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A PERSPECTIVE ON THE PRESENT STATUS OF DIVERSITY IN THE UNITED STATES†

JULIAN BOND††

When we think of diversity and fairness in the United States today, we think of a figure from our past, the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Racial justice, economic equity, and world peace were the themes which consumed his life and for which we honor him in memory. These issues haunt us as much now as when Dr. King lived. They are as old as our nation, and as new as today.

We have just ended a war in the Persian Gulf. The old Soviet Bloc is on the edge of armed anarchy, destroying itself in white on white violence, fueled by ancient tribal wars.

When Martin Luther King spoke out against the war in Vietnam in 1965, he was revolted at the hypocrisy of America's claims for freedom overseas when blacks enjoyed few freedoms here. "[W]e have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools."1

"The pursuit of widened war," King said in 1966, "has narrowed domestic welfare programs, making the poor, white and Negro, bear the heaviest burdens at the front and at home."2 How true those words ring today.

The stock market opened in 1991 at its second lowest level in history. Our economy is in decline, unemployment is rising, banks are failing. And race remains a primary factor in deter-

† This speech was given at William Mitchell College of Law on February 28, 1991 as part of the school's Diversity Week. The author retains the copyright to this speech.

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2. This quote has been attributed to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., but its authorship has not been verified.
mining how long some Americans will live, how much they will earn and learn, how soon their children will die.

Our present is filled with a renaissance of racism. The university has become a battleground against bigots; the list of schools where attacks on blacks or Jews have occurred stretches from Abraham Baldwin College in Georgia to Yale University in Connecticut, from the University of Alabama to the University of Wisconsin.

Howard Beach and Bensonhurst reminded us this virus knows no geography; today's daily headlines tell us that no region of the nation, no sector of our society is immune from hate and fear.

In less than nine years, we will see what few Americans living now have ever seen; the birth of a new century and the death of an old. Let us look backward over these ninety years.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the late Dr. W.E.B. DuBois set down a program the movement for civil rights ought to pursue.

We must complain. Yes, plain, blunt complaint, ceaseless agitation, unfailing exposure of dishonesty and wrong—this is the ancient, unerring way to liberty, and we must follow it.

... Next, we propose to work. These are the things that we as black men must try to do.

To press the matter of stopping the curtailment of our political rights.
To urge Negroes to vote intelligently and effectively.
To push the matter of civil rights.
To organize business co-operation.
To build school houses and increase the interest in education. To bring Negroes and labor unions into mutual understanding.
To study Negro history.

... To attack crime among us.

[T]o do all in our power by word or deed to increase the efficiency of our race, the enjoyment of its manhood, rights and the performance of its just duties.

This is a large program. It cannot be realized in a short
time. . . . [But] this is the critical time.  

DuBois correctly predicted then that the struggle of the twentieth century would be the struggle of the color line. From before DuBois' time until today, black Americans have generally followed his prescription for action, pursuing civil rights, economic justice, and entrance into the mainstream of American life. The years since then saw gains won at lunch counters and movie theaters and polling places, and the fabric of legal segregation was destroyed. What had begun as a movement for elemental civil rights has now become largely a political and an economic movement.

Despite impressive increases in the number of black people holding public office, and despite our ability to sit and eat and ride and vote in places which used to bar black faces, in a very real way nonwhite Americans are worse off now than in the years that went before.

When the final phase of the 1988 presidential campaign formally began, both George Bush and Michael Dukakis saw an America too many Americans never see. For both candidates, America was a land of happy families and successful suburbs, where every child waves an American flag and every day is the Fourth of July. But there was then, and is now, another America, a shadow America neither candidate dared to show or tell.

As the 1980s began, the nation chose a president whose terms could hold awful parallels with Reconstruction almost exactly 100 years before. Then and now, a president, desperate for power, entered into an illicit arrangement, not just with the unreconstructed South, but with the national unreconstructed majority, which believed then, as it does now, that private profit and public arrogance could be pursued at the expense of those living on the economic edge.

The 1980 election was won by an amiable incompetent whose sole intent was removing the government from every aspect of American life. He intended to take the government out of the business of enforcing equal opportunity. He intended to eliminate affirmative action for women and minorities. He intended to erase the laws and programs written in blood and sweat in the quarter century since Martin Luther

King, Jr. became the premier figure in the freedom movement and an American majority became single-minded in pursuit of human freedom.

For the Reaganites, conflict of interest became a precondition for employment in government. A band of financial and ideological profiteers descended on Washington like a crazed swarm of right-wing locusts bent on destroying the rules and laws which protected our people from bigotry, from poisoned air and water, from greed. But nowhere was their assault on the rule of law so great as in their attempt to subvert, ignore, defy and destroy the laws which require an America that is bias-free.

A constituency of the comfortable, the callous, and the smug was recruited to form solid ranks against the forgotten. They enforced the national nullification of the needs of the needy, the gratuitous gratification of the gross and the greedy, and practiced the politics of prevarication, pious platitudes and self-righteous swineishness. They forced a form of triage economics upon us, producing the first increase in infant mortality rates in twenty years and pushing thousands of poor and working poor Americans deeper into poverty. By midterm, the Census Bureau reported that the number of people living in poverty had increased over the previous four years by more than nine million, the biggest increase since these statistics were first collected over two decades ago. Today the poorest two-fifths of our population receives a smaller share of the national income and the richest two-fifths a larger share than at any time since 1947. If we are to believe with Thomas Jefferson that “the common man is the most precious resource of the state,” that precious resource is in real danger of economic extinction today.

They increased American interference in the lives of our neighbors in this hemisphere and in other countries around the globe. Criminal invasion in Grenada, U.S. sponsored terrorism in Nicaragua and Angola, and encouragement of white supremacy in South Africa are the legacies of the Reagan years, the decade of the dominance of greed.

Those eight years were a festive party, thrown for America’s rich. The middle class got by on two paychecks, median family income was stagnant, and the percentage of young families who owned their own homes went down for the first time since
the Depression. The poorest tenth of the population saw their income fall by ten percent. Young men between twenty-five and thirty-four saw their wages drop by nearly a dollar an hour.

Savings and investment were down in the Reagan years. Increases in productivity were stuck at one percent a year, and while the nation's output of goods and services had risen strongly, the increase came from more Americans working longer hours at lower pay.

Despite low numbers of Americans unemployed, the percentage living in poverty remained the same, higher than in any years in the 1970s. While workers pay had grown faster than the rate of inflation in the 1970s, that growth sharply slowed in the 1980s, and a slower growth in living standards was not far behind.

And for those Americans whose skin is black or brown, the poverty rate went up while median family income went down. For children of any color, the numbers living in poverty doubled by 1987. Poverty for black and Hispanic senior citizens went up, poorer children got poorer, and the gap between rich and poor grew wider. After a twenty-year decline, infant mortality rates for blacks went up.

By 1986, the wealth of the average white family was twelve times the wealth of the average black family. In 1969, three-fourths of all black men were working; by the end of the 1980s, only fifty-seven percent had a job. For these families, it wasn't morning in America. The only shining points of light they saw were daylight through the cracks in their walls.

Permit me to speak as we go with two voices. First as a contemporary fellow passenger on what promises to be a tough and frustrating trip from the present toward the twenty-first century, and secondly, as a witness and participant in an earlier leg of that journey, a trip whose stops include Selma and Saigon, Jackson and Johannesburg, a trip which will take us from Ole Miss to U. Mass., from Bull Connor's dogs to Ronald Reagan's judges, from the Ku Klux Klan to Neo-Nazis and the Posse Comitatus, from Brown v. Board of Education\(^4\) to Ward's Cove Packing Co. v. Atonio\(^5\) from James Earl Ray to Bernard Goetz and David Duke, from bombs in Birmingham to Boston's bigotry to a bombing in Birmingham again.

In many ways, the Southern freedom movement was a second Reconstruction, whose ripples were felt far beyond the Southern states and whose victories benefited more than blacks.

Like the first, almost exactly 100 years before, it focused on making the civil rights protections of America's half-citizens secure. Like the first, it saw gains for blacks extended to protections for others. Like the first, it gave new life to movements of other disadvantaged Americans, and like the first Reconstruction, the second ended when the national purpose wavered and reaction swept the land.

Before it ended, it was our democracy's finest hour. A voteless people voted with their bodies and their feet, and showed the way for other social protest. The antiwar movement drew its earliest soldiers from the Southern freedom army; the movement for women's rights took many of its cues, and its momentum, from the Southern movement for civil rights.

These three impediments to democracy's success—gender, race and abusive power—were all weakened by the movement's drive, and we are all better for it today.

An important step in the movement came in the spring of 1954. In April 1954, Martin Luther King, Jr., preached his first sermon as pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. He was twenty-five years old. He could not have known that in nine years, he would be the most famous black American, speaking at the March on Washington to the largest gathering of civil rights supporters in American history. And he could not have known that in fourteen years he would be dead.

Ten days after the first sermon, the French forces in a faraway garrison called Dien Ben Phu were overcome. No one imagined then that 55,000 American men would die in Vietnam.

Ten days after the French fell, legal segregation began to fall as well; the United States Supreme Court ruled on May 17, 1954, that segregated public schools were against the law. The Court's ruling destroyed segregation's legality, and an army of nonviolent protesters quickly arose to challenge its morality as well.

The southern movement for civil rights, like the war in Vietnam, showed Americans at our best and worst. At our best, we were and are a caring people, heroic and brave. At our worst,
we were and are a narrow and selfish people, devoted to skin privilege. And here, at home, in the American South, a decades-long struggle against great odds did win real victories, not just for Southern blacks, but for American ideals as well.

A year and a half after Martin Luther King, Jr. arrived in Montgomery, another black woman was arrested for refusing to give her seat to a white man on a city bus. One year and five days after Rosa Parks’ arrest, a young lawyer named Nelson Mandela was arrested in South Africa. Mrs. Parks’ arrest in Montgomery triggered a year-long bus boycott that broke the back of segregation in Montgomery, and the inspiration of the Montgomery movement set nonviolent fires in towns and cities across the south.

In 1960, college students adopted the Montgomery technique of nonviolent resistance, and thousands accepted jail without bail by sitting down to stand up for their rights. The next year, they attacked segregated interstate travel with their bodies and segregated ballot boxes across the South as well. There were lives lost along the way, and laws passed; by 1965 Jim Crow was legally dead. The 1957 and 1964 Civil Rights Acts and the 1965 Voting Rights Act gave blacks federal protection for rights most Americans already enjoyed.

Today we see a very different picture: a population largely indifferent to the poverty around it; a people more concerned about trapped whales in Alaska than babies trapped in poverty in Alabama. After the successes of the 1960s, the movement for civil rights faltered in the 1970s and has been in stages of advance and retreat ever since.

But the current threat to civil rights comes not from Southern sheriffs or bombs, but from the national government and the White House itself. Until 1981, the Federal government had a credible record as an opponent of discrimination. Under Republican and Democratic presidents alike, they won decisions prohibiting overt discrimination and others which banned practices that perpetuated the effects of discrimination in the past.

But beginning in 1981, they discovered a heretofore unknown protected class, white men, and directed their efforts toward protecting the benefits of this beleaguered and helpless group. Ronald Reagan had never seen a civil rights law he liked; his appointees to the federal courts and the Department
of Justice were determined to destroy or disobey every civil rights law they read. They made dangerous, precipitous and radical shifts toward contravening the Constitution and the law of the land.

The ultimate result of such policy was contempt for the rule of law itself. Had they prevailed, our constitutional rights would have been protected only when they were popularly agreed to or when a person who supports them was elected President of the United States. For the past and present administrations, the Constitution is a document of infinite elasticity, to be tailored and snipped to fit the passions of the moment.

The record is appalling. It reveals official lawlessness, a retreat from bipartisan policies practiced in the past, and an ignorance of law that would have been frightening in a private practitioner; when, however the wrong-doers were the President and Attorneys General of the United States, the rule of law itself was threatened and an appeal made to the lowest and basest instincts of our people.

The Reagan years saw attempts to give tax breaks to segregated schools; opposition to renewal of the Voting Rights Act followed by a cynical claim of credit for its passage; the trashing of the Civil Rights Commission; the transformation of the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice into a society for the protection of white male privilege; the halting of integration of public schools; strident attacks on that part of the federal judiciary that still sought to protect minority rights.

The human costs of these actions are beyond measure. When the government becomes the aggressor against the civil rights of its people, it becomes the promoter of prejudice and makes common cause with the stain of white supremacy that has persisted throughout our history. Despite this dreary record, there were successes, and the bipartisan congressional majority on civil rights remained intact.

A second front against racial justice was opened in the 1980s and has gained strength ever since. Led by scholars and academicians, funded by corporate America, this movement of neoconservatives aimed its efforts at removing government regulation from every aspect of our lives and found a handy hated target in civil rights.

While professing strong support for equal rights, these neo-
Bourbons opposed every tool devised to achieve that goal. They discredited affirmative action, not only because it threatened ancient skin privilege, but because it served as an easy symbol of despised government intervention. For these new racists, equal opportunity is a burden society cannot afford to bear. Their less than subtle message is that including blacks and women excludes quality.

The truth is that true equality requires an increase in unwanted competition these new States’ Righters cannot stand; their old-boy networks, in academia or in industry, cannot tolerate federal imposition of equal rights. They argue that the civil rights laws of the 1960s eliminated all discrimination, that the playing field is now level, that every contestant stands equal at the starting line. That some contestants have no shoes, that others find their legs gripped by heavy baggage from the past, and that an advantaged few begin the race at the finish line is of no consequence to these champions of the new order.

The movement today suffers not from its imagined excesses, but from the lies and distortions of its opponents. They tell us discrimination against minorities is not a problem; society must protect itself from discrimination against the majority instead. They tell us schoolteachers and unemployed mothers are “special interests.” They tell us civil rights remedies produce civil wrongs. They tell us class, not race, produces racial inequity, that culture, not color, separates black from white. They tell us America is colorblind, but a recent national survey tells us that the majority of whites believe blacks and Hispanics prefer welfare to work, are lazier than whites, and are more prone to violence, less intelligent and less patriotic.6 Tell that to the troops who fought in Operation Desert Storm.

These new obstructionists reject the intergenerational effects of racism as a cause of disadvantage; discrimination is dead, they say, and cannot be at fault, but blacks will suffer disadvantage as long as they exhibit discrimination’s badges.

When the topic is black unemployment rates, twice those for whites, past and present bias plays no role. But when the subject is welfare burdens or teenage pregnancies or other so

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called "pathologies," these neosegs never tire of listing the cumulative effects of our racist past.

Yesterday's movement has been criticized, in the perfect hindsight of today, for winning gains for middle-class blacks alone, but middle-class blacks in Montgomery did not ride the city's buses, and college professors and bankers in Greensboro did not eat their lunches at the five and ten.

Someone needs to disabuse the modern world of the notion that the beneficiaries of race-centered affirmative action are somehow "profiting" from it, as if the movement's goals were an investment shared by a greedy few, a subtribe of ebony Ivan Boesky's trading up life's ladder. There is no "profit" in receiving right treatment. Receiving rights others already enjoy is no special benefit or badge of privilege; it is the natural order of things in a democratic society. The continuing disparity between black and white life-chance is a result of epidemic racism and an economic system dependent on class division.

Abundant scholarship notwithstanding, there is no other possible explanation, not family breakdown, not lack of middle-class values, not lack of education or skills, not absence of role models. These are symptoms. Racism is the cause; its elimination is the cure. The last item on the civil rights agenda—economic justice—remains unfulfilled and unaddressed.

Martin Luther King, Jr. lost his life supporting a garbage workers' strike in Memphis; the right to decent work at decent pay is as important as the right to vote.

"Negroes," King said in 1961, "are almost entirely a working people. There are pitifully few Negro millionaires and few Negro employers. Our needs are identical to labor's needs: decent wages, fair working conditions, liveable housing, old age security, health and welfare measures, conditions in which families can grow, have education for their children and respect in the community." 7

That there are more black millionaires today is a tribute to the movement King lead; that there are proportionately fewer blacks working today is an indictment of our times and our economic system, a reflection of our failure to keep the movement coming on. Today the movement's focus is on set-asides

7. Address by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Fourth Constitutional Convention of the AFL-CIO (Dec. 11, 1961).
instead of wages, on joint ventures instead of jobs, when all, not either alone, is required.

The first two years of the kinder, gentler administration only reminds us how much things remain the same. The names have changed, but not the actions, and the assault on racial equity continues with just as much determination as before.

The President began by choosing as the nation’s chief civil rights lawyer a man most Americans would not choose to represent them in People’s Court; he continues a performance that is loud in rhetoric, but lacks execution through his dismaying attitude toward the Civil Rights Act of 1990.

On Monday, February 22, 1991, President Bush interrupted his prosecution of the war in the Persian Gulf to celebrate Black History Month. He mentioned the disproportionate burden borne by blacks among the troops in Operation Desert Storm, and promised to stand with them in a fight for “respect and dignity” when they returned. Those willing to risk life and limb abroad cannot be asked to continue risk on their return; these warriors deserve the fullest protection of the United States. Those large numbers of blacks and browns in khaki, the President said, exist because these volunteers know the military is an equal opportunity employer. A military surplus of opportunity, the President seemed to say, an opportunity draft, makes Uncle Sam more attractive for blacks and browns than whites. The fairness they see in the military they do not see at home.

One measure of protection they should expect is the Civil Rights Act of 1991. President Bush vetoed its predecessor, the Civil Rights Act of 1990, because he said it would cause businesses to adopt quotas. The real issue was never quotas; it was quotients, the low intelligence quotients of the people who believed that lie.

What the bill does do is restore law that existed from 1971 until overturned by the Supreme Court in 1989. The old law produced no quotas; the new law forbids them. What it will do is protect our men and women from the evil dictator of racial and sexual discrimination; those who risked their lives against Saddam Hussein deserve no less.

If the 1990s promise expanded freedoms in Eastern Europe

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and Southern Africa, we have a right to ask what we can expect at home. We were right to celebrate the death of totalitarianism overseas, but the early warning signs of collapse here at home may mean we cannot crown capitalism king just yet.

Twice before in the twentieth century we saw the private economy unable to cope with the challenges it faced. Six decades ago we embraced an aggressive, interventionist government when the private economy proved unable to beat back the depression and put wages into people's pockets once again.

We embraced an activist government again in the late 1950s and early 1960s when it became clear there would be no private sector or state level commitment to ending racial segregation without the intervention of the federal government. By 1960 it had become clear that the capitalist system had failed to moderate or restrain the privation which afflicted one in every five Americans just three decades ago.

Government's efforts worked then; they reduced poverty by more than half and relieved some of poverty's grimmest conditions: malnutrition, poor housing, ill health. They provided successful job training, raising the economic level of thousands of Americans. They provided early education for low-income children, increasing their chances for success in life. They increased visits by the poor to doctors, and they cut our substandard housing stock in half.

The message from the Congress and the White House is not encouraging. The President's State of the Union speech continued the reverse Robin Hood traditions of the Reagan years; squeezing the needy to fatten the greedy. Between Bush and Reagan, there's not a new paradigm's worth of difference.

The Democrats have nearly forgotten how to be an opposition. They read the President's lips too, but seem unable to form words or programs of their own. There is no courage on Capitol Hill; coalitions of the comfortable have replaced the notion that our society could be organized in a kinder, gentler way.

Today, black Americans face conditions as daunting as the firehoses and billy clubs of thirty years ago. An Urban League report tells us that blacks lost, not gained, ground in the 1980s. And on the streets and sidewalks where black America lives, crime and violence rule.
Homicide is the leading cause of death for fifteen to thirty-four year old black men and women, and ninety-five percent of the murders are black-on-black crimes. These are not drive-by shootings or strangers killing strangers; in most of these deaths the killer and victim knew each other. These are friend shooting friend.

In life chances, life expectancy, years of education completed, median income, in all the standards by which life is measured, black Americans see a deep and widening gulf between the American dream and the reality of their lives.

For the past decade, an often indifferent and sometimes hostile federal government helped to widen the gap; today, the neosegregationist majority on the Supreme Court denies minorities and women relief in the federal court. Court decisions and presidential indifference send a signal to the rest of America, to business and labor and education.

For nearly all of the last twenty years, the old interracial coalition that championed civil rights at Selma’s bridge and in Congress’ halls has been in retreat. We knew we had lost a champion with the death of Martin Luther King, Jr.; we never imagined support for equal rights would die as well. Martin Luther King, Jr. isn’t the only soldier missing from the freedom fight; he was part of an army that numbered tens of thousands. While all valued his leadership, few waited for his direction before an attack on segregation began.

In every city where he mounted a campaign, a viable local movement existed long before King brought his leadership to the scene. In countless Southern towns, aggressive antisegregation activity had a history that began in slavery time. Today we wait for others to sanction our protests, to lead us. Yesterday’s movement was a people’s movement. It produced leaders of its own; but it relied not on the noted but the nameless, not on the famous but the faceless.

We look back on the King years with some nostalgia, for those were the years when we were truly able to overcome. Our inability to do so today is conditioned, at least partially, by the way we recall Martin Luther King, Jr. For most of us, Martin Luther King, Jr. is an image seen in grainy, black and white television film taken in Washington a quarter of a century ago, the gifted preacher who had a dream.

But Martin Luther King was more than that, and the move-
ment more than Martin Luther King. King did more than tell
the nation of his dream at the March on Washington. In the
years before and after he addressed the human condition, the
larger world beyond America's shores.

King came from a long tradition of black leadership in
America, leadership which never felt limited to black civil
rights alone. In some ways, we have become King-dependent,
summoning his memory as a substitute for action. But we for-
get that he stood at the head of thousands, the people who
made that mighty movement what it was.

From Jamestown's slave pens to Montgomery's boycotted
buses, these ordinary men and women labored in obscurity,
and from Montgomery forward they provided the soldiers of
the freedom army. They walked to work in dignity, rather than
ride in shame. They faced mobs in Birmingham and death in
Mississippi. They sat at lunch counters, and they stood and
marched and organized.

Martin Luther King, Jr. didn't march from Selma to Mont-
gomery by himself. He didn't speak to an empty field at the
March on Washington. There were thousands marching with
him, and before him, and thousands more who one by one,
and two by two did the dirty work that preceded the triumphal
march.

Black Americans didn't just march to freedom; they worked
their way toward civil rights through the difficult business of
organizing. Knocking on doors, one by one. Registering vot-
ers, one by one. Developing a community effort, block by
block. Creating an effective organization, town by town. Pro-
ducing indigenous leadership, often unlettered and inarticu-
late, but always unafraid.

Today we look to others to lead and direct us; yesterday we
told the leaders where the people were, what the people
wanted leaders to do. There is an enormous opportunity for
service available to each of us, wherever and whomever we may
happen to be. From the Girl Scouts and Boys' Clubs to the
PTA and the local political club, from the NAACP to congress-
sional campaigns there's nowhere willing hands and minds
aren't welcome, nowhere they will be turned away.

Most of us are or will be successful in our lives. Many went
before us to smooth our way, and our job is to smooth the way
for those who come behind us. Building such a movement is a
difficult, but not impossible task; surely every one of us wants to have a say in deciding our common fate.

There can be no better prescription for relieving this current crisis, and for reviving some interest in it, than by recreating a nonpartisan, national coalition of need, of parents who want care, not warehousing, for their children; of workers who want work at a decent and protected wage; of people who work for their living and can't live on what they make, as well as those who can't find work but can't live on what we so grudgingly give; of all those people who want an end to welfare and capitalism for the poor, and subsidy and socialism for the wealthy, and all who must learn that sufficiency for those at the bottom is compatible with stability for those in the middle. All those people now live in America, divided now by race and class, fearful of each other, contentious and impotent.

An entire political movement came to near maturity in America in the sixties. Fueled by the fire from the Southern Civil Rights Movement and the national antiwar drive, drawing leadership from the grassroots, it threatened to challenge the foundations of racial and economic arrogance that had created vast reservations of the unwanted on this country’s soil.

That movement became the partial victim of its own success. It fought for and won the right to sit in front of the bus, to cast a vote, to sit at a lunch counter. It launched a Southern black political movement, but it failed to sustain and extend itself and, instead, saw itself dissipated by struggles on the edge. During the decade of the 1960s, a great social movement fought to win a place at the table for those citizens previously consigned to eating in the kitchen, if indeed they ate at all.

Now that the legal and extralegal barriers have been largely removed, the battle for the remainder of the twentieth century is to close the widening gap between the haves and have-nots.

None of us has much difficulty envisioning the world we want or the programs, which if adopted, would ring the new dawn in. We want a society whose single aim is the democratic satisfaction of the needs of its people. We want to guarantee all Americans an equal opportunity to participate in the organization of society, and in the shaping of public and private decisions which affect their lives. We want to guarantee that no one goes without the basic necessities of food, shelter, health
care, a healthy environment, personal safety and an adequate income.

Instead, the hopes and dreams of generations that each succeeding year would be the year in which the land of the slave finally becomes the home of the free have been set aside in favor of defense spending, balanced budgets and corporate domination of the economy.

In spite of the progress made so far, the real problem remains to be solved. As Dr. W.E.B. DuBois put it, the "greater problem which both obscures and implements it [the problem of the color line]: and that is the fact that so many civilized persons are willing to live in comfort even when the price of this is the poverty, ignorance and disease of the majority of their fellowmen . . . ." 9

What we need to be about today, and for many, many years to come, is a version of politics which cannot be labelled by the old terms. If there is an opening for an American era of politics different from the past, then it must be a citizen's democracy, insurgent, but with its focus aimed seriously at power.

When I speak here of "democratic," I do not mean the political party I belong to, but rather the system of equally distributing wealth and power in an organized society, through institutions based on the premise that we all have equal ability, an equal right, to make decisions about our lives and our futures.

This will require the creation of a large cadre with strategy, skill and vision to build a democratic movement in the mainstream, a reassertion of the plain truth that ordinary women and men have the common sense and ability to control their lives, given the knowledge and the means.

The instruments involved in building such a movement are more than electoral races, as important as they may be. The lesson we ought to have learned from the sixties is this: mass movement must have an organized base. Without organizations that are stable, continuous and mass-based, the movements that do emerge eventually flounder and decay. The sixties, in retrospect, were merely a series of mass mobilizations, winning some impressive victories and inspiring great

expectations but ultimately unable to sustain a living democracy at the base of the society.

In 1966, King explained the task ahead:

Our most powerful nonviolent weapon is, as would be expected, also our most demanding, that is organization. To produce change, people must be organized to work together in units of power. These units might be political, as in the case of voters leagues and political parties; they may be economic units such as groups of tenants who join forces to form a tenant union or to organize a rent strike; or they may be laboring units of persons who are seeking employment and wage increases.

More and more, the civil rights movement will become engaged in the task of organizing people into permanent groups to protect their own interests and to produce change in their behalf. This is a tedious task which may take years, but the results are more permanent and meaningful.

There is no easy way to create a world where men and women can live together, where each has his own job and house and where all children receive as much education as their minds can absorb. But if such a world is created in our lifetime, it will be done in the United States by Negroes and white people of good will. It will be accomplished by persons who have the courage to put an end to suffering by willingly suffering themselves rather than inflict suffering upon others. It will be done by rejecting the racism, materialism and violence that has characterized Western civilization and especially by working toward a world of brotherhood, cooperation and peace.¹⁰

In community after community around the country, one can see the beginnings of such a movement. Its practitioners are many and its focus diverse, but there seems to be a common thread throughout: the notion that small changes can become larger ones. In Washington, D.C., for example, over 6,000 residents are in nightly, neighborhood anticrime patrols. They have closed down half the city's open-air drug markets and more than 200 crack houses in two years.

But for too many Americans, civil rights remains a spectator sport, a kind of NBA in which all the players are black and the spectators white. But in this true-to-life game, the players are of every color and condition, the fate of all fans tied to points

scored on the floor. When either team wins, the spectators win too.

When four little girls died in a Birmingham church bombing, Sally Ride won the right to shoot the moon. Because black students faced arrest at Southern lunch counters almost thirty years ago, the law their bodies wrote now protects older Americans from age discrimination, Jews and Moslems and Christians from religious bigotry, and the disabled from exclusion because of their condition.

When the struggle for civil rights began to intensify three decades ago, we knew it would be hard-fought and never cost-free. But we hoped the American people would bear the burden and pay the price. And for a while, Americans answered, "We will."

The 1960s movement and the ferment which preceded it grew from the willingness of ordinary people—housewives, students, a seamstress, teachers, a railroad porter—to seize control of their lives. They did not wait for mythic charismatic leaders to organize a march or boycott; they organized themselves. They did not wait for mass approval, they faced rejection, knowing they were right.

Today, we wait for others to certify our politics, to give sanction to our protests. It took one woman's courage to start a movement in Montgomery, the bravery of only four young men in Greensboro to set the South on fire. Surely there are men and women, young and old, here today who can do the same. If there are hungry minds or hungry bodies starving near these wealthy walls, someone here can feed them. If there are precincts of the powerless poor nearby, someone here can organize them. If there is racial injustice on the campus or in the town, someone here can conquer it. If America still spends more on guns than butter, someone here can reverse that ancient trend.

Now is the time in the third century of our republic to make the promise of the founding fathers come true: one nation, with liberty and justice for us all.

Again, DuBois speaks to us from the past. He said, at the turn of the twentieth century:

I believe in God who made of one blood all the races that dwell on earth. I believe that all men, black and brown and white, are brothers, varying, through Time and Opportu-
nity, in form and gift and feature, but differing in no essential particular, and alike in soul and in the possibility of infinite development.

Especially do I believe in the Negro Race; in the beauty of its genius, the sweetness of its soul, and its strength in that meekness which shall yet inherit this turbulent earth.

I believe in pride of race and lineage and self; in pride of self so deep as to scorn injustice to other selves; in pride of lineage so great as to despise no man's father; in pride of race so chivalrous as neither to offer bastardy to the weak nor beg wedlock of the strong, knowing that men may be brothers in Christ even tho they be not brothers-in-law.

I believe in Service—humble reverent service, from the blackening of boots to the whitening of souls; for Work is Heaven, Idleness Hell, and Wage is the 'Well done!' of the Master who summoned all them that labor and are heavy laden, making no distinction between the black sweating cotton-hands of Georgia, and the First Families of Virginia, since all distinction not based on deed is devilish and not divine.

I believe in the Devil and his angels, who wantonly work to narrow the opportunity of struggling human beings, especially if they be black; who spit in the faces of the fallen, strike them that cannot strike again, believe the worst and work to prove it, hating the image which their Maker stamped on a brother's soul.

I believe in the Prince of Peace. I believe that War is Murder. I believe that armies and navies are at bottom the tinsel and braggadocio of oppression and wrong; and I believe that the wicked conquest of weaker and darker nations by nations whiter and stronger but foreshadows the death of that strength.

I believe in Liberty for all men; the space to stretch their arms and their souls; the right to breathe and the right to vote, the freedom to choose their friends, enjoy the sunshine and ride on the railroads, uncursed by color; thinking, dreaming, working as they will in a kingdom of God and love.

I believe in the training of children black even as white; the leading out of little souls into the green pastures and beside the still waters, not for self or peace, but for Life lit by some large vision of beauty and goodness and truth; lest we forget, and the sons of the fathers, like Esau, for mere meat barter their birthright in a mighty nation.

Finally, I believe in Patience—patience with the weakness
of the Weak and the strength of the Strong, the prejudice of the Ignorant and the ignorance of the Blind; patience with the tardy triumph of Joy and the mad chastening of Sorrow—patience with God.\(^\text{11}\)

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