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March 23, 1973

OP-ED RESPONSE TO VERNON JORDAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE

BY:

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As youngsters growing up in Atlanta, Georgia, Vernon Jordan and I had a first-hand look at black poverty in America and we knew and felt the pains of racism. We also knew what it was like to not be able to vote, and we saw gifted and talented Black people held down to menial jobs because of their skin color.

I would have never believed that years later we might disagree on goals for Black Americans. Nor would we have believed it only a few years ago when we both worked for the NAACP. In fact I don't believe it today.

I would like to think that Mr. Jordan, who is now the Executive Director of the National Urban League, and I differ only on the way we can reach those goals. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that I should demur from the views Mr. Jordan recently presented before the National Press Club in Washington.

The basic flaw of those who criticize the President's recent budget decisions is a misperception of what the President has actually done, and, in some cases, a misrepresentation of what he has said. The common thread running through such criticism is exemplified by Mr. Jordan's assertion that the budget "hacks away at social spending with ruthless intensity," and that it is "designed to destroy the social reforms of the 1960s."



The first point is completely wrong. Social spending has been increased, not cut. What has been restrained is the level of increase of all spending -- an action which will save the taxes of black and white wage earners and slow down inflation which more cruelly affects the poor.

The second point is also wrong, because it is not the social reform of the '60s which is being "destroyed"; it is the misrepresentations of the '60s which is being reformed.

For example, it is said by Mr. Jordan, and others, "How do we explain federal withdrawal to poor black families in Bedford-Stuyvesant?"

For me, however, it is more difficult to explain to that same family why the Urban Renewal program has evicted one million poor families from their homes, about one-half of whom have been blacks and Puerto Ricans. How do I explain that under the old Federal program, for every home built, three were destroyed? How do I explain how wealthy real estate owners and land speculators ripped off money which was meant to assist the poor? How, indeed, can we explain to poor black families that the rat-trap they have moved into under certain subsidized housing programs was sold to them at a price far beyond what the property was purchased for by the seller.

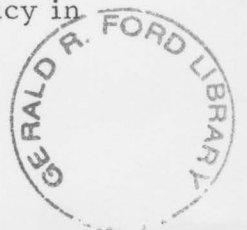
Frankly, I cannot accept the very popular notion among Blacks that President Nixon has retreated from assistance to the poor. The President is spending a billion dollars more in the area of housing and community development this year. The overall civil rights budget has nearly quadrupled since Mr. Nixon entered the Presidency.



Aid to minority business enterprises has jumped from \$200 million to \$1.2 billion. There are virtually dozens of other statistics, equally impressive, which show that the commitment of President Nixon has gone far beyond the commitment of any other President in the history of the United States.

What appears to be really at issue is the direction national policies should take. Unfortunately, we are dealing with a welfare mentality which has survived since born in the 1960s. That old approach -- and now, certainly, a discredited approach -- has forced the poor and the black to be supplicants on the Federal plantation. The old approach was to use lofty rhetoric and high-sounding names to sweep people off their feet rather than doing the hard work which would put them back on their feet.

What is the legacy of the Great Society and other old-line welfarism? It is a legacy that has seen poor people in continual conflict with themselves over one pet project or the other. It is a legacy which has rewarded those who have made the most noise -- usually the project directors who have fattened themselves on Federal funds which were intended to help the poor. And now, of course, it is the professional poverty worker who is screaming the most about these funds being cut. It is a legacy which was intended to promote a greater voice for poor people while in fact it has only created a greater bureaucracy in



Washington. And those who continue to ask for a greater voice for the people are the same who ask for more Federal responsibility, the very problem which has snuffed out the power of the people.

Old-line Federal programs have been nothing more than pacification programs. They have not stood up under the test of time. They were programs born in haste and fear. They were programs which were passed to put green money in wallets, but ended up wrapping red tape around our necks. They were programs which were often wasted, frequently mismanaged, and seldom helpful in reducing the problems of Americans.

I do not question the good intent of the old ways. Surely, they were mistakes of the head and not of the heart. But we cannot continue to live in the '60s in order to solve the problems of the '70s. And we cannot continue to abide under the hot rhetoric which never produced positive results.

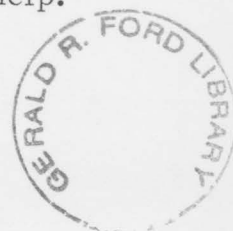
The notion of returning power to people and to local governments does not mean we return some power. It means trusting ourselves to use the tools we have rather than the tools that Washington thinks we ought to have. We cannot have it both ways -- ask for a return of power and yet complain that the local government will not do the job.



Which local governments do we distrust? Mr. Jordan, I would think, did not mean Mayor Gibson of Newark, or Mayor Hatcher of Gary, Mayor Blackwell of Highland Park, Mayor Bivens of Inkster, or Mayor Washington in the Nation's capital, or Mayor Evers in Mississippi, or, indeed, the hundreds upon hundreds of newly elected Black officials who have taken office in the past year alone.

Too often when real progress for the poor and the black has raised its head, hopes have been dashed by myths which rise up in America. The poverty program is not being destroyed, it is being moved where it can be most effective. Social reform is not stopping, it is moving more rapidly than ever before; the real opponents of change are those who refuse to budge from the failing programs of the past. Social spending is not getting smaller; it is growing faster than ever. Since 1968 alone, the Defense budget has remained about the same while Federal money to help people has doubled.

The marches, the boycotts, and the sit-ins of the 60s are dead issues in the 70s. What is still too much alive is the thinking that the poor black living in a Harlem tenement or a rural Georgia shack has been helped by programs which fattened up the poverty program staff members and kept lean and poor the people who still need our help.



That is what Vern Jordan and I want so badly to improve.

We both know that the solutions of the 60s have not worked as promised. I would like to think that he also shares with me the view that there must be better ways to solve these problems which grip and destroy so many of our people ---poor blacks, browns and whites.



1) 10 = 15 people to
 on continued list to
 attend with functions
 names
 address
 phone #

2) Draft to
 writers of
 stories on SSS

3) 15 sample
 letters

Test
 Christ Science
 monitor

- a) Thanks for balanced
 story / objective
 coverage is appreciated
- b) will provide you with
 information or direction
 of Adm to provide help
 to all Amer
- c) Should can be of
 help etc.

