

I have hardly mentioned race up to this point. I have talked of the desperate needs of human beings. They are needs we should face up to without asking what color people are.

Perhaps we should talk less about race when we discuss urban problems. After all, it is a fact that our slum dwellers are not all black. There are more whites than blacks below the poverty line in our cities. In New York City, the median income of Puerto Ricans appears to be lower than that of Negroes. When we look at the slums of the largest cities, we find that two of the three cities with the highest subemployment rates are San Antonio and Phoenix — and in these places the victims of poverty are mostly Americans of Mexican descent.

Yet we cannot ignore race as an autonomous factor in the urban problem, nor can we fail to recognize discrimination as a major obstacle to its solution. We will not attain the objective of making cities completely fit for human habitation until discrimination in housing, employment, and education has become as extinct as slavery.

At the hearings on the Republican Platform at Miami Beach, a great man, John W. Gardner, now chairman of the Urban Coalition, offered memorable remarks. I would like to step over that fine line that separates research from plagiarism and make the words of John Gardner my own. But, before this audience, I feel obliged to put his in quotation marks:

“Don’t be fooled by appearances. A nation doesn’t run on dollars or wheels or skills or natural resources . . . . A nation runs on motivation, on aspiration, on a vision of what it might become.

“Woe to the nation that has no animating values, or having them, gives up the endless effort to be true to them. The price is not just a guilty conscience, it is disintegration of the society.

“The great work of our generation . . . . is to make this a livable society for every American, a society in which no child’s growth will be stunted or fulfillment impaired by circumstance that can be prevented; a society in which ignorance and disease and want will tyrannize no longer; a society that does not assault the senses with ugliness nor the mind with mediocrity nor the spirit with bleakness.”

American cities today are a denial of our animating values — those values to which we all give lip service on the Fourth of July and other special ceremonial occasions.

When we begin to take seriously the things we say in speeches and carve on monuments about human brotherhood and equality, then we shall redeem our cities.