

AMERICA'S URBAN CRISIS
by Senator Gaylord Nelson

Mr. President, we in the United States, today in the 1960's, are citizens of the most powerful and affluent yet the most democratic and compassionate society since the dawn of world history.

We have the capacity to maintain our military establishment throughout the globe, and to maintain prosperity at home, to launch the exploration of space, man's last uncharted frontier, and to insure the material comfort of America.

Never before has a nation reached such astonishing power while so fervently protecting the freedom and dignity of its citizens.

The growth and advances made by the United States developed gradually through dramatically different stages of her history. During the 200 years of American independence the land has been transformed from a quiet and rural society, self sustaining, devoid of foreign involvements, to a highly urbanized world power. Exploration of the north American continent and its resources complete, the United States today casts its eyes toward the frontier of space.

Millions of American rural citizens today are moving into the urban complexes that sprawl over the land. 70% of

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America's people today live on 1% of her land.

Amassed wealth in the United States and her economy continue to grow. Since 1935, the Gross National Product has risen over 800% to a level of close to \$800 billion a year. By the year 2000, the GNP is expected to reach \$4 trillion a year.

Throughout this period of change the demands of the American society on its workers have changed. From the early days of the 19th century immigrants provided the back bone and ingenuity in developing the virgin continent. The poor and the persecuted abandoned lives of despair and deprivation in the old world to seek the promise and the freedom of the new. Prosperity awaited the energetic and the industrious. No great skills were needed to obtain jobs. In building an industrial power and expanding her frontiers, the United States offered jobs for all who were willing to seek them.

And the immigrants came. Many did not find the golden streets they had sought. The Irish and the Jews, the Italians and the Greeks often were forced to settle in slums and jobs not noticeably better than those they had fled. But the promise of America was there and it was real.

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The second generation of immigrant families were able to transform the promise and hope their parents sought into realization of those dreams. Sacrifice of parents, long hours of work under difficult conditions could be vindicated by the success of their children. It was still possible for a family to rise from the slums into the genteel society through thrift and hard work.

But as science and technology advanced, as industry grew more complex, the role of the laborer underwent far-reaching and permanent change. Sophisticated skills became necessary for workers to compete with new machines of mass production. Education assumed new importance for even the lowest job holder.

Will and determination could no longer guarantee economic advancement and independence. Unskilled jobs became less frequent and less available to the poor and uneducated.

Together with the elimination of old employment patterns came new unrest and ~~restlessness~~ among the poor and unskilled.

Instruments of mass media, TV, movies and magazines available to all dramatize the expanding gap among economic classes. Through these factors the poor have become increasingly aware of the difference among the classes. The Negro in Harlem sees TV commercials with sparkling houses on shady streets with well kept lawns and knows that this is an America that he does

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not belong to. The slum child watches TV announcers urge him to play with toys he will never see.

In this summer of 1967 the discontent and frustrations that have been mounting beneath the surface of society have exploded with terrifying and devastating fury. Violence of past summers pales beside the effects of over 40 riots that have already racked America this summer. Over 80 have died, thousands arrested, hundreds of millions of dollars worth of property destroyed during the past several months.

None can deny that the explosions of these past summers have not been incited by the poor but by the Negro poor, not by the slum dweller but by the Negro slum dweller.

And white America looked on, first in astonishment, then with increasing fear and anger, and asks, why?

Most people have been vaguely aware of the existence of decaying slums in the inner cores of major cities, that Negroes do not seem to hold many white collar jobs, that there is prejudice and bigotry in the United States. And then came the riots and society asks, why?

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Surely great progress has been made in the field of civil rights. Segregation in the public schools is illegal. Restaurants and hotels accommodate Negroes, even in the deep South. A Negro serves in the Cabinet and a Negro has been appointed to the U. S. Supreme Court. The President of the United States (is a Negro?) before a Joint Session of Congress adopted the pledge of the early civil rights movement when he declared that "we shall overcome."

And still the riots came. And the hopeful song of "We Shall Overcome" has been replaced by the shrill, hysterical and illogical cries of Black Power militants.

Society cannot understand why this is happening. Other groups low on the economic ladder have risen through their own tireless initiative. Negroes now have full constitutional guarantees of citizenship. What is it that they want?

But are these conclusions correct? Is the American Negro a first class citizen? Does he have a truly equal opportunity to share in the prosperity and benefits of in the United States of the 1960's?

The answers to these complex and difficult questions lie in the statistics and facts of those areas vital to the social standing and physical well being of any group of people -- housing, health, education and, most important, employment.

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Let us then examine what it means to be a Negro today in the United States - to what extent the Negro is a full participant in our society.

In 1949 white families averaged \$3200 income a year and Negroes averaged \$1650. Over the 15 years following that date white income rose to \$6800 (?) and the Negroes reached \$3800 (?). The gap of \$1650 in 1949 had almost doubled to create a disparity of \$3000 in the mid-1960 's. While the rest of society made stunning progress, the Negro advancement lagged far behind.

Throughout the United States exist decaying slums, populated largely by Negroes. In one typical city a governmental survey revealed these facts about the slum area, which made up 8% of the city's land area. It contained 20% of the city's population, provided 12% of its taxes, took 50% of the community health services, 51% of its police protection, produces 36% of its juvenile delinquency, 42% of its adult crime and 76% of its TB. Slums produce 2½ times as many police charges, 2 times as many ambulance calls and 14 times as much welfare payments. Many large city slums, such as parts of Harlem in New York City, contain over 90% Negro populations.

Over 42% of slum housing in the U. S. is substandard. 36% of all Negroes in the U.S. live in substandard housing as opposed to 11% whites.

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This is not a problem of any one section of the country. In Oakland, California, 23% of the people live in substandard housing. In Washington, D. C. 24%. In New York City 22%, in Detroit 28% and in Atlanta 54%.

No measure of success can be achieved today in the United States without decent and effective education.

The doctrine of separate but equal education, long since recognized to be a myth, is now illegal. But still, 9 out of 10 Negro students attend schools with majorities of Negro students. In 1962 a study showed Negro students in grade 6 to be 1½ years behind whites in verbal achievement and after completion of high school the average white has the equivalent of 12 years of education while the Negroes' level of achievement is still below grade 9.

Throughout the United States the drop out rate for Negro adolescents is twice the rate of whites. The I.Q. of an 8th grade Harlem pupil is 87.7 while the national norm is 100. Between grades 3 and 6, a period when academic achievement should be most pronounced, the IQ of that child drops 5 points.

And still this child goes home to view the pleasant suburban American portrayed on television and to see the middle class TV families whose lives he can barely comprehend and whose pleasures he will never know. That child will return to a neighborhood where the only animals he knows are rats and the playground is the dirty street.

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While that 6th grade child may not be aware of the city park on the other side of town, he is well acquainted with the presence of narcotics addiction with its ~~high~~ rate of 8 times higher in Harlem than the rest of New York City in 1961.

The Armed Forces have been regarded by many as the great melting pot, where youth from various backgrounds may be assimilated into society yet 4 times as many Negroes fail the Armed Forces qualifying test as do whites.

In the Army National Guard, Negroes make up 1.15% of those who serve and in the Air National Guard the figure is 0.6%.

Slum conditions and decaying neighborhoods that breed poverty and despair also cause a frightening health problem for their residents. Disease rates in the slums are 25% to 50% higher than the national average. The rate of heart disease among families earning under \$2000 a year is 4 times the rate of members of families earning \$7000. Incidents of arthritis and rheumatism among those families is 7 times higher, mental and nervous conditions 6 times higher. Life expectancy of a poor Negro is 7 years less than that of a comparable white.

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q Higher rates of disease less public awareness to health problems among the poor are compounded by less effective health facilities and treatment for residents of the urban ghettos.

In Watts physicians work at a ratio of one for each 7500 residents. 350,000 people of the area have no hospital and the nearest one is 12 miles away via public transportation. Whites spend twice the amount Negroes do on medical services during the course of a year.

In one municipal hospital with 400 beds there were recently employed 46 registered Nurses. On one 4 to 12 p.m. shift there were 3 nurses and 1 supervisor on duty for the entire hospital. Some areas have made efforts to alleviate such conditions. Before the establishment of Columbia Point Hospital Center in Boston fewer than 60% of people earning less than \$4000 a year saw a doctor during the year. During the center's first year of operation that figure rose to 92%.

Perhaps the key and underlying factor in understanding the plight of the Negro can be found in the employment field. The low national unemployment rate of 3.9% has no meaning when the unique and critical problems of the slum resident are studied. The slum unemployment rate has risen to 3 times the national rate while the national rate has fallen. 40% of slum families earn less than \$3000

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a year. 1 of 5 slum residents who are employed earn less than \$60 a week. 7% of these employed work only part time. 11% of male residents of the urban ghettos are considered to be out of the job market and do not even look for jobs. White teenagers have unemployment rates of 10% for girls and 20% for boys while the comparable figures for negro teenagers in the slums are 46% and 31% respectively. These many factors, including inadequate wages, infrequent jobs and general unemployment have created the newly recognized sub-employment problem. Today it is estimated that 1 in 3 ghetto residents has a serious employment problem. Sub employment rates in the nation's ghettos are perhaps the most horrifying indictment of our national shortcomings.

In the slum districts of Boston the figure has reached 24%, in New Orleans 45%, East Harlem 33%, Bedford Stuyvesant 27%, Philadelphia 34% and San Antonio 47%.

Frustrated and despondent victims of this situation are anxious to help themselves. A survey taken in one area showed that 67% of the unemployed slum residents willing to go back to school to acquire necessary skills and 79% willing to take on-the-job training.

An examination of the living conditions and social factors of the Negro make it clear that he is not a full participant in the benefits of American prosperity today.

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The Negro, having been in America for over 300 years, has watched from the side as other immigrant groups arrived, struggled in the slums and rose into the middle class. Hope and promise, realized by other groups, have been cruel illusions for the Negro.

Years of degradation and persecution have reaped a terrifying harvest in the bitter alienation of Negro youth from society today.

Simplistic appeals to racism and hatred cannot succeed if the seed of bitterness has not already been sown. Explosions of senseless, self destructive violence cannot occur unless life has long since lost its hope and meaning.

Problems of America's Negroes, highlighted by the Civil Rights Movement of the 50's and early 60's are no longer cause for mere concern but a matter of national emergency. Eruptions of violence are but an outward manifestation of the decay gnawing at the fabric of American society.

We must act swiftly to avoid the forbidding consequences that complete alienation of 22 million Americans can bring upon the United States. Most Americans are casually aware of the underlying causes of Negro discontent and their disadvantaged role in society, of the long years of slavery, the bitter years of reconstruction, the breakdown of the family and the degrading prejudice and bigotry.

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It is known that the shameful conditions of today did not appear overnight, that they are the product of long years of injustice.

No one group of people or special class of society can be blamed for the situation. The shortcomings of society in this area is inexorably bound to the common failings of that society in other crucial domestic matters over the past several decades. Not the willful neglect but the passive indifference of society has compounded the critical social ills of negroes in the United States.

The natural environment and beauty of the United States faces a grave crisis today and in the years to come. During the past several decades we have become increasingly aware of the mounting pollution of the air and water.

Once clear rivers and streams, refreshing and beautiful in the past, have today been transformed into sewage tanks for mass industry. Air in the cities is filled with smoke from factories and exhaust fumes from automobiles.

Forests have been ravaged and peaceful countrysides made into commercialized blotches of ugliness throughout the land.

Resort areas that do remain swarm with neon lights and novelty booths which leave little semblance of the natural beauty that once reigned.

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Landscape along roads and highways is obscured by innumerable unsightly billboards.

Threats to health posed by pollution and to the environment by commercial and industrial exploitation did not arise overnight. They too were the result of years and decades of society's indifference and neglect to the changes taking place.

Reasonable and responsible citizens as well as officials recognize the dangers of the situation and the hazards it creates. But still we do not act to stem the tide and the reverse the dangerous trend. And the curious and the concerned look on and ~~00000~~ wonder why immediate and effective steps are not taken.

The key to understanding these puzzling realities lies in the history and traditions of the development of the United States.

Pioneers and rugged individualists expanded this nation's frontiers and built its strength. Governmental involvement was limited to assistance and not regulating interference. Erosion of the natural environment resulted as businessmen became involved in their legitimate pursuit of profit and industrialists sought to protect the interests of their stockholders.

And while each interest group pursued his own goals the public interest was not represented in the course of events.

Spectre of governmental involvement on behalf of the public interest is still viewed with alarm, as a holdover of days gone by.

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But the realization and must be clear that it is no longer possible to avoid the problems created by years of inaction.

It is clear that private individuals and industry have not dealt adequately with the crisis facing our natural environment and that the public interest, the interest of all people and all society must have a voice today.

It is also clear that the problem of Negro inequality cannot be solved by the Negro himself. The plight of the Negro today has been partially brought on by social indifference and it must be resolved, not only to placate the Negro but to benefit the white man, not only for the advantage of the Negro community but for the preservation of American society.

If we are to make the progress vital to our future, and the efforts so desperately needed, we must undertake a commitment to action now. A commitment to convince the teeming masses in the ghettos that America is theirs, that society is concerned, the United States does care. The time for words and token efforts has passed.

We in government especially cannot rest on the record of progress and achievement made during the past several years. The situation in the ghettos today is not satisfactory, it is a national shame and therefore a national responsibility.

Priorities of this government must be revised to undertake

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this effort. The welfare system of the 1930's, still in use, more widespread than ever before, has been proven inadequate. Aid to dependent children regulations, devised as a temporary and limited measure in the 1930's to assist widows and children has spread havoc within the Negro family structure. Welfare facilities have created a maze of unwieldy and dehumanizing bureaucracy. Solution to these seemingly unsolvable dilemmas lies not in governmental handouts alone but in jobs.

Proposals have been offered by many distinguished, knowledgeable people both in and out of government.

The immediate and most obvious need is to guarantee employment to all men who seek it. The creation of jobs by government for ghetto residents can only serve as a temporary help to the problems of subemployment.

New and innovative approaches must be developed to provide permanent employment for the poor, especially the Negro poor. An approach advocated and discussed in recent months would invoke private enterprise in this effort. Industry, through systems of tax incentives and write offs, could be encouraged to build plants in the ghetto and to train and employ slum residents. Such an approach is far more realistic than the insistence that government alone provide the means for accomplishing this task.

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In my judgment equal opportunity of employment is the fundamental ~~929292~~ and underlying solution to the crisis we face today. There are in the United States capable, intelligent and imaginative men who can perform the needed work with vigor and dedication. Our task is to give them the chance.

Now as never before the nation requires leadership from the executive and legislative branches of government.

Thomas Paine wrote at the time of the American revolution, "Tis not the concern of a day, a year, or an age, posterity are virtually involved in the contest and will be more or less affected even to the end of time by the proceedings now."

If we act now the United States will continue to prosper and be strong and the current unrest will pass. But if we hesitate and stumble, if we pay no heed to the muted, inarticulate pleas that reach us from the ghettos, then our future as a nation must be uncertain. And history will record that in the summer of 1967 the United States stood at the cross roads. And history's judgement of us ~~92929~~ here today will be harsh.

So let us, as a nation, move forth in this time of crisis, as we have done in crises past, to make the dream and promise of the United States a reality for all Americans.

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