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Excerpts of Speech by
Senator Edward W. Brooke (R-Mass).
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Exactly what can be done and how soon to achieve the harmonious integration of our Negro brothers into the general social structure? In its essential respects I believe that the agenda has already been written. It has been outlined in ample detail in the report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. It consists of a broad range of public and private action, some of which is already in progress but which must be accelerated to meet the pressing needs of a troubled society.

Discrimination in housing has denied most Negroes access to decent homes and, by providing slum landlords with an essentially captive market has driven up the prices for the inferior housing available to most ghetto residents. De facto residential segregation has thrown disproportionate numbers of underprivileged and culturally deprived children into urban schools ill-equipped to educate them. Poorly motivated and lacking encouragement from their peers or parents, these children bring little to their education and take little from it.

While this cycle has been repeating itself countless times in the Negro ghettos of the central cities, the white middle class has been gravitating to the suburbs, eroding the city's tax base at the very time the urban core is experiencing increased demands for public services. This is the cycle which distinguishes the new ghetto from the old. The old ghetto thrived on hope; the new ghetto drowns in despair. The old ghetto was open and tended to disappear; the new ghetto is closed and tends to sustain itself.

If our country's central priority can be summarized in a single statement it is this: The United States must re-open the traditional paths out of the ghetto.

For years now we have talked of the "revolution of rising expectations" throughout the world, but we have not appreciated the fact that such a revolution was under way in our own midst. To the less fortunate people in this country, even more than overseas, we have flaunted our affluence and aroused their desire to share in it.

Particularly in urban areas, where the poor and dispossessed are constantly bombarded by images of the "good" life enjoyed by others in the society, the proximity to prosperity is a cause of distress. In such circumstances a sense of futility can easily overwhelm the ghetto resident. But though aspiration may wane, temptation is always there, and frustration sometimes gives way to frenzy. Nevertheless, most of the rioters and their neighbors are not engaged in a conscious assault on society. Far from it. Indeed most of them continue to want to play a constructive role in our social institutions.

It is in this basic orientation of most Negroes that one finds cause for hope. Although black extremists have appeared on the scene, their influence is hardly as great as they and the press have implied. Most ghetto residents, including even those active in the riots, still desire a place in American society, not separation from it.

What, then, can we do to relieve the chronic social crisis in this country? In the long run the goal must be to eliminate the ghetto. This does not mean that ghetto residents should be forcibly dispersed among the rest of the population. It does mean that the artificial barriers which have enclosed the ghetto must be lowered so that movement into and out of the area can take place freely on an individual, voluntary basis.

In adopting short-term measures to deal with the current disabilities of those who live in the ghetto, it is imperative that we not sacrifice the greater aim. To improve life in the ghetto, though a worthy endeavor, will be self-defeating if it serves to maintain the very institution which accounts for so much of our difficulty. We must not delude ourselves into merely "gilding the ghetto".

For this reason the priority investments must be those which improve the capacity and opportunity of ghetto dwellers to move more readily in the society at large. The Commission has proposed action in many fields. To meet persistent unemployment we consider it urgent and feasible to create two million new jobs in the next three years. Furthermore, since fewer and fewer of the existing jobs are found in the central city, we must facilitate the access of urban residents to places of employment in outlying areas. This will require improved transportation to carry workers to and from jobs in the suburbs.

Even more important, it demands that those who wish and can afford to do so, not be hindered in obtaining housing near their places of work, on equal terms with other citizens. This will require our utmost attempts to eliminate discrimination in housing.

Not only should the available housing stock be freed from discriminatory sales and rentals. Massive efforts are also required to replace the six million substandard dwelling units which are still occupied in the United States, many of them in the urban ghettos. During the past three decades only 800,000 federally subsidized housing units have been constructed for low-income families. In the same period federal insurance guarantees have supported the construction of over ten million middle- and upper-income units. Clearly the country's housing problems must be attacked with greater vigor, and with particular attention to the huge backlog needed for the less affluent families. By no means should all or most of these be constructed in the central city. Properly planned, this program can do much to release some of the pent-up pressures in the over-crowded urban centers

In the intricate web of ghetto problems, none is so fundamental as education, the traditional mechanism by which the underprivileged have lifted themselves upward. Federal, state and local governments must collaborate to insure more adequate educational opportunities for all children. State assistance formulas should be revised to provide more aid per pupil to districts with especially high proportions of deprived youngsters. Incentives should be created to encourage contact and cooperation between relatively well-off, middle-class school districts and those of lower-class communities. Compensatory programs, such as the pre-school Head Start projects, should be expanded and continued for as long as necessary to close the gap between disadvantaged children and those growing up in environments more supportive of educational achievement.

Programs directed to these ends comprise the heart of today's agenda for social action. Support for broad measures of this character will be the concrete test of our commitment.