

Whitney M. Young Jr.

Biracial Coalition, Leadership Crucial

This summer's racial violence has caused a crisis of leadership. The riots have made it easy for "backlashers" to justify resistance to necessary social changes. But this leads to a dangerous polarization of attitudes which could lead to more violence.

Negro leadership has lived up to its responsibility by speaking out against riots and by proposing rational programs to end their causes. Now it is time for



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white leadership to speak out and condemn the backlashers and start doing something to end the ghetto's problems. Churches, liberal organizations, political clubs, business and labor, interracial and human relations groups, all have to speak out now and regain the initiative from the backlashers. They have been silent for too long.

There are signs that some leaders realize the urgency of the situation and are willing to join the coalition so desperately needed if our country is to have peace and progress. I took part in a recent meeting to form just such a group.

It is called the Urban Coalition, and our first meeting included leaders of business, labor, religion, city mayors, and civil rights groups. From this came proposals for an emergency work program to provide jobs and training for the unemployed, the establishment of job centers in cities, and the commitment of private industry to take all steps necessary to insure full employment.

This last item is especially significant because business has not done enough to provide the jobs and training needed. Negro workers are unemployed at a rate more than twice that for white workers and Negro family income is \$3,000 less per year than for white families. Something has to be done about this—now.

Many business leaders understand that they have a tremendous stake in urban peace and some of them realize they can't afford to continue old ways of doing things. But the real test will come at the local level. Businessmen and community leaders are going to have to come forward with vigorous support for radical changes.

That is why various local urban coalitions are now being formed. In New York, for example, Mayor Lindsay, who was at our meeting, has set up a New York Coalition of local leadership to attack ghetto problems. Other cities and regions will do the same.

The Urban Coalition could be the most exciting new development in a long time—but only if its members are sincere in pushing for radical change. The time is long past for mere lip service to the ideals of equality. Responsible leaders and established organizations must be given the resources to deal adequately with ghetto problems. Negro citizens are tired of being promised jobs and not getting them, they have been lied to once too often.

The business and civic leaders now forming such coalitions in their communities will have to deliver on their promises. This coalition will have to create jobs and strengthen the economic life of the ghetto. It will have to end racial barriers in housing, health and education. These can't be temporary steps to stave off a riot; they must be steps which get at the heart of the problems caused by racism and solve them permanently.

We really have little choice. This country can take the high road to social progress and equality by a strong commitment to far-reaching programs to create jobs and better living conditions for the urban poor, or it can take the low road to social disaster and violence by letting the backlashers speak for it and allowing ghetto conditions to worsen. We have to take that high road.