

REMARKS ON ETHNIC SLURS, KAHULUI,
MAUI, HAWAII

September 23, 1968

I got up this morning fully expecting that I would make certain remarks to you that more or less fit into the context of a campaign on the beautiful island, such as the valley island of Maui. You know Judy and I have traveled somewhat in Hawaii. We were here in April. We didn't get to Maui, unfortunately, because of the press of time and commitments on Kauai. But we're delighted to be here today. One thing I can certainly assure you of, however, is that the little bit of time that we're going to have here is not going to satisfy my appetite for Maui. We're going to come back.

A funny thing happened on the way to Hawaii. Maybe it wasn't so funny after all. Those of you who read your local papers are going to find that this Vice Presidential candidate, this son of a Greek immigrant, is being accused of an insensitivity to the national pride and heritage of other peoples. I submit to you that this is a rather ridiculous charge to make to a man who grew up in a neighborhood where his family was the only Greek family, a man who saw his father come home dead tired in the afternoon and climb down off a vegetable truck to be ridiculed by certain people who referred to us as "those Greeks on the block." Yes, we were sensitive in those days but thank God the United States has passed that point where we're drawn up so tight that we can't communicate with each other, and where our sense of humor is beginning to disappear.

On the plane a reporter, whom I consider a friend of mine — because I never jest with my enemies — who happens to be Japanese, was asleep. I referred to him in certain slang, similar to the slang that people on athletic teams use affectionately among themselves, some of which wouldn't bear repeating. I don't think I said anything quite that harmful to my friend, Gene Oishi, and I don't think Gene Oishi took what I said in any sense of downgrading him. But coming on the heels of another amplified statement that occurred a week ago in the campaign, where in designating certain ethnic groups — as I feel I have a right to because I am part of one, and a very big part of one — I inadvertently used a slang expression for another ethnic group, and I confess ignorance because my Polish friends had never apprised me of the fact that when they called each other by this appellation it was not in the friendliest context.