

001568

L I HAVE BEEN TALKING TO VARIOUS GROUPS THROUGHOUT
THE COUNTRY ABOUT WHAT I CALL "A NEW BILL OF RIGHTS FOR
AMERICA. L THESE NEW RIGHTS ARE WHAT YOU MIGHT CALL AN
UP-DATING OF THOSE FIRST TEN AMENDMENTS THAT DECLARE
AMERICANS SHALL BE TRULY FREE MEN AND WOMEN, L WE HAVE
COME A LONG WAY TOWARDS MAKING THOSE IDEALS A REALITY.

L A MAJORITY OF AMERICANS DO HAVE AND EXERCISE THEIR RIGHTS
TO LIFE, LIBERTY AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS, L MOST
AMERICANS DO PARTICIPATE FULLY IN THE MAINSTREAM OF OUR
NATIONAL LIFE L BUT POOR AMERICANS, ALL 24 MILLION OF
DO NOT.
THEM^ THEY ARE AMERICANS IN NAME ONLY, ~~██████~~ So

TODAY I WOULD LIKE TO DISCUSS WITH YOU WHAT I CALL THE
"RIGHT TO PUBLIC COMPASSION."

"COMPASSION" IS ^{a beautiful} ~~AN INTERESTING~~ WORD. IT MEANS TO

"SUFFER WITH." I EMPHASIZE THE "WITH." IT MEANS THAT

THIS RIGHT IS A TWO-WAY STREET. THE POOR HAVE A RIGHT --

A RIGHT TO KNOW THAT THIS MAGNIFICENTLY AFFLUENT, POWERFUL

AND INGENUOUS NATION ALSO HAS A HEART -- NOT A "BLEEDING

HEART -- BUT A HEART. ^{the more} ~~THE~~ FORTUNATE AMERICANS ALSO

HAVE A RIGHT TO FEEL FOR OUR BROTHER CITIZEN -- THE RIGHT

TO EXPECT THE GOVERNMENT WE ELECT AND SUPPORT ^{to} FIND THE

MEANS TO ALLEVIATE AND THEN ERADICATE POVERTY. ^{to} POVERTY,

^{in america} OF THE KIND TOO MANY AMERICANS SUFFER, IS A NATIONAL DISGRACE

WE ^{duty} HAVE THE RIGHT TO CALL FOR ITS DISAPPEARANCE

FROM THE LAND.

WE ALL KNOW WHAT POVERTY IS -- IN THE ABSTRACT.

WE HAVE SEEN THE PICTURES THAT ACCOMPANY VARIOUS
CHARITABLE APPEALS -- A LITTLE CHILD WITH A GROSSLY
SWOLLEN STOMACH -- A LARGE FAMILY POSING IN FRONT OF
THEIR SHACK IN APPALACHIA -- ~~AN~~ INFANT WHOSE FEET
HAVE BEEN GNAWED ON BY A RAT.

WE THINK WE KNOW WHAT POVERTY IS BUT THESE 24 MILLION
AMERICANS EXPERIENCE POVERTY ON AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT
LEVEL OF REALITY. THEY LIVE POVERTY -- THEY SLEEP
POVERTY -- AND FREQUENTLY ALL THEY HAVE TO EAT IS POVERTY.

AFFLUENT AMERICANS FEEL THAT CERTAIN MATERIAL AND
SOCIAL THINGS GO WITH THEIR LIFE STYLE -- A DECENT HOME,
AN AUTOMOBILE, COLOR TELEVISION, VACATIONS, MAYBE A POWER
BOAT.

L MANY OF THESE ARE CHILDREN. SURVEYS HAVE SHOWN THAT

A SERIES OF PSYCHOLOGICALLY AND PHYSICALLY CRIPPLING

DISEASES AND DEFICIENCIES, RESULTING FROM CHILDHOOD

MALNUTRITION, EFFECTIVELY LOCK MANY POOR CHILDREN INTO

A LIFETIME OF POVERTY. CHRONIC FATIGUE, LISTLESSNESS

AND EXHAUSTION OFTEN ACCOMPANY THE DISEASES. THESE

CHILDREN ARE BEING RAISED TO REMAIN DULL, LISTLESS AND

POOR.

L THE 1968 REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

STATES THAT THE POOR SUFFER FOUR TIMES MORE HEART DISEASE --

6 TIMES MORE NERVOUS DISORDER AND RETARDATION -- 10 TIMES

MORE EYE TROUBLE THAN THE AFFLUENT.

THE EXTREMES OF HEAT AND COLD, OVERCROWDING, ANCIENT PLUMBING AND OUTDOOR PRIVVIES ARE ALL TOO REAL TO THE MILLIONS OF AMERICAN POOR. MILLIONS ARE PACKED INTO INNER CITY TENEMENTS WHICH HAVE INADEQUATE HEATING AND PLUMBING.

L IN RURAL AREAS, INDIVIDUAL SHACKS OR GROUPS OF SHANTIES ARE THE DWELLING FOR FARM WORKERS AND MIGRANT LABORERS.

THESE HOUSES, OFTEN CRUMBLING AND ROTTING, SELDOM HAVE RUNNING WATER OR INDOOR PLUMBING. THESE CONDITIONS ARE READY BREEDING PLACES FOR DISEASES YOU AND I NEVER ENCOUNTER IN OUR LIFETIME.

THE SENSE OF HOPELESSNESS THAT POOR AMERICANS FEEL IN BEARING THE BURDEN I JUST DESCRIBED IS BAD ENOUGH.

- 7 -

BUT WHAT IS REALLY IRONIC IS THAT THE POOR MUST LARGELY
ABANDON THEIR CULTURE TO MAKE IT IN OUR AFFLUENT SOCIETY.

L AFFLUENT SOCIETY LOOMS BEFORE THEM AS AN ALMOST
INSURMOUNTABLE CONGLOMERATION OF STRANGE CUSTOMS;
SEEMINGLY ILLOGICAL REQUIREMENTS, RULES AND REGULATIONS;
AND, IN SOME CASES, CRUEL HYPOCRISY AND CONDESCENSION.

TO THE POOR, AFFLUENT SOCIETY IS A WORLD OF ENDLESS
PRINTED FORMS, BIG WORDS, AMBIGUOUS PHRASES, LISTED
REQUIREMENTS, AND BIG BLANK SPACES WHERE THEY MUST SIGN
THEIR NAMES, IN IGNORANCE OF WHAT THEY ARE SIGNING. IT
IS INTO THIS WORLD THAT THE POOR HAVE TO VENTURE IF THEY
ARE TO RECEIVE THE EDUCATION, THE EMPLOYMENT, AND THE
FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL AID THAT THEY ARE TOLD WILL HELP
RAISE THEM ABOVE THE POVERTY LEVEL.

THE PRINCIPAL CAUSE OF POVERTY IS THAT THE INDIVIDUAL
IS EITHER UNEMPLOYED OR UNDEREMPLOYED. FIFTY-FIVE
PER CENT OF ALL POOR FAMILIES IN 1969 WERE POOR DESPITE
THE FACT THAT THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY DID WORK DURING
ALL OR PART OF THE YEAR. IN ANOTHER 30 PER CENT OF
POOR FAMILIES, THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY WAS UNABLE TO WORK
BECAUSE OF ILLNESS OR DISABILITY OR BECAUSE IT WAS
NECESSARY TO STAY HOME TO CARE FOR THE FAMILY.

BUT WHETHER POVERTY IS CAUSED BY UNEMPLOYMENT,
UNDEREMPLOYMENT, DISABILITY, AGE, OR INABILITY OF THE
HEAD OF THE HOUSE TO LEAVE THE FAMILY FOR WORK, THE RESULTS
ARE THE SAME: LOW INCOME, HUNGER, DISEASE, POOR HOUSING
AND PERSONAL DISCOURAGEMENT.

THIS CONDITION CONTRIBUTES TO AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE ANOTHER GENERATION OF POVERTY-TRAINED CHILDREN ARE RAISED. THIS IS THE POVERTY CYCLE WE TALK ABOUT SO MUCH AND FIND SO DIFFICULT TO BREAK.

L THE OFFICE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY REPORTED THAT BETWEEN 1959 AND 1966, 6,200,000 RURAL POOR MOVED TO URBAN AREAS, TAKING WITH THEM WHATEVER SKILLS THEY

POSSESS. h THEY LEFT BEHIND THEM THE OLDER AND LESS

EDUCATED. l LOCAL RURAL GOVERNMENTS CANNOT PROVIDE THE **NECESSARY** EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND OTHER MEANS^ TO BREAK OUT OF THE POVERTY CYCLE.

L ONE-HALF OF THE NATION'S POOR LIVE IN METROPOLITAN

AREAS. l THIRTEEN PER CENT OF THE POPULATION OF CENTRAL CITIES ARE CONSIDERED TO BE POOR.

IT IS IN THE GHETTOS AND SLUMS OF OUR URBAN AREAS WHERE

THE SEAMLESS WEB OF POVERTY IS DRAWN MOST TIGHTLY:

L POOR EDUCATION, LIMITED EMPLOYMENT SKILLS AND WORK

HABITS, UNEMPLOYMENT, DEPENDENCY, DECREPIT HOUSING,

BROKEN FAMILIES, HUNGER, OVERCROWDING, CRIME AND NARCOTICS.

L ^{these} ALL COMBINE TO MAKE ESCAPE FROM THE POVERTY CYCLE

DIFFICULT IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE -- WITHOUT OUR HELP,

L THESE EXPLOSIVE INGREDIENTS COMBINE TO MAKE THE

AMERICAN URBAN SLUM THE MOST OMINOUS AND DANGEROUS

POCKET OF POVERTY IN THE NATION. WE HAVE ALL SEEN

WHAT HAPPENED IN DETROIT, WASHINGTON, WATTS, NEWARK AND

NEW YORK.

MANY CITIES ARE NEARLY BANKRUPT. NEW YORK STATE AND CITY ARE PLANNING MASSIVE LAY-OFFS OF MUNICIPAL AND STATE EMPLOYEES. THE INFLUX OF LOW-INCOME FAMILIES INTO THE CENTRAL CITY HAS CREATED A HEAVY DEMAND FOR WELFARE AND OTHER COSTLY PUBLIC SERVICES. BUT THIS DEMAND FOR INCREASED SERVICES IS NOT MATCHED WITH THE TAX BASE TO SUPPORT THEM. THE WELL-OFF HAVE MOVED TO THE SUBURBS AND INDUSTRY NO LONGER LOCATES PLANTS IN THE INNER CITIES. IN FACT, THERE IS A RUSH OF CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS FROM NEW YORK CITY. NOT ONLY ARE THE JOBS NO LONGER IN THE INNER CITY, BUT EVEN THE TAXES FROM INDUSTRIAL HEADQUARTERS ARE LEAVING. (REVENUE-SHARING)

THIS IS WHY THE STRUGGLE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS IN AMERICA IS IN THE INNER CITY.

THESE WALLED FORTRESSES OF POVERTY -- THESE GHETTOS OF THE POOR ARE WHERE WE MUST MEET THE CHALLENGE OF THE '70's. THIS IS WHERE THE TESTING OF AMERICA'S NEW BILL OF RIGHTS IS TAKING PLACE.

WE HAVE DEVELOPED A BROAD OFFENSIVE TO COMBAT POVERTY. THE POOR ARE NOT A HOMOGENEOUS GROUP. THEIR NEEDS DIFFER FROM CITY TO CITY AND FROM URBAN TO RURAL AREA. THIS BROAD APPROACH IS REFLECTED IN PASSAGE OF THE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY ACT OF 1964, ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW PROGRAMS SUCH AS COMMUNITY ACTION, NEIGHBORHOOD LEGAL SERVICES, HEADSTART, AND VISTA.

BUT MUCH MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE TO FINISH THE JOB.

THE TWO-PRONGED GENERAL ATTACK SHOULD ^{BOTH} EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES AND INCENTIVES FOR EVERYONE TO EARN A LIVING, AND ESTABLISH AN EFFECTIVE INCOME MAINTENANCE PROGRAM FOR ALL WHO ARE IN NEED.

THE JOB PROGRAM SHOULD PROVIDE EFFECTIVE TRAINING AND EDUCATIONAL PLANS, COMBINED WITH JOB PLACEMENT. WE MUST STRENGTHEN OUR PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM TO PROVIDE AS MANY JOBS AS ARE FEASIBLE IN HEALTH, TRANSPORTATION, SANITATION AND OTHER BASIC PUBLIC SERVICES. THERE ARE THOUSANDS AND THOUSANDS OF THESE JOBS UNFILLED RIGHT NOW AND ALL OF US ARE SUFFERING BECAUSE OF IT. (EMERGENCY EMPLOYMENT ACT 150,000 -- PUBLIC SERVICE EMPLOYMENT -- 200,000 = 350,000 NEW JOBS IF PRESIDENT DOESN'T VETO.)

WORK RELATED SOCIAL SECURITY PROGRAMS SHOULD BE STRENGTHENED TO KEEP THE RETIRED, THE DEPENDENTS OF DECEASED WORKERS, THE DISABLED AND THE UNEMPLOYED FROM POVERTY.

OLD-AGE, SURVIVORS AND DISABILITY BENEFITS SHOULD BE INCREASED WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON THE MINIMUM BENEFIT. BENEFITS UNDER UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION AND WORKMEN'S COMPENSATION NEED TO BE INCREASED, AND COVERAGE NEEDS TO BE BROADENED, SO THAT ALL WORKERS UNDER AGE 65 WHO ARE INJURED OR UNEMPLOYED WILL RECEIVE ADEQUATE PAYMENTS. (BAYH-HUMPHREY AMENDMENT TO EXTEND 26 MORE WEEKS OF COVERAGE FOR UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION.)

- 15 -

L THE WELFARE REFORM PLAN NOW GOING THROUGH THE
CONGRESS IS A BEGINNING. L IT PROVIDES A GUARANTEED
ANNUAL INCOME OF \$2400 FOR A FAMILY OF 4; FOOD STAMPS
WOULD BE PHASED OUT IN FAVOR OF CASH PAYMENTS; MINIMUM
PAYMENTS FOR INDIVIDUALS WOULD SCALE UP TO \$150 AND A
COUPLE WOULD RECEIVE \$200 BY 1974; THE WORKING POOR WOULD
BE COVERED AND THEIR TOTAL INCOME COULD REACH \$4,320
~~BEFORE THE \$720 WORK SUPPLEMENT WOULD BE ERASED BY ACTUAL~~
~~WORK INCOME;~~ DAY-CARE CENTERS WOULD BE PROVIDED FOR
CHILDREN OF THOSE WORKING; AND UP TO 200,000 PUBLIC SERVICE
JOBS WOULD BE CREATED. THIS PROGRAM WOULD SAVE THE STATES
AND LOCALITIES APPROXIMATELY \$2.2 BILLION. EVENTUALLY,
ALL WELFARE MUST BE FEDERALIZED.

WE MUST NOT INDULGE IN FANTASIES THAT POVERTY WILL GO AWAY AS SOON AS WE CAN PUT ALL THOSE ON WELFARE TO WORK. THIS JUST ISN'T GOING TO HAPPEN. WE WILL CONTINUE TO HAVE EXPENSIVE BILLS TO PAY, BUT THIS COUNTRY IS RICH ENOUGH TO TAKE CARE OF ITS OWN. WE HAVE THE RESOURCES AND INGENUITY TO MAKE THIS SYSTEM WORK -- MAKE IT GRANT BASIC DECENCY TO THE RECIPIENT OF WELFARE AND PEACE OF MIND TO THE TAXPAYER, THROUGH SIMPLICITY, EQUITY, ADEQUACY AND DIGNITY.

POVERTY IN A TIME OF AFFLUENCE IS A NATIONAL DISGRACE -- IT WEAKENS AND DIVIDES OUR NATION. YOU PEOPLE ARE IN COMMUNICATION -- THE WHOLE WORLD KNOWS WHAT IS GOING ON IN EVERY CITY AND RURAL AREA OF AMERICA.

CAN WE TALK ABOUT THE BASIC AND INALIENABLE RIGHTS
GUARANTEED TO EVERY AMERICAN WHILE 24 MILLION OF US
ARE EXCLUDED FROM THAT RIGHT WE HAVE DISCUSSED TODAY --
THE "RIGHT TO PUBLIC COMPASSION?"

LET THE GROUPS OF AMERICANS ON BOTH ENDS OF THIS
"COMPASSION" ASSERT THEIR RIGHTS.

#####



Minnesota Historical Society

Copyright in this digital version belongs to the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, link to, or email content, however, for individual use.

To request permission for commercial or educational use, please contact the Minnesota Historical Society.



www.mnhs.org