



Inaugural Address
Mayor Frank G. Jackson
January 2, 2006

Happy New Year to everyone.

First, I want to say thank you to everyone for coming today.

I give special thanks to my wife, Edwina, and my family for their support.

And thank you to Bishop Perry, Bishop Pilla, Judge Blackmon and Congresswoman Tubbs Jones for being a part of today's inauguration.

I also want to recognize all the elected officials, clergy and public servants and let you know that I look forward to working with everyone to make this city great again.

Sixteen years ago, I knew that, in order for me to be able to protect and ensure the future of the community I cared for, I had to run for City Council. This was not because I had an ambition to be a councilman; it was something I had to do.

I watched a once vibrant community become tired and rundown. The businesses, professionals and many working people were gone. The homes where families lived became vacant lots with high weeds and illegal dumping. The streets that once were the centers of community activities became the centers of drugs, prostitution and stolen cars.

Friends of mine, like David Donaldson, former Councilman Lonnie Burton, Dwayne Browder and others fought against this rising tide of hopelessness and despair. They worked hard to stabilize and rebuild Ward 5, a community that they loved. Through their hard work and dedication, they laid the foundation that I was able to build upon to ensure the future of Ward 5.

I was able to be successful because our community – the hard-working people who remained and did not give up – became one community, sharing a common vision – to make our community a great community again.

And that is my vision for Cleveland.

Because today, is about the future of Cleveland.

Cleveland has a great future and its time we start moving forward. We can only do that when we become one city – one people living and working together with a common vision to make Cleveland great again.

As mayor, I know that I will be here for a period of time – and in that of time I want to make sure that Cleveland is better off than when I started. And to do that I know that I need to form partnerships, be accessible to all segments of society, and provide the leadership to get done what needs to be done.

This is not about me. This is about the future of Cleveland and what I do on my watch to ensure that Cleveland and the people of Cleveland are better off. Some day, I will walk away from this office – but I promise I will leave in a better condition than when I found it.

Beginning in 2006, as your mayor, our conversation will be about what is right with Cleveland, what brings us together and what guiding principles will motivate us.

We have a long and rich history.

People came here looking for hope and opportunities – they came from humble beginnings, different ethnic backgrounds, races and different religions.

People still find their way to the City of Cleveland looking for hope and opportunity.

My own family came here from Pennsylvania in search of a better life over 60 years ago.

Cleveland has always been a city of hope and opportunity where people knew and expected that life would get better for them.

And here we are today, a city with a world-class orchestra, world-class medical facilities, recognized as one of the most livable cities and one of the best places to visit. It was the diverse ethnic, racial and religious people who came here that built Cleveland and worked to make Cleveland and these institutions what they are today.

There is a lot that is good about Cleveland.

What brings us together is a common vision and our common needs as one people living and working together to rebuild our city.

We must go beyond the differences of race and ethnic backgrounds – beyond geographic boundaries and religions – and beyond class and income.

We no longer have the luxury of allowing these differences to divide us, to stop our progress and to get in the way of fulfilling our vision of being a great city.

But if we are to make Cleveland great again, we must be motivated by our love and passion for the well being of the city and its people.

This is my vision. Cleveland is my home. I have spent my entire life here. I have witnessed the good times and the bad.

I have seen this city knocked flat on its back, and I've seen it struggle to its feet again – courageous in the face of adversity, determined when confronted with challenges, resolute in its refusal to never give up. Cleveland has heart.

If we're going to make Cleveland great again, we must show our love and passion for Cleveland. We must show our heart and be willing to sacrifice for our future.

Everything starts with education.

Recently, I met with the leadership of the Cleveland School Board about how we can work together on behalf of Cleveland's children. Our meeting led to this statement that defines our stewardship for education:

Our survival is directly related to citizens, businesses, organizations and institutions fulfilling their duty to ensure educational excellence for our children.

Being here today is symbolic. There are 1400 students who will be here tomorrow. They will come here with hope and looking for opportunities for the future. To be the people, just like the ones who came before, to make Cleveland great again.

And the students who will be here tomorrow – they are the stewards of the future. Their stewardship will be defined by our stewardship. They will learn from what we do – not what we say.

So, this does mean all of us. No matter where we live or work – what our income is – we have a duty to ensure educational excellence for our children.

We should have an expectation of greatness and settle for nothing less than the best.

Our expectations will determine the quality of life we have.

We have a right to expect that our families will be safe on the streets and in our homes.

We have a right to expect that our children will be educated and ready for college and for the workforce.

We have a right to expect higher quality city services.

We have a right to expect that city government operates more efficiently, is customer-friendly and business-friendly.

We have a right to expect that people of all nationalities and races and religions, will have respect, justice and equality.

If we are to be a great city again, then we must meet these expectations and see the results.

The result will be that we will have made Cleveland a city of choice – a city where people will choose to stay and move to -

Because we will have educational excellence in our schools, we will deliver exceptional city services and we will have jobs and business opportunities for everyone – and there will be respect, justice and equality for everyone!

We, as elected officials, have a responsibility to represent the interests of our constituents, and we also have the responsibility to be the stewards of the region.

If we are to survive, our businesses must prosper.

Our businesses will not prosper if the region does not.

If we are going to be able to compete on a national and international level, we must deal with our regional economy.

That is why I have created a cabinet-level position to promote regional economic development.

And I have already met with the Mayors and Managers Association to discuss ways to ensure that our region will prosper.

When we represent our diverse interests – with a common vision – we can reach agreements that are good for the city of Cleveland and the region – where both the city of Cleveland and the region will prosper by improving the quality of life for our citizens through respect, justice and equality.

When we raise our expectations and set the standards high for education, quality of life and business – then we will be closer to our goal of making Cleveland great again and becoming one city, one people with one vision.

As stewards – the question is – how will we know that we have become one city and one people and that we have one vision?

The answer is we will know when we don't see the differences in one another.

We will know when we don't see ourselves as black or white or Hispanic or Asian – east side or west side – downtown or neighborhoods.

We will have the same concern and the same passion for the well being of all of us because we are one people.

As we begin to define our greatness – in education, quality of life, jobs and business development – we need to understand that we always have to keep in mind that the measure of a great city is how we provide for and treat the least of us and how we ensure that the least of us are better off.

When we no longer justify the suffering and the struggles of those who need our help as a necessary by-product of our own prosperity, then we will know that we have succeeded.

None of this will happen without action. We can no longer afford discussions and debates. We must act and act now.

Throughout my campaign, wherever I went, east side or west side – downtown and neighborhoods, I talked to thousands of people of all nationalities and religions in every part of the city, and also people who didn't live in the city, who wanted nothing more than to lend their resources, their talents and their energy for no other purpose than to help the city that they care for and love to be great again.

As your mayor, what I want to do is let all Clevelanders know that I need their help. I need your help. The gates of the city are open and welcoming you to come and do what you can do.

We must make Cleveland a city that does not imitate others – but a city that makes people say – let us go to Cleveland and learn what they are doing.

So I challenge myself, the citizens of Cleveland, our businesses and the region to act in a way that makes Cleveland great again – a city of one people, one community, living and working together, with respect, justice and equality.