

THE UNFINISHED AGENDA

Hubert H. Humphrey

Hubert H. Humphrey is United States Senator from Minnesota.

He was born in South Dakota and educated at the University of Minnesota and Louisiana State University. He was Mayor of Minneapolis from 1945 to 1948, and in 1949 he became the first Democrat in Minnesota history to win a seat in the U.S. Senate by popular election. He served there until 1964 when he won the vice-presidency in the Johnson Administration. In 1968 he was defeated in his campaign for the presidency by a margin of half a million votes. In 1970 he was again elected to the Senate from Minnesota, winning 57 percent of the vote.

John A. Gronouski, Dean of the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, presented Senator Humphrey to the Symposium audience.

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Today is historic in that we observe the opening of the Civil Rights papers on deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. It is historic because scholars will find in those papers a rich source of information and insight into mid-20th century America's overriding moral and social challenge—the quest for racial justice and opportunity. As we look back over the period of the sixties, we remember that we went through a veritable revolution in many of the social standards and institutions of our land. The miracle is that we survived and that our institutions held intact, making the adjustments and the refinements that were required. And no man was more crucial to this struggle, no man gave more of himself to this cause and asked more of us than a United States Senator from this state and later President of the United States, Lyndon Johnson.

This Symposium is historic in other equally significant ways. Just the fact it has been held is historic. It has been more years than I care to count since such a distinguished group of national leaders have come together for something called a Civil Rights Symposium. Finally, this meeting is historic because it offers a rare opportunity to speak honestly and directly in the presence of friends and critics to the unfinished agenda of civil rights that still confronts this Nation. It is my judgment that we need candor among ourselves now more than anything else, a willingness to engage in dialogue and debate that will afford us a basis for some decisions.

I do not accept the proposition that most Americans believe that two centuries of racial injustice have somehow vanished from this land. No matter how they may feel personally about school busing or scatter-site housing or the Philadelphia Plan, I believe that most Americans understand the job is far from finished. It is therefore vitally important that we seize this opportunity to

remind our fellow citizens of this unfinished agenda, and that should be the purpose of this Symposium. If we did no more than this, if we only enumerated the wrongs and the injustices that remain, we would be throwing away a chance to carry forward the struggle to eradicate these living denials of justice and freedom. To make this a truly historic conference, we must face directly the kind of tough political problems that we faced many years ago and, through unremitting effort, eventually surmounted. It is to this task that I thought I might usefully direct my remarks today.

It is fashionable in some circles to suggest that white politicians no longer have much to offer in this struggle; that blacks, Chicanos, and Indians have now taken over the full burden of organizing the political forces to end the racial abuses that offend us all. While it is certainly true that a great deal of the responsibility has shifted to those who personally suffer under these wrongs, I flatly reject the notion that this burden is theirs alone. I do so for two reasons. First, I still believe that racial injustice and prejudice is as much a white problem as it is a black, brown, or red problem. And if that is so, I am unable to understand how the problem can be solved without full and active participation by whites—public officials and private citizens alike. Second, real progress will be achieved only when the overwhelming majority of Americans are committed to action and are prepared to communicate this message to their elected representatives in cities and states, in the Congress and in the White House.

We look back at the civil rights battles of the fifties and sixties with an air of nostalgia. In those years, the legislative goals were well-defined: the removal of a host of legal barriers to civil equality and equal opportunity. More than this, the legal barriers existed primarily in one section of the country, so that the lives of most Americans, it seemed, would be unaffected by whatever reforms we might achieve in Congress. We were, in a sense, working with a civil rights agenda that was uniquely suited to legislative remedy. We now look back on those times as the easy days of the civil rights struggle.

But if we think a moment longer—and in this I defer to my good friend, Clarence Mitchell, who will be participating in tomorrow's panel—we realize that those easy days were not so

easy. In the early 1950's, the number of U.S. Senators actively committed to passing the pending civil rights legislation could caucus in the rear corner of the Senate cloakroom. Those were actually years of unrelieved frustration and failure until Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson decided that we could postpone no longer the most urgent portions of the pending legislation. In what still must be regarded as one of the Senate's most amazing demonstrations of parliamentary skill, the Civil Rights Act of 1957 became law when Lyndon Johnson maneuvered the legislation through the Senate without a protracted filibuster.

By the early 1960's, these initial steps were no longer sufficient as remedies for the problems that remained: equal access to public accommodations, equal job opportunity, non-discriminatory use of federal funds, and greater protection of the right to vote. The legislative outlook was as dismal as it had been ten years earlier. The dramatic events in Birmingham, the decision by President Kennedy to seize the legislative initiative, his tragic assassination, and the total commitment of President Johnson to realizing these objectives produced a more hospitable legislative climate. But even then, the outlook in the Congress was grim. Our eventual triumph was not pre-ordained, by any means. At numerous points in the 75-day battle to break the filibuster, the legislation could have been compromised irretrievably. That none of this happened was due almost entirely to the political strategy that had been mapped out and was followed even in the most difficult moments of debate.

These retrospective remarks have had only one purpose: to suggest again that the struggle for civil rights in Congress has never been easy and that, in many respects, our present difficulties are no more insuperable than the barriers we faced back in the "good old days." They are different, to be sure, but not insuperable.

Other participants in this Symposium will speak to the substance of the remaining problems: racially-restrictive suburbs, racially-exclusive schools, racially-protected jobs, crime, drugs, and the host of other intertwined domestic problems. We will also talk about the Northern battlegrounds where many of these issues must be resolved. But I would like to devote the remainder of my remarks to the political strategy that must be devised if we are to continue the progress of the 1960's in this decade.

I begin with this proposition: unless we can agree on a strategy that will attract a majority coalition in the Congress and the Nation at large, we can look forward to little in the way of concrete results. It will avail us nothing to beat our chests in righteous indignation with a sense of moral consciousness about the inequities and injustices, unless we have a program of action and the important forces to put it to work. This lesson is as true today as it was 20 years ago. Between the two extremes of empty appeals to the Nation's moral consciousness and premeditated violence and intimidation lies a broad field for constructive political action, not so dramatic maybe, but effective; and it is in this area that we must begin to think more creatively.

It is commonplace in current political analysis to suggest that the national constituency in support of continued civil rights progress has vanished. "No interest," they say. The Nixon landslide in the general election, the surprising showing of George Wallace in the primaries, and the reams of polling data are offered as evidence of this decline. The momentum toward greater racial justice of the 1960's apparently has given way to a growing sense of retrenchment and disquiet in the 1970's. On the other hand, if one looks behind these highly visible developments at other examples of the public's attitude, the outlook is less stark and more hopeful.

The Gallup Poll, for example, has discovered a marked decline in the number of southern white parents who object to sending their children to schools with blacks. In 1963, 61 percent of southern white parents said they objected to such a development: in 1970 only 16 percent said they objected. Gallup described this as one of the most dramatic shifts in the history of public opinion polling. In 1958, 39 percent of the voters interviewed in another national Gallup Poll said they would vote for a well-qualified black man for president. Fifty-three percent said they would not support such a candidate. Last year, 69 percent said they would vote for a well-qualified black presidential candidate of their party—an increase of 31 percent. On the basis of this survey, Gallup reported that prejudice towards blacks in politics had declined to its lowest point yet recorded. These findings are significant if they do no more than remind us that integration of blacks into our educational and political structure has moved forward in the past decade, even as we read of the bitter

opposition of a specific group of whites to a local busing plan or the defeat of a particular black candidate at the polls.

We are now in a peculiar but vitally important period of our national life when our lack of direction in the civil rights arena is no greater than the lack of direction generally. The American people and their elected leaders are confused and ambivalent about where we should be heading as a Nation and deeply divided about our short-range objectives. Goals and priorities are literally untabulated and unknown. The 1972 elections did little to clarify this situation. It is regrettable but nonetheless true that many people voted *against* Senator McGovern or *against* President Nixon rather than *for* either candidate. And an alarmingly large number of eligible voters didn't vote at all. The issues of the campaign became hopelessly muddled, and many people voted against positions that neither candidate actually advocated. Thus we emerge from the presidential election no better informed about our future than when the campaign began more than a year ago. In fact, Democrats are even asking themselves, "What is the Deomocratic Party?" "*Why* the Democratic Party?" And to all of these questions there are no easy answers.

But this much can be said: drawing on the election returns and our knowledge of current public attitudes, it seems clear that any political appeal that appears rightly or wrongly to favor one group or class of people over another is going to be rejected by a majority of the American electorate. I said the time was at hand for candor, and I shall use some of it myself. The Democratic Party got into trouble when its internal reforms came to be perceived, even though falsely, as establishing specific quotas that favored young people, women, and blacks over the more traditional elements of the party, particularly ethnic Americans, blue-collar workers, the elderly, and elected Democratic officials. There was a considerable propaganda campaign to make this point stick in the minds of the American people.

By the same token, I would argue that the Civil Rights Movement got into trouble when more and more people were propagandized into believing that it was only an effort to give blacks a special break that was not afforded to any other group in American society. We know this perception is wrong but this perception exists, whether we like it or not. I am a political man,

and I know that what is true in public affairs frequently is not nearly as compelling as what people think is true. It is our job to get the thinking straightened out.

It is within our power to break out of this impasse and to begin the mobilization of the political resources that can restore the positive momentum of the 1960's, not only for civil rights, but for a total national agenda. How can this be done? I am not sure that any of us have all the answers, and I surely do not. But I can point up several facts that should be kept in mind. First, I subscribe to Vernon Jordan's thesis that President Nixon has within his grasp an extraordinary opportunity to move to the forefront of the quest for racial justice in this country. Just as he confounded his critics with his dramatic trips to China and the Soviet Union and his adoption of wage and price controls, Mr. Nixon could seize the initiative on the civil rights front. I know or at least assume that a second-term President must begin to think seriously about the historical judgments of his Administration. And I can imagine no more harsh indictment than that President Nixon should have failed to lead the United States in the most critical and urgent area of domestic concern: human rights. Such a move by President Nixon would be supported and applauded by a large majority of Democrats and, I suspect, a significant number of Republicans. It would bring back to life almost overnight the bi-partisan coalition that was responsible for all the civil rights legislation of the 1960's.

Presidents, however, do not operate in a vacuum, no matter how much they seek to seal themselves off from public opinion. So I would supplement the Jordan thesis with this proposal: we should be devising a political strategy that will assist—yes, insist and propel—President Nixon to make this kind of affirmative decision. There is good historical precedent for this approach. We may forget that the early 1960's was a time of convincing President Kennedy that he should adopt a more aggressive posture in support of civil rights legislation that had been pending in the Congress for many years. We forget that his initial Civil Rights Proposals in 1963 were judged inadequate by the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. It was only after those tragic and dramatic events in Birmingham that the Kennedy Administration became fully and totally committed to the legislative package that eventually became the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The times and the circumstances are indeed different today, but there are several factors that President Nixon should be reminded of as he looks ahead to his second term of office. He should be reminded that the defeat of George McGovern was not a repudiation by the voters of the programs and the policies that had been advocated by other presidents and passed by a coalition of Democrats and Republicans in Congress. For example, there is solid evidence that a majority of Americans strongly favor closing tax loopholes and creating a more equitable tax structure. In like fashion, there is significant national support for cutting out non-essential defense expenditures. This is significant, because progress in these two areas, only possible with strong presidential leadership, would begin to provide the federal government with the financial resources that are essential for any realistic attack on our most urgent domestic problems of education, housing, jobs, health care, environment, crime, and transportation. As we attack these problems either directly through the federal government or through cities and states, we touch the areas of daily life that now comprise most of what we mean by civil rights. The new budgetary flexibility means that these goals can be achieved without seeming to advocate special advantages for one group at the expense of another. There is virtually no segment of our society that would not benefit directly from meaningful progress in each of these areas.

In this context, I contend that the entire concept of the Civil Rights Movement must be broadened to include the rights and opportunities that should be available to other disadvantaged groups in America. I am thinking of the physically handicapped, for example, or the mentally retarded who are discriminated against in the most cruel and inhumane ways; or the elderly, who are frequently locked up in what we call Senior Citizen Housing Projects, oftentimes forgotten and isolated. All these people must face many of the same barriers and misunderstandings and prejudices that confront blacks and other minority citizens. Injustice knows no race, and it knows no age. We are also in a period where the issue of women's rights and women's political power must be included in a broader definition of civil rights.

In other words, it can be demonstrated that the success of President Nixon's second term depends in a large measure upon his

willingness to take the lead on a number of issues that were raised in the recent campaign by Senator McGovern. Moreover there already exists a base of popular support should Mr. Nixon pursue such a course of action. It is imperative then that we begin to organize the political forces that can help bring President Nixon to a realization of his opportunity. We cannot afford to let a President chart his own course. He must have the benefit of the advice and the counsel of the great American electorate. I intend to urge the Democratic Congressional leadership working in close cooperation with black and other minority leadership to speak out forcefully on these matters at the beginning of the 93rd Congress. I would hope that state leaders, governors, mayors, and county executives would do likewise.

As I see it, we must identify the struggle for civil rights as an all-embracing struggle for the rights and privileges and duties of all Americans. In the political arena, there are not enough blacks, there are not enough Chicanos and Indians and Puerto Ricans to form an electoral majority. We must create a climate of identity of interests between the needs, the hopes, and the fears of the minorities and the needs and the hopes and the fears of the majority. In simple language this means identifying the cause of civil rights with quality education for all children. Millions of parents, white and black, feel that the present educational system is not satisfying the needs of their children. We must identify civil rights with the right of every American to good health care. It is not only blacks or Chicanos that have inadequate health care. There are millions of Americans white as well as black or brown or red who are either victims of inadequate health care or unable to pay for what care is available. We must find some new, common denominators, mutual needs, mutual wants, common hopes and fears, and use them to bind together a coalition of people representing the hopes and the fears of the majority. Out of this coalition we can then fashion a new Bill of Rights that will belong to all Americans and, because it does, will have tremendous force:

The right to a meaningful life, free from poverty.

There are more whites in poverty than there are blacks. Unite the people today who are the victims of poverty.

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The right to full and equal protection of the law.

All people find today that justice delayed is justice denied. The people who live in the ghetto are the victims of crime much more than the people who live in the suburbs. But all people have the right to equal protection of the law.

The right to productive and gainful employment.

Unemployment knows no race. It stands as a constant threat to the life and the well-being of millions of families.

The right to economic, political, and social opportunity free from the obstruction of discrimination based on race, creed, or sex.

The right to move up in the social structure; not just the right to a job, but the right to be a manager as well as a worker. The right to be on a board of directors as well as to be a customer. Not only the right, but the realization of the right.

The right to a clean and decent neighborhood.

The right to life free from violence and terrorism.

The right to privacy free from official or private invasion.

The right to safety, including protection of person and property.

The right to quality education at all levels free from segregation.

Quality education is integrated education. If we can learn together, we can live together. But if we learn separately, we are apt to pursue separate courses.

The right to live in good health under a system of comprehensive insurance providing and assuring modern health care for all.

The right to be free from hunger.

The right to recreation and leisure.

The right to a clean and wholesome environment.

These rights belong to the American people; they are not just for blacks or Chicanos or Indians, but for the blue-collar worker, the poor white, the student, the farmer, the worker in the office or the shop. Without these rights alive and well and vital, without these rights applicable and accepted, there are no real civil rights.

*Vernon E. Jordan, Jr., speaks on
"The Challenge of the Seventies."*

Photo by News and Information Service,
The University of Texas at Austin.



*Senator Hubert H. Humphrey
addresses the Symposium
on Monday morning.*



Photo by Frank Wolfe, LBJ Library.

We now have the formalities of law, the legal protections, but we have not had the social acceptance that is required. The new dimensions of civil rights are to be found in the living and working and playing conditions of our people. It is not enough to have laws that declare discrimination in employment illegal. We must have jobs and income and upward mobility.

It is not enough to ban segregation in education. We must have well-financed, modern, well-equipped schools with competent, well-paid, qualified teachers. Those who can least afford education are those who should have the best education. But the poorest schools are generally to be found in areas where the children have no books in their homes, no libraries available, and little or no income to satisfy the needs of learning.

It is not enough for government to employ blacks and other minorities, even though government should set the example. We must insist that corporate industry open its doors, not only to menial assembly-line jobs in factories, but to jobs all the way up the management spectrum. And the same must be true of finance and the institutions of higher education.

The emphasis must be on developing the political and economic system to its full potential so that all may benefit. In the context of the ending of the war in Vietnam, this appeal may generate far more political support than some of our more cynical political commentators would imagine. As U.S. participation in this war ends and our prisoners are returned, we will be liberated from a burden that has stifled and blurred our vision of what is possible in this country.

The academic community of intellectuals has been paralyzed by the cruelty of the war and has not given its attention to the days that lie ahead. America has been denied the creative, innovative thinking about the basic social and domestic problems that plague us, because so many have found themselves in an emotional binge about a cruel and lasting war, which pray God is fast coming to an end. I appeal to the academic community, to the intellectual life of America, to think anew, to cleanse itself of the past, to think of tomorrows, to ask itself, "How can we in America learn to live in dignity with respect for one another?" "How can we open up the harmony of peace which is more than the absence of war?" It is not just a matter of the diversion of billions of dollars

to support our military effort in Southeast Asia. It is basically a matter of our energy and our awareness and our willingness to buckle down to the hard tasks that lie ahead. Although it may not happen immediately, I am confident that over time we will come to know a political climate free of the hatred and antagonism that arose as a consequence of the war. In such a political climate, it will be more feasible to win the support of the American people for a renewed attack on the unfinished agenda of domestic concerns.

But, you ask, do we have time enough? How can we expect black Americans, Chicanos, Indians, and other deprived minorities to postpone for one day longer their full and fair participation in American life? The answer is simple: you can neither expect nor ask them to be patient. On the other hand, one of the factors that always amazed me throughout my years of public life has been the degree of faith in the American system that has been retained by blacks and other minorities. In many respects, they have kept the democratic faith far more than some of our more affluent and fortunate white Americans who have benefited so fully from the system.

Early next year, the Potomac Associates will release a study showing that blacks express about as much sense of personal progress from the past to the present as whites, but that blacks are more optimistic than whites about their personal futures. These findings raise questions about the notion that members of the black community are overwhelmed by feelings of personal frustration and hopelessness.

I do not cite these results to suggest in any way that our past achievements are adequate, or that we have been truly responsive to the problems that remain. I cite them only to suggest that the blacks and most minority groups have not given up on this country. Some of the people who have given up are the very ones who can enjoy the luxury of being unhappy. But many of the people who have every reason to be unhappy today hope for the better tomorrow and express their faith in our ability to achieve it.

I ask you to join me not in a child-like optimism but in a resolve to put together in this country the coalition of economic and political forces that can move mountains. We have done much, but what we have done is only an indication of what we can do and what we must do.

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There is no time for self-pity; no time for recriminations; no time for looking back.

In light of the political developments in this country, everyone in this room has a special obligation to be a leader and to be a cooperator; to remind those who hold high office that they hold it, not for themselves, but solely for the fulfillment of the highest purposes of this Nation.

Senator Humphrey's address concluded the Monday morning session of the Symposium.



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