipice, but we haven't fallen over the edge.

How did we get so close to the edge? How did this country get so dangerously divided? At the root, we would say, are loss of manufacturing jobs and globalization, wage stagnation for millions who aren't protected by unions, and an endless war in the Middle East. But we have also reached

the edge because we failed to teach generations of children how to understand these forces, cope with them, and overcome them.

We put Citizenship and History on the back burner in our schools. It is past time that everyone in this room, and AFSA as a whole, calls upon each and every school in the nation to restore History and Citizenship – or call it Government – to the top of the curriculum.

Students have to understand the Constitution and how it establishes our basic rights. They must be taught the rights they are guaranteed under the Bill of Rights and what the Declaration of Independence says about despots and tyrants. They need to know what the electoral college is and how a candidate can become president without winning the popular vote. They have to understand the Separation of Powers and how democracy can die if the three separate branches of government act as if they are only one branch.

For most Americans from the Baby Boom, Generation X, Millennials it's hard to imagine what I'm going to say right now. But you are educators who have communicated with children year after year and you already

know that what I'm going to say is true. I'm going to say that there are plenty of young people who have no idea what the Holocaust, Soviet Communism, Slavery and Jim Crow were. They sure don't know what the labor movement was.

Think about it, brothers and sisters, when these historical realities fade from the public mind, the crazies come creeping out: the holocaust deniers and the slavery revisionists. Without a grasp of even our recent history, young Americans don't know that there are deadly precedents for proposing that Muslim-Americans carry identity cards and the reality that Latino children are torn from their parents and incarcerated in far-flung detention centers. But they should know there are precedents. They should know about the Native American genocide, and the 1940s and what happened to Japanese Americans in this country and to Jews around the world. They would be more vigilant if they knew!

We have been doing a lousy job of educating our children along these lines and we are living with the legacy of that failure right now. Because what is real education? Let's call upon Dr. Martin Luther King again for our answer. Long before his death 50 years ago -- when he was an extremely young

man in 1947 -- he said, "To save man from the morass of propaganda, in my opinion, is one of the chief aims of education. Education must enable one to sift and weigh evidence, to discern the true from the false, the real from the unreal, and the facts from the fiction."

Today, I call upon each and every one of us, and I call upon AFSA as a strong union, to launch a campaign to restore a civic education curriculum to our schools. The next generation of voters – and leaders – is sitting in our classrooms. It's up to us to prepare them to want to vote and to vote from a place of knowledge. They have that right no matter what their religion, race or ethnicity.

Since 1976, AFSA has been affiliated with the great AFL-CIO, and has been united in the mission to fight for the interests of all its members and for quality public schools for children from all backgrounds. Today, I've asked of all of you to strengthen our mission by helping AFSA become one of the nation's dominant forces in sticking up for public education in order to preserve our democracy. And I've also asked you to launch a campaign to restore a civic education to our schools. That is the second part of the effort to preserve our democracy.

As Diann Woodard said if we never give into division and disunity, never surrender our solidarity, then “we can suffer thru the slings and arrows fired our way, with our heads held high.”

Let’s go out there! Let’s do it! I’m fired up! I have faith! What right do I have to despair? The great ones never despaired. On this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death, Martin Luther King still speaks to us. Listen to him! Hear him say, “We’ve got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn’t matter with me now because I’ve been to the mountaintop . . . I’ve looked over and I’ve seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the promised land.”

Thank you, brothers and sisters, thank you.