From the Mountains to the Coast: Improving the Health of Black Boys

Edward Earl Bell
Greetings to each of you. In the words and in the majestic cadence of Dr. Maya Angelou, as she ended her Inaugural Poem 'On the Pulse of Morning' (Clinton, 1993)…”And into your sister's eyes, into Your brother's face, your country... And say simply, Very simply.... With hope, Good morning.”

It is my pleasure to be here! And permit me to say…Good Afternoon!

Allow me to pause here, and give a special thanks to my friend, my colleague—to Dr. Meeshay Williams-Wheeler. Without her confidence and the planning committee’s will, I, a native New Bernian, a boy to a man, from the housing projects, am humbled to be you opening speaker.

In the paraphrased words of Dr. Maya Angelou, I don’t come alone to this podium, this place, this gathering alone; when I speak, I tend to bring spiritual and ancestral beings with me.

I come bringing all of my experiences, disappointments, and successes with me. I come today, and in your presence, heavy laden about the health and the well-being of North Carolinians.

I thought and thought, what shall I tell this body, this group of Family Consumer Science practitioners; these educators; these givers! These are those, who continue to work to build stronger communities; these are those who try to understand the
development of children. These are the scholars whose research shed light on possibilities, and whose practices provide implications for us all.

These are those who study the well-being of others; these are those who look at relationship development, helping us to make informed decisions about nutrition, clothing, and other daily life daily choices.

And...These are those who study parenting skills...these are those who gave home "ee". A new meaning...

Knowing all of this, then....What shall I talk about this afternoon? Then, somethings began to take shape; my pen and paper formed my understanding as to what I shall say.

Your theme, “From the Mountains to the Coast: Improving the Health and Well-Being of North Carolinians” (say 2x)

Allow me to be particular. If I am not particular, then I do a disservice to who I am and want I stand for. From the Mountains to the Coast: Improving the Health and Well-Being FOR ALL North Carolinians” Let me explain why:

When I think about mass incarceration, I think about the health and well-being of North Carolinians, I think about black boys.

When I think about the alarming number of school suspensions, I think about the health and well-being of North Carolinians I, too, think about black boys.

When I think about police shootings and killings, I think about the health and well-being of North Carolinians, I, too, think about black boys.

When I think about black-on-black crime, I think about the health and well-being of North Carolinians I, too, think about black boys.

When I think about health, I think about mental health, physical health, financial health, and the well-being of about black boys.

When I think about parenting, I think about the health and well-being of single parents in the black community.
When I think about ALL lives, I think about the health and well-being of black males—and yes—black boys lives MUST matter.

Why should all of this matter? As we all improve the health and well-being of North Carolinians, let’s not forget those black boys whose health and well-being are draped across classism, wrapped in racism, floating across seas of inferiority, riding the oceans of despair, hanging from mountains of troubles, clothed in poverty, and settled upon with low expectations—their health and well-being must matter to all North Carolinians!

As an African American male, and yes according to Zora Neale Hurston, “I have been in Sorrow’s kitchen and licked out all the pots. Yet, with the hope, to stand on the peaky mountain wrapped in rainbows, with a harp and sword in hands”—it is then—can we say in unison—that we are **Indeed** improving the health and the well-being **for all** North Carolinians.

As we improve the health and well-being of North Carolinians, let’s not forgot about that black boy who is made to feel less than, because of his color and mailing address; when we think about the health and well-being of North Carolinians, let us not forget about Rayheem who is made to feel second class, simply because of his mere presence and because he “sags” his pants—and the “nappiness”, naturalness of this hair, which is a current appreciation from some.

When people ask me about my hair: I tell people about India Aria:

> I am not my hair  
> I am not this skin  
> I am not your expectations, no (hey)  
> I am not my hair  
> I am not this skin  
> I am the soul that lives within

When we think about the health and the well-being of NC, I think about micro-aggressions and implicit biases and black boys. (Demonstration)

From the Mountains to the Coast: Improving the Health and Well-Being FOR ALL North Carolinians” (2x)
Zora Neale Hurston reminds us: “Ships at a distance have every man’s wish on board. For some, they come in with the tide. For others they sail forever on the horizon, never out of sight, never landing until the Watcher turns his eyes away in resignation, his dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men”.

“Now, women forget all those things they don’t want to remember and remember everything they don’t want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly.”

I am going to take the dream of the woman! This dream shall become my truth. For I believe From the Mountains to the Coast: Improving the Health and Well-Being of North Carolinians, is something that we must all remember—and never forget!

It cannot be a ship at a distance, a wishful notion, assuming that eyes will be turned. We all must be Watchers, until we do indeed, do our part as we embark upon Improving the Health and Well-Being for ALL North Carolinians by focusing on ALL human beings—heading towards a more perfect union for ALL people...regardless of class, race, sexual orientations or dispositions—religions or Persuasions—and the like.

Improving the health and the well-being of NC, cannot we improved until inclusion meets diversity, until opportunities aligns with equality, orientations aligns with individuals, and considerations makes room for love for all man/woman kind, only then can we improve the health and well-being for ALL North Carolinians.

We can’t improve—until ALL people are lifted. In the words of Dr. King: "We are all bound together in a single garment of destiny." The time is always right to do what is right FOR ALL PEOPLE!!"

And very simply, I say to you Good Morning, not merely as a formal greeting, but an opportunity to make right, what is wrong, as we all move to improve the health and well-being for ALL North Carolinians. Good afternoon!

No editing was done to this Speech (This is purposeful)

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