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The American Jewish Committee Appeal for Human Relations

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Mr. David G. Gartner
c/o The Hon. Hubert H. Humphrey
Federal Office Building #7
Room 6233
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Gartner:

Enclosed please find a tape of Mr. Humphrey's remarks at the Herbert H. Lehman Human Relations Award Dinner on April 22 (including Mr. Alan Greenberg's introduction) and two transcripts, with only preliminary editing, of his remarks.

Should you require any further material, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Joseph Dames
Joseph Dames
Dinner Secretary

/pz
encs.

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TRANSCRIPT OF REMARKS
HONORABLE HUBERT H. HUMPHREY
HERBERT H. LEHMAN HUMAN RELATIONS
AWARD DINNER
AMERICANA - APRIL 22, 1969

Thank you Mr. Greenberg, Mr. Lewis, Mr. Appleman and all the distinguished members here of this committee, guests at the dinner and, of course, my good friend Max Fisher. I was told that Max was doing his good deed while I was proceeding to the banquet hall. I want you to know that I have known Max for a long time and he knows how to raise money for both good and bad causes. We have a great time together; you just have to understand this.

How I wish that time would permit that I could just visit with some of you tonight who are very close and dear friends, but you have been here a long time and I've taken a long time to get here. I could have walked and made it sooner. We left Washington at 5 o'clock - that is we started to leave Washington on the 5 o'clock shuttle. I got a chance to be in Washington longer today than almost any other time - out on the end of the airport. I never knew how comfortable it could be to sit in the back of an Electra - I didn't even get a jet - and enjoy looking out at the Potomac and see just how quiet things can be.

Just to show you how my timing has been off, I quit smoking over twenty years ago and now you can even smoke when the plane is on the ground. Things have all been mixed up, it seems like.

Well, there are so many here tonight who have come to

honor a very wonderful citizen, a gentleman who has given much of his life and much of his talent to the cause of human relations, and who is the recipient tonight of an award that I happen to believe is one of the most significant awards given to any fellow American, by any group, and that is the Herbert H. Lehman Award.

I think you all know that I was privileged to serve in the Senate with this great man, with this wonderful spirit. It has been one of the blessings of my life to have known him as a leader and as a friend, and I had the singular honor on several occasions of having him encourage people to help me out now and then. So, I am happy to be here on this occasion, and I want to talk very seriously with you because you are serious people.

Now I have talked to some of you so many times that you must be very bored even with my physical presence, much less my rhetorical comment. I am not going to talk to you tonight about the Middle East, even though it is a matter of grave concern and I have been visiting about it today. I was with some of our friends yesterday of the ADL and talked a bit about the critical situation in that part of the world. We just live in a time of crisis and danger and I guess we are just going to have to learn to live with it. But, at the same time, we're going to have to make up our minds that we must live, and that life is a precious gift of Divine Providence, and it is that precious gift which must be protected at all costs.

I want to say first that it is always a pleasure to appear before the American Jewish Committee. I have been here with you on other occasions and I am particularly pleased to appear in my new role as V.P., which is, in short, visiting professor. They used to have another title for me when I used those initials. I cannot deceive you, I would much rather be President than just to be here tonight. But in all honesty, these last few months have been rather precious to me. I feel a little more relaxed, even though I seem to be very busy. I find them very rewarding months and very revealing.

These have been months of greater reflection; when you are in public office, you are dashing from one crisis to another. And they have been months of considerable intellectual challenge, especially on the college campus, which I now call home. I don't know, when I was a professor 25 years ago, the college campus was a meadow of tranquility and calm and really it was the Great Society. Today I come back and it is a battlefield!

But, nevertheless, it is a vital part of our life and an extremely interesting area. If I had my way, I think I'd require that every public official be forced to take a sabbatical every now and then and spend some time being exposed to the uninhibited cross-examinations of college students and even college professors.

I've been out on that firing line and I'll guarantee you one thing - you are really compelled to do some thinking. I even have a few public officials whom I could nominate right now for that sabbatical leave, but maybe I ought not to rush it.

In the last 20 years we have developed some reasonably good answers and I think some good programs to meet some of our great challenges. And now I think we should proceed to implement these ideas and to invest the resources that are needed for maximum results. I am talking to people who understand investment. I know, and I think you know, that it is foolhardy to do less than the situation requires. I am a pharmacist by original profession - I know a little bit about it. I wouldn't for a moment try to fill your prescription - things have changed far too much since those days. But I'll say this - that it does you no more good to take 25,000 units of penicillin than if you swallowed a Smith Brothers coughdrop. Maybe the other is better - it tastes better. And unless you really put to work the programs that are supposed to be directed towards the challenge of the problem, you're better off maybe not to do anything.

Now tonight I want to talk to you about gaps, not missile gaps, not credibility gaps, but gaps in our understanding about the uncertainties of our knowledge and about the need to subject every

bit of so-called conventional wisdom to searching review. This is just another way, ladies and gentlemen, of saying we have to put every bit of what we have, which I think is basically good, but nevertheless put it to a searching and critical re-examination. This means everything, in terms of our foreign policy and our national security policy to our economics and to our political and social structure. I am confident that one of the things we need to do is to have a basic reassessment of our priorities at home and abroad, and we need to do it now.

In my classroom, and I have travelled from one end of this nation to the other in classrooms, I am always being challenged, and I have been doing a good deal of challenging myself. I do not let my students think for a minute that I am one of these soft cushions on which they can supposedly bounce their antagonisms or hostilities. I try to be a hard backboard off of which they can bounce their ideas. There has always been the challenge of the present to the past and that is good and that is wholesome. But I think those of us, who some of the young think are of the past, do them a disservice if we act as if we are foam rubber when they throw out an idea and pretend that it may have merit when it has none at all. This is not a way to serve the mind or the body, and surely not a way to serve principles of excellence.

But what better place is there to speak about some of these

things than the American Jewish Committee. And what more appropriate function than a Herbert H. Lehman Memorial Dinner - an evening to honor the memory of a great American who challenged, in his life, every bit of conventional wisdom of this society. I saw him do it in the Senate year after year, especially when this wisdom restricted or denied the rights of the less fortunate among us.

For over 60 years this Committee, respected Committee, honored Committee, has been in the forefront of the effort to understand what make people behave the way they do - why there is bigotry and prejudice and group conflict - what motivates people to act the way they do. And you've been studying how to improve relations between people and between groups. Few, if any other organizations, have been able to do as much or as well. So, tonight, I not only come here to commend you and to pay my respects to your honored guest, to the recipient of this high honor, but I want to do more than commend you, I come here to urge you to do much more - more, more, more, than you have ever done - for one simple reason - there's more to get done - more to be done and the hour is late, the crisis is here.

Two recent studies have prompted my remarks tonight. There have been several studies, of course, but I picked two. Both of these have jarred many of us, and very controversial matters they are. But surely we ought not to fear controversy, we ought to be willing to examine, even though it appears to be controversial. We must

never fear to explore because earlier beliefs may be shaken. We must be willing to explore further because there could be terrible damage and terrible misunderstanding, if only partial knowledge or partial reports of knowledge are simplistically stated and simplistically interpreted. I believe it was the English poet Pope who said, "A little knowledge or a little learning is a dangerous thing." And surely in these matters of social policy, a limited approach, a simplistic approach, can be dangerous.

Now I refer first to the highly controversial Jensen study on the Relative Significance of Environmental and Genetic Influences on Intelligence. Most people don't want to talk about this because they're going to get in trouble and I had to do a little thinking about whether I wanted to talk about it. But I'm a professor now, not a politician, and I am going to talk about what I believe needs to be talked about in this country before it's too late. And secondly, there was a report last week, a study of Head Start, that wonderful anti-poverty program for disadvantaged pre-school children. Oh, yes, I'm familiar with the C.P. Snow report, too, and we might even have a word to say about that.

In both cases, however, these two reports that I've cited, I fear initial public disclosures have already buttressed the prejudices and antagonisms that some Americans feel toward other Americans, towards public efforts to help people. These initial disclosures, these incomplete and often misleading disclosures, could be disastrous to

the very causes that you're working on and that you and I have placed at the top of America's agenda.

But should these concerns want to make us suppress the studies or condemn them out-of-hand? I would hope not. It is now our responsibility to examine these studies, not the immediate news and editorial coverage of them. Let me say, quite frankly, no one is smart enough - I have met no one who can write something substantive every day. And one of the advantages of being a speaker is that you can repeat a speech often, but you can't repeat an article often. And when I see that you've got to deliver supposedly profound, philosophical, moving information every day in a daily column, I say it's impossible, and it is. Thank goodness, some are able to do it once a month or once a week. So, we are not going to be moved by headlines. I don't happen to think the ten-second news flash tells you much, except that somebody died, or that there was an accident or a flood. It really doesn't give you a great insight into human motivation or human behavior. We need to examine the full studies - this is the nitty-gritty of it - the hard work -- to subject the findings to searching analysis and to match those findings with all other knowledge that we have or that we can obtain so that ultimately we may face the total picture. Then and only then we can determine what, if any, modifications in our social policy may be required. There isn't a time that one of these reports comes out but somebody meets me and says, "Well now (they are not quite sure what to call me

whether Vice President, Senator, Mr Humphrey or Professor, but they'll say, to be safe) Mr. Humphrey, just what did you think of that report?"

I think now I've become wise enough to be able to say, "Well, I've read three lines about it and I'm sure that it's maybe three-hundred pages long. It might be better if we didn't comment right away." I have never believed, for example, and I am certain that I will never be able to accept the notion of any racial or group superiority or inferiority.

There are indeed, and let me say it very openly, superior people and inferior people, but one can surely question, and I not only question but I do not believe, that there are superior or inferior peoples as such. The simple fact which I've experienced throughout my life is that there is a wide spectrum of brilliance and sensitivity and spirituality in every single people - that is in every group. There are geniuses on our Indian reservations, in the different tribes and countries of Africa, on Israeli kibbutzim and even some on the faculty and in the student body at Harvard.

There are scoundrels, too, whose skins are white or yellow or black or even in-between, or rich or poor or educated or ignorant. The basic truth which we must always remember is that each individual, and that is what this Committee has been trying to tell the world, that each individual must be judged on his own worth and must be given every opportunity to expose and develop that worth. Eleanor

Roosevelt put it so beautifully - how wonderful this woman in her eloquent simplicity - here's what she said: "Everyone who believes that in every human being there is a spark of the Divine, that he is not an animal, must believe that to help that human being to achieve the fullness of his potential is the greatest service his government can fulfill."

That's it in a nutshell. We have an obligation to let each of God's creatures grow, without unfair barriers or limitations. Then the question comes "How?" It's been put by the poet "Every man his chance" but how? And that's what we have been trying to discover in these recent years and with some uneven success. This is where the Jensen and the Head Start studies give us some clues and I think we've got to be willing to look for clues. Is it possible, for example, that after several hundred years of deprivations, that some Negro children and some white children as well, suffer not only the generally understood environmental handicaps, but have been damaged even genetically? Is the malnutrition, even starvation we find among poor people today, a significant factor in genetic damage to children born to such people? Is there any relationship between poverty and mental retardation? When you and I know that the rate of mental retardation in the ghettos is five to one? Is protein deficiency as serious as we say it is? How come we have been so stupid for so long as not to know that the learning process in the first four or five years of a child's life was

more significant than the balance of his life?

And why is it that a government and a society doesn't do something about it? Why is it we wait to get fat and indulge ourselves in the good things of life when we really ought to be trying to stay thin and trim, which is surely after middle age? When we ought to have the food is when we don't have it, all too often. Here we are with the greatest medical science the world has ever known! Ladies and gentlemen, I stand before you to tell you as a student, a teacher and a public official, that it's almost been like a revelation to the American people, and only a few of them have heard of it recently, that malnutrition affects the intellectual potential.

Now we can do something about this. How cruel it would be if someone were to come in here and commit an act of violence that caused brain damage. You would call the police, you would surely demand some action. Ladies and gentlemen, public policy has been causing brain damage for generations in this country and elsewhere. The ignorance, first of all, the fact when we didn't know, and second of all, when we did know and we didn't do something about it.

I think people can be forgiven if they do not know what they are doing, but when you know what you're doing and you know you can do something else, and do it much better, then you are really committing a grave and grievous sin. I feel very strongly about this, and yet may I say with all of the news about crime and all of the news about disorder and riot, I have yet to see one hundredth as much percentage of coverage about the dangers of malnutrition to the body,

to the mind and to the spirit -- only recently when a Senator or a Committee starts to uncover hunger in a nation that throws more in the garbage can every day than most people eat in a week.

Righteous indignation, yes, I feel this way and I am going to talk about it right across this land because it need not be.

Well now let's take a look at Head Start. We were told last week that gains made by children in this program seem to vanish rapidly. Some persons have already jumped to the hasty conclusion that here is another federal program that seems to have been a failure and a waste of hundreds of millions of dollars. Well, on a purely personal basis, and without getting into the dispute over the accuracy or the methodology of the research, I refuse to accept such a verdict. I've been in many a Head Start class; I think I've been in more than the Study got into; I've seen these children; I've seen their parents and I've seen them actively involved in the program. And I've spoken with the teachers and the doctors and the social workers and the volunteers who have helped these children, and these children are obviously being helped, and significantly.

The tragedy in America is that we do not have universal pre-school education, and the shame of this country is that we do not have day care centers for mothers who need to work and leave their children in a wholesome environment. If we get as excited in America

about day care centers as we do new country clubs, we are going to have something going in this country. And don't misunderstand me, I love good country clubs - I'm not going around here in a hair-shirt or an ashes and sackcloth - I just happen to be like my daddy, who was a man who never every told me what time to go to bed, but he sure was the best getter-upper in the county. I do believe if we're going to have one we can have the other.

Now I understand a little bit about this Head Start study. It is essentially suggesting that many of the gains are not retained, not that there are no gains; and I think that the question has to be asked, "why were the gains not retained?" There is now considerable doubt over the accuracy and the reliability of the study and I'm not surprised. But let's assume that the evidence is upheld in later studies.

The question then becomes "why are the gains of Head Start not retained?" Is it because there is something inherently wrong with the program? Is it the school system which enrolls the children, or with the homes in which the children continue to live, or in the social decay of their neighborhoods? Those are the questions that need to be asked.

I have cited these two recent and specific developments just to illustrate the need before a splendid audience of opinion-makers and men and women of substance and influence - to illustrate the

need for greater study and understanding in the critical areas of social policy.

But there are some other basic questions and I'll leave these questions with you to ponder. What is the basic explanation of the rebelliousness? Yes sir, this revolutionary spirit, the arrogance of some of our college students these days. It is one thing to condemn it, and I've been out where it's happened and I know the impact of it and the feel of it, and I've condemned the violations and the violence as much as others. But what's the explanation? Is this country of ours incapable of living with prosperity? Is that the explanation? Do they have too much time? Is it that our system is rotten? I don't think so; some of them tell me so. Is it really only superficially different, this college generation from previous generations, or is it something frighteningly different at this time? I don't think we really know. What are the similarities as well as the differences between the American and the European experience with youth? To what do you lay the explanation of this incredible, disastrous development of drugs and the use of drugs amongst our young people in particular?

I think it is one thing to say we ought to stop it and another thing to ask why did it happen? Why, when we seem to be on the brink of a real breakthrough in desegregation in the United States, have some elements in the black community given up and actually embraced the very separatism that was once so hateful to them?

Do we have enough understanding of the use of violence in both our domestic and foreign affairs? Are we reverting back to the law of the jungle here at home and abroad, or are we abandoning the rule of reason and substituting the rule of brute force? I think these are just a few of the critical social issues that go toward understanding a man's basic thinking and spiritual processes. On a more practical problem-solving level, then, we must grapple with the new dimensions of concern. How do we turn this nation and this world from a suicidal arms race to a greater acceptance of world order - a world of law and reason? How do we capture the vast resources being used to build the works of war and use them in the cause of peace? Can we really do anything that's effective in time to control the population explosion? What procedures and devices can we develop that will permit the powerless to share in power, to participate fully in the basic decisions of this society? That's the central question of the struggle in this nation today.

How do the left-outs get in? How do the powerless share in power? How do those who feel they're denied begin to feel that they are included? Until that question is settled there will be no peace. There will be no let-up of the tensions and the troubles that are pressing upon this nation.

Now these are not American problems alone. Certainly they are not Democratic or Republican or Jewish or Catholic or Protestant.

But unless we get greater understanding of these and the other greater issues, then it will matter very little whether President Nixon's legislative program is enacted or not, or who will be President in 1972 or 1976. There is some hard thinking to be done in the years ahead, and many of our most cherished assumptions and beliefs will be and must be challenged and may be reshaped. Many of today's problems cry out for immediate solutions, such as hunger, and we must try to develop the best answers we can under the circumstances. But we must also be generous in allocating sufficient manpower, sufficient time and resources, to keep working on the great intellectual challenges which go to the roots of the human condition.

I came here tonight for the singular purpose, not of arousing your emotions, not of telling you what to think, but rather to ask you to think and to think as we've never thought before; to think daringly with the willingness to explore even the most sacred and the most comfortable of traditions, and to ask ourselves "why is all this happening, why is this madness in the world today?"

Is it more than it used to be or is it that we just hear about it more? We need to get some sense of perspective, some sense of values. I think that this great Committee can and will perform a magnificent service in concentrating its resources and its talents, along with others, in trying to find some of the answers.

What a special privilege it is for a man in my position, who has shared for 25 years the honors of public service, where I've either had to advocate a program or defend one, to now be able to just ask the questions. I happen to believe that there is great wisdom amongst the people, and I don't believe we've been seeking that wisdom from the people.

I have only recently begun to understand how much I lived within a limited circle, despite my travels, despite the many friends that I've been privileged to have. But when one gets out into this wide, wide world of conflict, of enterprise, of ideas, of incredible danger and challenge, all at once you begin to feel a little differently.

I've told you before and I leave you with this, I don't think American has lost its way. I think it's trying to find a better way. But in order to find a better way, we'll have to re-examine the map very carefully, and more importantly, the terrain, and be willing to bridge roaring rivers and to walk across the hot sands of the deserts of indifference and even the deserts of rebellion.

I ask the people in this assembly not to lose faith in what we have, but rather to express that faith by making what we have better, not just for ourselves but better for others, who by being helped make it better for us.

Thank you very much.



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