

One of the great and persisting scandals of our day is the sad fact that in the most affluent nation of the world there are millions of people, Negroes, Spanish-speaking Americans, whites, and others - such as American Indians - who are perennially, almost institutionally, condemned to a life of poverty. Directly or indirectly, intentionally or sub-consciously, the condemnation of the minority is inflicted by the white majority of this nation. We have gradually been evolving into a two nation, side by side, separate and unequal, developed and under-developed. At the heart of this poverty is a triple inequality of opportunity - in education, in employment, and in housing. Each side of this dismal triangle supports the other two sides: poor schools mean lack of preparation for meaningful employment. Lack of employment or menial, low-wage jobs mean inability to achieve better housing, even if it were open and available. Concentration of the poor in shabby neighborhoods gives access only to poor ghetto schools for their children, and so it goes, year after year, poverty creating more poverty.

The march on Washington is meant to be a non-violent, multi-racial attempt to manifest this face of poverty to the nation, to attract the attention of everyone to a condition that should plague our individual and collective conscience as Americans. It may be the last great march, our last chance to be convinced to do something constructively in each local community to find realistic solutions to make the promise of America come true for all Americans.

It has been asked, "Why don't the poor pull themselves up by their own boot straps?" The whole point is that they don't presently have any pullable boot straps. A poor school is not a boot strap, and over 90% of

all Negro youngsters are in poor schools. 400,000 under-educated Negro youngsters are graduated into American society each year to face frustration. Unemployment is not a boot strap, and Negro unemployment is twice as high among Negroes as among whites, with the figure for young Negroes much higher. A dilapidated house in a run-down neighborhood is not a boot strap - but that is where most Negroes live.

A nation that can afford to spend thirty billion dollars a year in an area the size of the State of Indiana, with half the population of America's poor, can afford to spend half that amount yearly over the next ten years to eliminate this explosive nationwide inequity in our midst. Opportunity cannot be denied a people for hundreds of years and then be used to condemn these people for not doing what could not possibly be done without this opportunity.

Many people have died to make the dream of America come true: soldiers, citizens, patriots all. We, the living, owe a great debt to all of them, to our America, to our own consciences that have so often proclaimed this: One nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

The march will come and go. But the problem will remain, stark, inescapable, clamoring for our attention, our individual efforts, our dedication, our understanding, our solutions.

You can brush off, or condemn the march, but you cannot isolate or insulate yourself from the problem that the march portrays, because it will continue to exist in your community until you have found realistic means of eliminating it. We cannot all march, but each of us can do

something even more meaningful - create equality of opportunity in education, employment, and housing in our community. This is what the march is all about. Deny this and you deny America. Deny America and one of the few shining lights will be extinguished in a world that is largely darkened by universal poverty, frustration, and hopelessness. America is what America does. What are you willing to do?

- From the Desk of

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Attached is a statement by the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., president of Notre Dame, on the Poor People's March on Washington, released today. The statement came in response to a request from Notre Dame's Student Government, which is organizing a collection of clothing and money for use by sponsors of the March.

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