

Why Do We Need the Poor People's Campaign

Poverty is invisible. It is a mistaken illusion that we are all an affluent society. "Poverty is often off the beaten track."

". . . the very development of the American city has removed poverty from the living emotional experience of millions upon millions of middle-class Americans. Living out in the suburbs, it is easy to assume that ours is, indeed, an affluent society."

And finally, the poor are politically invisible. "The people of the other America do not, by far and large, belong to unions, to fraternal organizations, or to political parties. They are without lobbies of their own; they put forward no legislative program. As a group, they are atomized. They have no face; they have no voice."

"Thus, there is not even a cynical political motive for caring about the poor, as in the old days. Because the slums are no longer centers of political organizations, the politicians need not really care about their inhabitants."

The old poverty was general. So it was a concern of the politicians. e.g. The Depression. Misery was general and there was no need then to write books about unemployment and poverty. "That was the decisive social experience of the entire society, and the apple sellers even invaded Wall Street. There was political sympathy from middle-class reformers; there were an élan and spirit that grew out of a deep crisis."

"It is a blow to reform and the political hopes of the poor that the middle class no longer understands that poverty exists."

----Michael Harrington
The Other America

Inaction is the central problem: only a movement can get things moving:
We suffer from an absence of will, not of Solutions;

Men of other cultures and other faiths - and men of no faith - will often support the same solutions, because they can be grounded in the normal human wisdom and reason of man as rational beings. But between acceptance and action can fall the shadow - the shadow of inertia and habit and self-love.

"How do we preserve the energies needed to maintain the momentum of a dynamic society? How do we counter the pessimism of the Roman philosopher who wrote: 'I approve the better way - but I follow the worse'?"

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"It is perhaps the first responsibility of Christian faith to provide the goal. As Christ said: If salt loses its savor, it is fit only to be thrown into the privy. Christian purpose and Christian dedication are as vital as the proposing of Christian, and therefore humane, solutions. Indeed, to have 'life more abundantly' may be the first duty in a dispirited age."

Paulist Pamphlet

Need for Dramatization:

"I wish there were some eloquence I could use, some fact I could cite, some verbal Pearl Harbor I could deploy, so that all Americans would rise and say: 'That is true. I personally must do something about it.'"

James M. Gavin and Arthur Hadley
"The Crisis of the Cities: the Battle We Can Win"
Saturday Review, February 24, 1968

Need for Political Advocacy by Non-Poor: Not a matter of expertise but will.

"It is one of the terrible ironies of political life in America that there are social problems that could be dealt with where the basic research has been done and the techniques of solution demonstrated, but where there is no political force strong enough to enforce progress." -

Harrington, The Other America

The campaign is an attempt to make the poor visible, to provide the good for our society, and to create political power for the poor.

"Only a commitment to national action on an unprecedented scale can shape a future compatible with the historical ideals of American Society."

U.S. Riot Commission Report