Thank you very much, its a privilege to be here at this session celebrating America's freedom decision. Throughout the United States the celebration of the Brown decision is catching on. Earlier this year I was in Colorado participating in a session similar to this sponsored by the University of Colorado law school. Indeed the Brown decision is probably one of America's most momentous Supreme Court decisions and the reason why it is catching on is because it was a decision that freed whites as well as blacks and so there is reason for all to celebrate. We cannot understand the Brown decision unless we look at it as part of a social movement and social movements are the efforts of a large number of people to deal with the problem which they feel they have in common. Thus social movements are neither controlled nor directed by any single individual. The authority and the purpose of social movements emerge from the people. No single individual therefore can be cited with having initiated or brought to conclusion the civil rights movement. It is a movement and movements involve a large number of individuals. In order to get an understanding of what is happening, it it important to look at movements in terms of their various stages. I have found throughout the United States many people have become cynical saying that nothing has happened because they think that as soon as the supreme court decision was made the movement was over. That was only the end of the first stage of the movement. As a sociologist, I see the Civil Rights movement in its modern incarnation as starting probably in 1930. Between 1930 and 1954 was the period of litigation. Some people established probably the first victory in this period of litigation as 1938 in the Missouri ExRail Gains vs. Canada decision which declared that the State of Missouri could not maintain a law school for white students and send its black student out of state to receive an education. I grew up in Texas and they used to do the same thing there in Texas. When I was getting my doctor's degree I could not go to the University of Texas. I went to Syracuse University. I don't know if other
Speech by Charles Willie
Delivered at Rhode Island College, Providence, Rhode Island
May 2, 1984 as part of a Commemorative Conference: Brown V. Board of Education of Topeka

Thank you very much, it's a privilege to be here at this session celebrating America's freedom decision. Throughout the United States the celebration of the Brown decision is catching on. Earlier this year I was in Colorado participating in a session similar to this sponsored by the University of Colorado law school. Indeed the Brown decision is probably one of America's most momentous Supreme Court decisions and the reason why it is catching on is because it was a decision that freed whites as well as blacks and so there is reason for all to celebrate. We cannot understand the Brown decision unless we look at it as part of a social movement and social movements are the efforts of a large number of people to deal with the problem which they feel they have in common. Thus social movements are neither controlled nor directed by any single individual. The authority and the purpose of social movements emerge from the people. No single individual therefore can be cited with having initiated or brought to conclusion the civil rights movement. It is a movement and movements involve a large number of individuals. In order to get an understanding of what is happening, it is important to look at movements in terms of their various stages. I have found throughout the United States many people have become cynical saying that nothing has happened because they think that as soon as the supreme court decision was made the movement was over. That was only the end of the first stage of the movement. As a sociologist, I see the Civil Rights movement in its modern incarnation as starting probably in 1930. Between 1930 and 1954 was the period of litigation. Some people established probably the first victory in this period of litigation as 1938 in the Missouri ExRail Gains vs. Canada decision which declared that the State of Missouri could not maintain a law school for white students and send its black student out of state to receive an education. I grew up in Texas and they used to do the same thing there in Texas. When I was getting my doctor's degree I could not go to the University of Texas. I went to Syracuse University. I don't know if other
Texans wish they were Black now, but I had to go there and Texas as a State had to pay the difference between the University of Texas's tuition and Syracuse University's tuition. I will tell you a story; Texas didn't do that in the beginning. I went to Syracuse in 1949 and it wasn't until 1954 after the Brown decision that Texas paid the actual difference. Up until that time Texas used to send me $100 check each year to cover my expenses at Syracuse and then they considered it was all right. I will tell you a little story. I shouldn't tell you this story to begin with. I should tell you that to wake you up near the end, but I'll tell you a story. After the Brown decision, I still was in school because my degree was not awarded until 1957 and so I wanted to come home. After all you can't send me away from Texas for good, and I reasoned that I was travelling at State expense and travelling at State expense you couldn't ask me to sit up all night on the chair car that I did when I was travelling at family expense. So I wrote to Texas, and this was in the early days when flying was not popular and said, "I want to fly from Syracuse to Dallas," and flying in those days had a certain status connected to it. The Texas Educational Authority said no you can't fly. I said well then if I can't fly, you are going to have to pay pullman fare, and pullman fare was as expensive or more expensive in those days than flying, and so the State of Texas paid pullman fare for me to go from Syracuse back to Dallas rather than pay a plane fare for me. I have lived through these ages and therefore can see what has happened. Now I don't have to bargain with whether I can fly or not they just make me drive down from Boston to Rhode Island. But the point I want to make is that this is part of a movement. I called stage one in that movement the stage of litigation and it existed from 1930 to 1954. Some people have identified the major court decision in that stage as the Missouri case which was 1938. Judge William Hasty prefers to date it two years earlier in 1936. That was the case of Pierson vs. Murray. It was a case in Maryland only, and that's why some people are inclined to use the 1938 date rather the 1936 date. But at any rate, this
was the period when there began to be a breakthrough in the litigation stage and from 1936, 1938 on most of the decisions were rendered in favor of the black plaintiffs who brought cases to the Supreme Court demonstrating that separate was not equal. Stage one came to an end in 1954, May 17, with the Brown decision. I might add, however, that immediately losses began to set in. As I look at the situation, the plaintiffs won Brown one in 1954, and the defendants won Brown two in 1955 and that has been happening throughout the United States. Brown two fashioned a remedy for Blacks whose grievance was affirmed in Brown one, and Brown two started compromising. Brown two said that you could take into consideration the public interest. Now I never knew that public interest and personal rights were equal and yet the Supreme Court made that compromise. The Supreme Court also said that you could move at deliberate speed, and I always heard that justice delayed was justice denied, so it had compromised in that respect. Then the Supreme Court said finally, that the Board of Education is the educational authority, and it ought to have responsibility to fashion a plan to redress the grievances of blacks. Now listen to that; let me tell you a Brer Rabbit story. Thats almost like saying Fox, you got caught stealing chickens, I want you to note that I was not sexist I didn't say stealing hens. I said Fox, you got caught stealing chickens. Stealing chickens in this instance was running a segregated school system, and then the court said Fox, you are guilty and now I want you Mr. Fox to develop a plan to secure the chicken house. It doesn't make sense, does it? And throughout the United States, the Fox has been making plans that favors the fox. Most of the plans to redress the grievances of blacks have been plans that have been designed to be least offensive to whites. I don't understand it. If whites want a school desegregation plan that is not offensive to them, they ought to stay out of court. If you go to the School Board, you can bargain, because that is an administrative agency, but when you go to court, you go to court when people can't arrive at a solution and a compromise outside and when you go to court you win or lose. And I want
you to know something because many of you don't know it. In the Brown decision the Blacks won and the Whites lost. I want you to realize that. So no school desegregation plan is supposed to be a plan that is least offensive to whites. All school desegregation plans are supposed to be plans that put Blacks in the place they would be if they never had been discriminated against. That's what law is. I am a believer in law and order, and the Constitution says that when you can't solve problems outside of court you go into court and if you lose you got to make up for those who won. And that's what happened in the Brown decision. Yet most of the plans have been made by whites, middle-age whites, male whites, and the plaintiffs have been blacks and young blacks. I don't understand how middle-age male whites know what is good for youth and children who are black. I just don't understand. Something is wrong someplace. I have suggested that the major civil rights organizations in this nation ought to be about the business of finding foundation funds and commissioning series of black scholars to put together model school desegregation plans so that the grievances of black children can be redressed. Now I want some white consultants in my group, because I believe in diversity, but I think that the major responsibility for developing plans to redress the grievances of those whose grievances were affirmed has to come from the people who suffer. I would be amiss if I go to South Africa today and say I have a plan South Africans for you to overcome the oppression in South Africa. I don't stand to suffer if my plan goes wrong. I can go back to the United States and suffer some but not what they will suffer in South Africa. The people in South Africa should devise the plan that is appropriate for redressing the grievances; that has been one of the great limitations of the Brown decision. The plaintiffs won the liability phase which was Brown 1954 and lost the remedy phase which was Brown 1955. Now of course all has not been lost because what happened was Brown one brought to an end the litigation phase, the major part of the litigation phase, there has been litigation since but it has been refining the issue. It brought to an end the
major litigation phase, but that was the end of the first stage of the civil rights movement. The second stage I have called the legislation stage, and the legislation stage extended from (Strike that) The second stage is the demonstration stage. The demonstration stage is the demonstration stage. The demonstration stage lasted from 1955 to 1964. Now I will tell you why we have the demonstration stage. You don't always have to have the demonstration stage. The reason why we had the demonstration stage is because blacks used a positive approach then went into the courts. We said that this was a constitutional democracy and blacks used a positive approach, they went into the court. The courts found in favor of blacks. Since whites lost, then whites should have used the positive approach and should have abided by the law. But you read the southern manifesto, it said they were not going to abide, they were going to use every means possible to avoid the Supreme Court decision including its position so whites used the negative response to the positive response of the Supreme Court and nothing was left for Blacks to do then but to use a negative response to the negative response of Whites and that's when the demonstration stage came into being. The demonstration stage as you know the school desegregation issue was related to an issue that had nothing to do with schools, the 1896 Plessy versus Ferguson issue had to do with common carriers, and so the demonstration stage started out with something not having to do with schools, but having to do with common carriers. It was the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955 that started off the demonstration stage and it started growing and growing and growing throughout the United States. As many of you know one of great leaders of the demonstration stage not only was Martin Luther King, Jr. but George Wiley who came from this State. So the demonstration stage carried on from 1955 up until the 1964. 1964, as you know, was the year after 1963, and you know what happened in 1963. We have to be simple on some of these things. You know what happened in 1963. That was the great march on Washington. So in 1963 after the great march on Washington which was one of the greatest demonstrations this nation has ever seen, we got a holiday where Martin Luther King, Jr. was participating without calling it a
holiday. They all came to Washington and all of the civil servants went home. Washington offices closed down August 28, 1963, and after that great demonstration President Johnson said, this Country is about to come unloose at the seams. Let me tell you what Blacks were doing then because most people think Blacks are without power and I've got to tell you a secret, everybody has power. If you dominant people of power, you have power to implement, but if you are sub-dominant people of power, you have power to veto. Most sub-dominants don't realize they have power to veto. What the Blacks did and some Whites August 28, 1963, was they exercised their veto power which is a legitimate power of subdominance. They said you will not be able to run the United States as you have always run it before unless you count us in and we are going to prove it to you because we are going to close down the Capitol and they did. Lyndon Johnson, being a wise man from Texas, understood that Blacks meant business. If he had been from other state, he might not have understood that. I am not sure what would have happened if he had come from Rhode Island, but at any rate he was a Texan, and Lyndon Johnson understood that Blacks meant business. Kennedy understood that Blacks meant business. He called them all in. President Kennedy said come on over to White House. You all come over and they came over and talked and Kennedy formulated this Civil Rights Act of 1964 and then as you know he got killed and Lyndon Johnson carried it through as a memorial to Kennedy. And that was the beginning of the third stage in the Civil Rights movement which I call the Legislative stage. There is something interesting about this. The negative responses of Whites to the positive activity of the court ushered in negative response to Blacks to the negative response of Whites. And the only way you break a cycle of negative responses, you have to use a positive response. So after the negative response of demonstration had grown so large as to stop the nation, now those of you who don't agree with me, I am not arguing an ideological point of view, I am telling you what happened, Washington closed down. I know cause I lived there at that time. I lived in Washington between 1962 and 1963. 1964 as a matter of fact. It closed down. Therefore, the President of the United
knew that you couldn't run a nation if you had folks closing down the national Capitol when they felt like it. And so he called together the Legislators and said they are putting pressure on me, and that is what a good legislator should do. A good legislator should never say you are not going to pressure me. A good legislator should tell the others, I don't want to do this, but they are putting pressure on me, and that's what President Kennedy said. He was a good Massachusetts politician. He said they are putting pressure on me. We got to do something. They formulated the 1964 Civil Rights Act which was the beginning of the redress of the grievance. It took ten years of demonstration to get the 1954 and 1955 Supreme Court ruling moving. So I am telling the young people here today, one decision doesn't mean its over, it may take ten years to begin to get some movement, and the only way you are going to get some movement, you've got to be willing to put bodies on the line which means you got to be willing to risk your own life. That's what happened during the period of demonstration. There was some among us who didn't make it back from a demonstration, including _______________.

So you have got to put bodies on the line. You don't think that a decision by itself will win what you have sought because others may make a negative decision, a negative response to a positive decision. If you make a negative response to a positive decision, I can bet you dollars to donuts you will get a negative response elsewhere and it will escalate and the only way you can stop one negative response encouraging another negative response, encouraging another negative response is you have to make a positive response. That's what the 1964 Civil Rights Act was. Following it the nation saw that positive response wasn't so bad and so in 1965 they passed a Voting Rights act, and then in 1968 they passed a Fair Housing Act, and the period of legislative initiative came to an end in 1968, with the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s death was just as sacrificial as the death of Jesus Christ which we have recently celebrated during the Easter season. I went back with my hand calculator and calculated the jump in the immediate
income of the Blacks. It was about 5 or 6%. I calculated the increase in the number of minorities who were recruited to predominantly white schools, and it happened in 1969, right after his death. I calculated a number of differences that occur and they occurred right after his death, so therefore, I have called this stage the fourth stage of the Civil Rights movement. The first stage being the stage of litigation, the second stage being the stage of demonstration, the third stage being the stage of legislation, and the fourth stage is the stage of implementation which began in 1969. What am I trying to say to you? That the stage of implementation for the Civil Rights movement is only fifteen years old, so those who wish to say nothing has happened, you haven't given yourself a long enough time period to measure. The stage of implementation is only fifteen years old. It came with the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. Now there are people who are trying to draw, trying to close down the stage of implementation and one wonders how many more deaths will be necessary to open up that implementation stage again. Now society ought to have enough sense not to fool around with this possibility again because we see what has happened in the past, so we are only fifteen years into the stage of implementation. If that be the case, then let's look at some of the successes and some of the failures in the Civil Rights Movement and particularly with reference to education with the perspective that we are only fifteen years into the stage of implementation. I want to share with you what I would call some old ideas and some new ideas about school desegregation that have been associated with the stage of implementation. These ideas are derived from two sources, the findings of the National Review Panel on School Desegregation Research as summarized and reported by William Wholey and some of the findings from my own research. First let me tell you some of the old ideas about school desegregation. Willis Wholey, Dean of the Peabody School of Education at Vanderbilt reports that school desegregation is most effective when these nine conditions prevail: 1) Classroom assignment result in
racially balanced student population with no groups overwhelming the other. 2) Students who perform at or above grade level are in every classroom. 3) Sustain interaction between the races is encouraged in academic and extra-curricular activities. 4) Rigid forms of tracking and ability grouping are avoided. 5) A racially diversified group of relatively unprejudiced teachers and principals are recruited. 6) Parents are involved in all school affairs. 7) Staff development programs pertaining to desegregation are initiated. 8) Student attendance zones are stabilized so that student/teacher relationships can grow. 9) A multi-ethnic curriculum is developed. Now a careful review of effective school desegregation plans reveals that they include most of these features. I have enumerated these so that you can check out your own school desegregation plan and see does it include most of these features which have been found to be associated with good school desegregation plans throughout the nation. Based on my own observations and studies in several communities, I add two more old ideas that are associated with school desegregation, and among my two old ideas, the first is this: Busing is a phony issue in that there is no correlation between what one learns and how one gets to school. Did you hear that? I don't know how you came to school today at Rhode Island State University but what you learned here had no relationship to the transportation you used to get here. I know some of your transportation can harass you at times, but the truth of the matter is there is no correlation between what you learn in school and how you get to school. I don't know how we have let people raise up busing as the issue. I don't talk about busing anymore. I talk about transportation, but anyway I am going to use the words that people have used. Busing is a phony issue. I put it in those words because I think you remember it that way easier. My second major idea is community turbulence is less severe and violence is least experienced in places where political leaders and school officials state that desegregation court orders are lawful and that violation of the law will not be tolerated. Wherever the mayor said that there was no violence.
Now the mayor did not say that in Boston and there was violence. When the mayor says school desegregation is the law of the land, and violence will not be tolerated there is no violence. So you go visit your mayor next time, and ask your mayor what your mayor is going to say about school desegregation if your mayor doesn't like violence. I can guarantee you will not have violence in the city where the mayor says school desegregation is the law of the land, and violence will not be tolerated. That's an old idea. You didn't have to come in here to hear me say that. Now I am going to share with you some new ideas. What about the new ideas? The first new idea about school desegregation I want to share with you is this. School desegregation has worked. I know that's a new idea because you believe your President. Busing has been effective. All of the methods and techniques for bringing the races together in our schools have enhanced the education of students. That's a new idea. Now I know there are some out there who are romantic and think that school was better when you were there. You read A Nation at Rest. All of those old men and a few women sitting around a table saying our students know less than we know. That's a lie. Remember they were the ones who were saying it. They didn't ask the students whether or not their parents knew more than they knew and the students and their offspring did not have access to the press. I don't know why adults continue to be arrogant as they are thinking they know more than students. My kids know more than I did. I am a sociologist and they had no sociology in high school when I was in high school. Now my high school has philosophy, sociology, and psychology and here I am going to say my kids don't know as much as I know. Its the height of arrogance. Its takes an old man to tell you that. I know its arrogant because I know I am just adequate, and I know most of you are too. Most of you don't want to admit that you are adequate. Most of you think you are excellent. I guess that's what they call
a report, but most of you are not you are just adequate and to the extent that I can get you to be humble you will be able to help educate these kids because they are going to save you, but you are not humble enough so I want to tell you that school desegregation is worth, kids more know more than they knew before. Now I know some of them don't know as much but some of you were dumb too when you were that age. I am talking about probabilities. The probability is that most young people know more today than you knew when you were young. Therefore, all of this stuff I am talking about school desegregation having ______________ out a school system is a propaganda statement. That's the new idea. To professional educators this may not be new, but to the public it is and it must be repeated again and again to overcome the well orchestrated propaganda against busing that has flooded our nation in recent years. At all levels of our society including the Executive Branch of the Federal Government and also including the office against Civil Rights in the Justice Department, we have heard that busing has failed. We have been told a big lie by respectable people that busing has not worked. I am going to tell you a little about Boston before I finish. It is encumbered upon us who know better to contradict this falsehood. We must state clearly and without equivocation that school desegregation has worked including that facilitated by busing and other forms of transportation. Consider these few facts, and I could give you others, but I am just going to give you facts on the number of people in school. Back in 1940 before the Brown decision, the median school year completed by Whites was 53% higher than that of Blacks, but by 1979 25 years after Brown the median school year completed by the majority was only 3% above that of the minority and today it is less than of age 1%. Back in 1940 before the Brown decision, of all blacks 25 years and over only 7 or 8% had graduated from high school. 1940, that's when I was born. 1927, I was growing old. Only 7 or 8% of all Blacks had graduated from high school. By 1979, 25 years after Brown a majority of Black adults over 25 years were high school graduates. Back in 1940, before the Brown decision, less than 2% of Blacks over
25 years of age had graduated from college. You couldn't find many Blacks around this school near then, back in 1940. Go look at the year book. But 1979, 25 years after Brown, 10 to 11% of all Black adults had earned a college degree. In summary, the median school year completed by Blacks increase from 5.7 years in 1940 to 12.1 years in 1979. This represents a 110% increase in less than a half century. Isn't that remarkable? For people who said nothing is happened since Brown. On the basis of these facts, we may state unequivocally not only that busing has worked, but that litigation in the court for school desegregation worked, that demonstration in the streets for school desegregation worked; that legislation by the Congress for school desegregation worked. These actions increased educational opportunities for minorities. Moreover there has been a dramatic 50% decline in the dropout rate of Black students from 1967 to 1977, the period during which desegregation had its greatest impact. David my colleague at Harvard and Barbara Newfeld explained the success of school desegregation this way in their summer, 1981, article and I quote "Perhaps the most single success of American public education has been provided nearly equal access to elementary and secondary schools for all, an achievement quite distinct in human history." It is therefore strange that we have tarnished a distinct victory in human history with the propaganda that school desegregation hasn't worked. It is difficult to understand why we insist on tarnishing with the propaganda of failure, the victory of universal education that we have been able to achieve in this nation largely because of school desegregation. Now the second new idea that I want to bring to you today is this: School desegregation has benefited Whites as well as Blacks and other minorities. Now most Whites don't know this, but I came here today to tell you school desegregation has benefited Whites. It has also benefited Blacks, but it has benefited Whites. And so therefore if you don't have any school desegregation in your community, and you want to be benefited you ought to go ask the School Board to desegregate the schools. I have
often said that _________________ ought to thank his God or whomever he thanks every morning he gets to go about his medical duties that there are Blacks in the United States. Because _________________ has the privilege of going to a medical school because of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. I studied that decision and I found that four of the Justices based their decision on the fourteenth amendment, but four Justices is not enough for a majority opinion. The fifth Justice based his opinion on the 1964 Civil Rights Act which was put on the books by Blacks so ___________________ had the privilege of going to medical school because of the political efforts of Blacks. You see what I mean by saying when Blacks get all riled up, it helps Whites. Now very few people have made that interpretation. As a matter of fact, Blacks don't like to think of it that way, but I like to think of a double victory and that's what comes when you get minorities out there working in behalf of the majority too. You have a double victory. The 1964 Civil Rights Act, therefore, was a double victory, a victory for Blacks, but a victory for Whites and it manifested in ___________________.

Now I want to tell you why I said that school desegregation has benefited Whites. In 1940, before Brown, only one-third of the White adults over 25 years of age graduated from high school. Now I know you don't know that because you thought that all Whites were smart. But back in 1940 only one-third, that meant two-thirds of White adults did not graduate from high school. That was before Brown. In 1979, 25 years after Brown, the proportion of White high school graduates had doubled and represented almost two-thirds of those over 25 years of age. A national survey conducted the Fall of 1978 revealed that 95% of all Whites, five to six years of age, were enrolled in school and that 99% between the ages of seven and thirteen were in school. Isn't that something that's remarkable? All of that happening after Brown. Thus, the progress that we have experienced in achieving equal access to educational opportunity has helped the majority group as well
as the minority group. At least we can conclude that the desegregation movement has not harmed the majority. So I don't apologize for busing because I know its helped Whites as well as Blacks. Now let me tell you what happened in Boston. In Boston school official James Doherty told a newspaper reporter, and I picked my references carefully because I want you to know that I am not racially chauvenistic. James Doherty told a newspaper reporter that school desegregation at South Boston High School had its positive side. Now I know you don't know that because you read the Boston Globe. He said, and I am quoting James Doherty, "The in thing with Blacks is going to college and that was a boom to Southy where almost no one went to college. James Doherty further said, the very feeling Blacks had about going on to college had a good effect on the White kids. The White kids, said James Doherty, "had down-graded themselves, felt college was too tough or that they didn't have the ability," and then he said, "now there is a feeling after school desegregation among Whites that if Blacks are going to College, why can't we." The Boston school official said, and I quote him, "its rubbed off on White kids, meaning of course the desire to go to college. This illustration of a positive outcome of school desegregation for Whites can be found in many places but often is overlooked. Usually the statement that our media representatives make that school desegregation has helped Blacks, Browns, and other racial minorities and has not harmed Whites. I am testifying that has helped Whites too. In the light of this customary way of reporting school desegregation effects, the idea that desegregation has helped the majority as well as the minority is indeed a new idea and an important idea. I am coming to a close because we've got a great panel here. My third new idea that I want to share with you about desegregation is this. The third new idea is: It is all right for Whites to be a minority. It is all right for Whites not to be in charge. That has been one of the most beautiful outcomes of school desegregation. I think that Whites have labored under the burden that they had to be in charge for so long, that they are getting tired, and school desegregation has come along and let Whites know
that they can be sub-dominant, not only that but Blacks will take care of them.