

February 2, 2004

Remarks by Jeet Bindra

**In Honor of ChevronTexaco's
Black History Month Celebration**

**El Segundo, Ca. February 5, 2004
Richmond, Ca. February 12, 2004**

In 1893, a 24-year-old attorney boarded a train at the Pietermaritzburg Railway Station, not far from the city of Durban in South Africa.

Headed on a business trip to Pretoria, the British-educated lawyer had recently started work as legal counsel for a local merchant.

It was June, winter in the Southern Hemisphere, and cold outside.

With a first class ticket in hand, the young man - - who like myself was born and raised in India - - made his way to the first class compartment and took a seat.

Now, South Africa in the late 1800s was in many ways like South Africa in the 1980s - - before Nelson Mandela and the fall of apartheid.

Back then, South Africa's Colonial white minority not only enforced many restrictions against black Africans, but also upon Asians from India.

At that time, people who came from the Indian subcontinent were known as "coloreds," or "coolies."

And so it was that a European boarded the train to Pretoria . . . saw this neatly dressed and yet dark-skinned man sitting in the first class compartment . . . and rushed to inform the railway officials.

The officials asked the man to remove himself to a different compartment, since non-whites weren't allowed in first class.

He showed the officials his first class ticket.

They warned him that he'd be forcibly removed if he didn't exit graciously.

He didn't move.

And so, the young lawyer was physically thrown off the train and onto the platform at Pietermartizburg . . . with his luggage tossed unceremoniously beside him.

As the train steamed away, he sat in a bitter cold waiting room, shivering, and pondering whether to move back to his native India . . . or remain in South Africa and make a stand for his rights.

I want to thank you for inviting me to share thoughts with you during this Black History Awareness celebration.

It was an honor to receive the invitation, and a joy for me to be here with you today.

The lunch looks terrific.

As a chef who loves to cook ethnic food, these kinds of meals are my favorite.

OK.

I'm telling you the story about the young Indian man in South Africa, because a fundamental element of ChevronTexaco's Black History Awareness celebration is to embrace the past.

And I have personally done that.

In 1999, while on a vacation in South Africa, I made a special pilgrimage to the Pietermartizburg Railway station . . . to stand on the very spot where *Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi* was thrown from the train . . . more than 100 years before.

I had heard this story about Mahatma Gandhi since my childhood.

But to stand in that place was to *feel the history* . . . to imagine the emotions that Gandhi must have endured . . . all while knowing of the decisions he subsequently made, and what he accomplished in response to the great injustice.

In fact, Gandhi's ejection from the train was one of the more pivotal moments in modern history, and serves an example of how one individual can make a huge impact on his or her world.

As some of you may know, Gandhi became a leader of the Indian community in South Africa, where he developed the theory and practice of non-violent resistance, which was later adopted by Martin Luther King.

It's been said that "When Gandhi was evicted from the train, an Indian visiting South Africa fell, but when Gandhi rose, an Indian South African rose."

Most of you probably know that after returning to his native land in 1915, Gandhi became the spiritual father of India's independence movement.

He set an example for millions of people around the globe, and in many ways was the spiritual brother of Dr. King, Nelson Mandela, and many other leaders in the struggle for civil rights and dignity.

And he did this while living a lifestyle more simple and humble than any of us can imagine.

I wanted to share that story with you, because it illustrates one of the reasons I feel such a kinship with African Americans, and so enjoy the annual celebration of Black History Month.

This is a tradition that started at ChevronTexaco in 1992, and it grows richer and deeper with each passing year.

Part of the depth and richness comes from the finding and telling of new-found historical stories about African-Americans . . . and the retelling of old ones that never fail to inspire.

I would also like to encourage you to do what I did at the Pietermartizburg Railway station, which is to visit places that might have great personal meaning.

It could be the steps at the Lincoln Memorial, where Martin Luther King gave his “I have a dream” speech.

It could be places such as the lunch-counters of Birmingham or Selma, where things have so obviously and greatly changed.

It could even be at the ballot box, where you not only can freely vote, but in most areas of the U.S. have slates that include minority candidates.

We think nothing of what, just a century ago, was unthinkable.

In some ways that is right and good.

But in others, embracing the past does truly educate the present, which in turn can only enrich the future.

You know, I believe that the people of ChevronTexaco have a special obligation to society.

Our colleagues work in the oilfields of the storm-tossed North Sea, and on natural gas platforms off the coast of Western Australia.

They work in the Arctic cold of the McKenzie River Delta in Canada's Northwest Territories, and in the heat of the Niger River Delta in Nigeria.

Our colleagues drive on dangerous roads in remote areas, and operate equipment under high temperatures and pressures in refineries and processing plants.

We do dangerous work to find oil and make products that are absolutely essential to the well-being of humanity.

Without the fuels that provide mobility, we would not have such ample supplies of food, the freedom to come and go as we please, get to medical services, and enjoy average life-spans that are approaching 80 years.

Still, we owe it to society to do that work safely, and so that there is no harm to the environment.

More so than people in many other industries, we have a duty to serve as an example of how things are done right.

We also have an obligation to each other, and it is something that has helped build ChevronTexaco into a very special kind of organization.

If you asked an outside observer to describe the people of our corporation, he or she would probably say: "They are very kind to each other, and respectful of differences."

Well, the truth is that because we are human, we will always be far from perfect.

But through events such as this one . . . and the celebrations held by the rich variety of networks that have developed over the past decade . . . we are working together to promote better understanding and greater respect.

What's more, these behaviors - - this curiosity about people and things - - are critical to our company's future success.

Please, never think you've learned all you have to learn.

We all need to dedicate ourselves to continuous learning and be at the cutting edge throughout our careers . . . or we will lose to our competition.

I've also long believed that a person should take every opportunity to communicate and demonstrate his or her professionalism.

And I feel passionately that you should treat everyone with respect, irrespective of their position or title.

By fulfilling these obligations, we set strong examples for each other.

Serving as a good example:

That reminds me of two stories about Ghandi . . . who because of his experiences in South Africa, I hope you can think of as an honorary African-American . . . at least for this one day.

The first is about a young mother, who approached him one day and said: "Please, Gandhi-je, you must tell my son to stop eating sweets."

Gandhi paused for a moment, and then replied. “Well, all right, but can you come back in two days time?”

The mother agreed, and two days later brought the boy back.

Gandhi took the child aside and told him: “Don’t eat sweets.”

“Is that all?” said the puzzled mother. “Why couldn’t you have said that *two days ago*?”

“Because two days ago,” said Gandhi with a smile, “I was still eating sweets.”

One thing Gandhi never let go of was his memories of Pietermartizburg, of that transforming moment in his life, and what his example could mean to others.

You see, after Gandhi returned to India in 1915, he traveled throughout the large nation by train.

Trains run the length and breadth of India, and are the primary way people get around the sub-continent.

You’ve probably seen photos and film of those trains, which are packed with humanity.

Because of my ChevronTexaco safety background, just the thought makes my heart race in fear.

But then, crowded trains have long been a reality in India.

In any event, after his experience in the first class compartment at Pietermartizburg, Gandhi always took his preferred seat wherever he traveled in India.

This humble spinner of cotton and wool always sat with the common people . . . in third class.

And he always did so with the grace and dignity that educated the present, and which helped enrich the future of people throughout the world.

Thank you.