

711.4
J63c

DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING
AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT
LIBRARY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20410

SEP 6 1966

The Center of Our Society—

THE AMERICAN CITY

LYNDON B. JOHNSON
President of the United States



Remarks of President Lyndon B. Johnson at Syracuse, N.Y., August 19, 1966, published by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.



I want to talk to you today about the center of our society—the American city.

Over 70 percent of our population live in urban areas. Half a century from now 320 million of our 400 million Americans will live in cities, with our larger cities receiving the greatest impact of this growth.

For almost three years my Administration has been concerned with the question: What do we want our cities to become?

For you and your children, the question is: What kind of place will Syracuse be fifty years from now?

A city must be more than a collection of shops and buildings; more than an assortment of goods and services; more than a place to escape from.

A city must be a community where our lives are enriched. It must be a place where every man can satisfy his highest aspirations. It must be an instrument to advance the hopes of all its citizens. That is what we want our cities to be. And that is what we have set out to make them.

One word can best describe the task we face—and it is immense. Until this decade, one description fitted our condition: "too little and too late." By 1975 we will need two million new homes a year—schools for 60 million children—health and welfare programs for 27 million people over the age of 60—and transportation facilities for the daily movement of 200 million people in more than 80 million automobiles.

In less than 40 years—between now and the end of this century—urban population will double, city land will double, and we will have to build in our cities as much as has been built since the first settler arrived on these shores.

Our cities are struggling to meet this task. They increased their taxes by 39 percent between 1954 and 1963, and still their tax debts increased by 119 percent. Far more must be done if we are to solve the Number 1 domestic problem of the United States.

Let me be clear about the heart of this problem: It is the people who live in our cities and the quality of the lives they lead that concern us.

We must not only build housing units; we must build neighborhoods. We must not only construct schools; we must educate our

children. We must not only raise income; we must create beauty and end the pollution of our water and air. We must open new opportunities to all our people so that everyone, not just a fortunate few, can have access to decent homes and schools, to recreation and culture.

These are obligations that must be met not only by the Federal Government but by every government—State and local—and by all the people of America. The Federal Government will meet its responsibility, but local government, private interests and individual citizens must provide energy, resources, talent, and toil for much of the task.

Many of the conditions we seek to change should never have come about. It is shameful that they should continue to exist. And none are more shameful than conditions which permit some people to line their pockets with the tattered dollars of the poor.

We must take the profit out of poverty. And that is what we intend to do.

First, I have asked the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development to set as his goal the establishment—in every ghetto of America—of a neighborhood center to service the people who live there.

Second, I have asked the Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity to increase the number of neighborhood legal centers in slums. I want these legal centers to make a major effort to help tenants secure their rights to safe and sanitary housing.

Third, I am directing the Attorney General to call a conference to develop new procedures to insure that the rights of tenants are fully and effectively enforced. We will have at that conference the best legal minds in the country to work with State and local officials.

Fourth, I will appoint a commission of distinguished Americans to make the first comprehensive review of codes, zoning, taxation, and development standards in more than two generations. I proposed the establishment of such a commission in my 1965 message on the cities. Both Houses of Congress this week agreed in conference to fund this effort. The work of the commission will begin immediately upon the enactment of this legislation.

These are steps we will take now. But let me be peremptory. This job cannot be done in Washington alone. Every local official, every mayor and every Governor must vigorously apply their building, health, and safety codes to the limit of the law. Where there are loopholes, they must be closed. Where there are violations, the exploited tenant must be assured a swift and sure action by the courts.

Not even local officials, however, can change these conditions themselves. Unless private citizens become indignant at the treatment of their neighbors, unless individual citizens make justice for others a personal concern, poverty will profit those who exploit the poor.

The Federal Government, of course, has a very large responsibility. And we are trying not only to fulfill but enlarge our role in the rebirth of American cities.

In 1961 we were investing \$15 billion in our cities. We have increased that nearly 100 percent—to almost \$30 billion. For the first three years of this decade these programs increased by an average of \$1½ billion per year. Since then, they have increased \$4 billion per year—2½ times the rate of increase in the previous three years.

We have made important new starts in many vital areas: in the war on poverty; in assistance to law enforcement; in the attack on pollution; in the training of manpower; in the education of children; and in the improvement of our health.

But not all the answers are in. Not even all the questions have been asked. We must continue to search and to probe, to experiment and to explore. We need constant study and new knowledge as we struggle to cure what plagues the American city.

That is why, for the first time in our history, our cities have a place in the Cabinet. More than a century after President Lincoln created the Department of Agriculture, we have a Department to serve the needs of the three out of four Americans who live in cities.

I have directed every member of my Cabinet who can help with our urban challenge to meet at least once a week in the White House—or as often as necessary, to keep our cities program moving. I have asked each one of them to go out into the cities and to see the needs for themselves—and to come back and tell me what he finds.

This is why we have brought to Washington the ablest men we could find in this country to concern themselves with the future of our cities. They have come from the universities, from business, and from labor. They are scientists, lawyers, and managers—creative men, men of vision, practical men.

This is why we have taken steps to set up summer programs for our youth, to keep the playground open later at night, to open swimming pools and open fire hydrants on hot summer evenings. These temporary steps do not take an Act of Congress. Any city can take them. Every city should take them now.

There are responsibilities, however, which only Congress can meet. We need laws and new programs—and we need them this session.

I have proposed to Congress what could become the most sweeping response ever made to our cities' needs. This is the Demonstration Cities Program, which is still before the Congress. It admits for the first time that cities are not made of bricks but of

men. When Congress acts—and action is needed now—we will be able to make the first concentrated attack on urban blight and to rebuild or restore entire neighborhoods.

As we learn more, new ideas and new courses of action to improve our cities can be fitted into the Demonstration Cities Program. It does not freeze our strategy and inhibit future change. It does not erode the power of local governments, but on the contrary gives cities new choices and new abilities, new ideas and new spirit to action.

Congress has already acted to provide the money for the rent supplement program that will mobilize private enterprise to help the poor. Every \$600 of rent supplements will encourage private enterprise to build a housing unit with 20 times that amount.

Congress gave us \$18 million less than we need, and it only went more than a year after we proposed rent supplements. But now we can move forward to help hundreds of thousands of poor families raise their children in clean and decent surroundings.

These are only two of the programs we have laid before Congress to help solve the problems of our cities. What we need now—and what American cities expect now—is action. Congress can pass this program and bring new opportunities to millions.

To the Congress I say:

Give us funds for the Teachers Corps—and let skilled teachers bring knowledge and a quest for learning to those children who need it most.

Give us more resources for rent supplements—and let us provide better homes for so many who live in substandard housing.

Give us the Civil Rights Bill—and let us begin to break the chains that bind the ghetto by banishing discrimination from the sale and rental of housing.

Give us the means to prosecute the war against poverty—and let us provide jobs and training for adults and a head start for the very young.

Give us the Child Nutrition Act—and let us offer breakfasts and hot lunches to needy children who can be encouraged to stay in school.

Give us the Hospital Modernization Bill—and we can build and modernize hospitals to serve our urban citizens.

Give us the legislation—and we can help overcome a severe shortage of trained medical personnel.

Give us the money for urban mass transit—and our cities can begin to provide adequate transportation for their people.

Give us a just minimum wage—and more American workers will earn a decent income.

Give us better unemployment insurance—and men out of work can be trained for jobs that need workers.

Give us the Truth in Lending Bill—so that customers, especially those who are poor, can know the honest cost of the money they borrow.

Give us the Truth in Packaging Bill—so the hard-earned dollars of the poor—as well as of every American—can be protected against deception and false values.

We have an agenda for action. We have taken the first steps toward great cities for a great society. Now Congress must act to give us the power to move ahead on all these fronts.

This is no time to delay. This is no time to relax our efforts. We know there is no magic equation that will produce an instant

