

## Class Handout NY-5 New York, Reading 14

### The Aspirations of Whitney Young

Whitney Young is Executive Director of the National Urban League, an organization founded in 1911 by whites and blacks to increase the employment opportunities of blacks moving into northern cities. Although the League has broadened its activities, its major concerns continue to focus on those problems that led to its founding.

The problem that the Negro citizen faces in this country, and it is a problem around which the whole thrust for first class citizenship is based—is not merely an attempt to remove one's self from a mild inconvenience.

It is not simply a thrust for social status and for acceptance. The conditions that Negro citizens find themselves in today is not a mere recession. It is not even a depression. Let me cite you some facts. . . .

. . . [W]hat we are talking about when we talk about Negro unemployed is that one out of every four Negro workers happens to be unemployed in this country. We are talking about a group of people whose family income happens to be exactly 53 per cent of that of the average white family's income.

That figure, Gentlemen, is worse than in 1952 when it was 57 per cent. The gap is getting wider.

We are talking about a group of people 60 per cent of whom have a family income under \$3,000, 75 per cent have a family income under \$4,000. We are talking about a group of people who have 50 per cent of this nation's youngsters between the ages of 18 and 21 who are out of work and out of school.

Today there is close to a million youngsters, Mr. Chairman, youngsters between 18 and 21, out of school, out of work. A million. Five hundred thousand of these happen to be Negro kids, idle in cities of our country. In cities like Chicago 85 per cent of the welfare caseload happens to be Negroes though they certainly don't represent much more than 22 per cent of the population.

In Detroit, 60 per cent of the unemployed happen to be Negro citizens. We are talking about a group of people who today in this country, one out of every six, lives in a house that is dilapidated and substandard, according to the Census, as compared to one out of thirty-two for white citizens. . . .

What I am describing to you for the Negro is not a recession, an inconvenience, it is a catastrophe, a disaster, and it is fast becoming a national disgrace for our country where there is no question about its affluence. . . .

I am saying it must be Civil Rights buttressed by the resources with which people can in fact take advantage of equal opportunity; to provide equal opportunity without providing a deprived, a historically deprived group of citizens with the resources by which they may take advantage of the opportunity is to me to invite upon them disillusionment, frustration, and despair.

Now the alternative to the passage of this kind of legislation is very clear. We will either help Negro citizens become productive, constructive consumers, or they will automatically become destructive, disgruntled, dependents.

"Statement of Whitney M. Young, Jr., Executive Director, National Urban League, Inc.," in *Transcript of Hearing, Ad Hoc Subcommittee on The War on Poverty Program*, Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives, April 14, 1954, pp. 2-7 (mimeographed). Printed with permission of Whitney M. Young, Jr.