

WHAT HAS GONE WRONG AND WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE
LOS ANGELES CITY

"I was hungry and you fed me? Naked and you clothed me? No. I was hungry and naked and you formed a committee. It is easier, we find, to concentrate on the death of somebody who lived two thousand years ago." John L'Heureux, S.J. Journal: Picnic in Babylon.

In 1964 Oscar Handlin opened his book, Fire-bell in the Night, as follows:

(Chapter 1, called "An Unfinished Task")

"For a few weeks in a stunned nation the hope flickered that President Kennedy's assassination might, after all, be the occasion for a breakthrough in the interracial strife. Perhaps enactment of a program that meant much to him would give meaning to his martyrdom. Public opinion polls in December showed that Americans felt a sense of personal remorse and a guilty consciousness that they had done too little to further the spirit and practice of brotherhood. More specifically, an impressive percentage of them connected the tragedy in Dallas with the need for advancing the status of the Negro.

"But when the emotion of the aftermath drained away, it became clear that no miracle had occurred. President Johnson did indeed persuade Representative Howard Smith of Virginia, chairman of the House Rules Committee, to begin hearings on the civil rights bill in January. Yet as those at last lumbered toward a conclusion, it was apparent that the alignments of a year before had hardly changed."

Dr. Kenneth B. Clark, social scientist and author of Dark Ghetto, on the Riot Commission's Report:

After every riot there had been a commission and a report, he said, and he had read them all.

"I must in candor say to you members of this commission -- it is a kind of Alice in Wonderland -- with the same moving picture re-shown over and over again, the same analysis, the same recommendations and the same inaction."

Point out that the time for talking is past, the time has come for action.

"If the Church is to err in our day, let it err on the side of over-involvement rather than under-involvement. Let it be specific rather than general, making mistakes of commission rather than of omission. Let it be too far to the left rather than too far to the right, or (as is its usual posture) comfortably and complacently in the middle. Let it be too radical rather than too conservative. Let it spend itself now for a bleeding and bent world, Let it trust not in its own power, but in the grace of God who can turn our weakness into his strength, and out of our faltering footsteps erect a clearer highway for the pilgrims who follow us." Robert McAfee Brown to Jesuit

Seminarians -- printed in bulletin of Holy Trinity Church, Georgetown.

Confrontation and personal involvement necessary because most people are ignorant of the issues except in terms of numbers. Experts just as ignorant in one sense as everyone else because there is no empathy.

There are millions who are poor in the U. S., but they are becoming increasingly invisible. ". . . it takes an effort of the intellect and will even to see them."

"I discovered this personally in a curious way. After I wrote my first article on poverty in America, I had all the statistics down on paper. I had proved to my satisfaction that there were around 50,000,000 poor in this country. Yet, I realized I did not believe my own figures. The poor existed in the Government reports; they were percentages and numbers in long, close columns, but they were not part of my experience. I could prove that the other America existed, but I had never been there."

Michael Harrington
The Other America

As an example of lack of understanding of poverty:

The story is told about a little girl in a school near Hollywood who was asked to write a composition about a poor family. The essay began: " This family was very poor. The Mommy was Poor. The Daddy was poor. The brothers and sisters were poor. The maid was poor. The nurse was poor. The butler was poor. The cook was poor. And the chauffeur was poor . . . "

Alice Miel, The Shortchanged Children of Suburbia

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