A CORPORATE RESPONSE TO HUNGER IN AMERICA

PRESENTED AT THE SYMPOSIUM ON POVERTY AND WORLD HUNGER JANUARY 18, 1986 MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. CENTER FOR NONVIOLENT SOCIAL CHANGE, INC.

REMARKS BY

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CHAIRMAN AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

AMERICAN CAN COMPANY

I DEEPLY APPRECIATE YOUR INVITATION TO ADDRESSES
THIS SECOND NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON POVERTY AND
WORLD HUNGER, IT IS MOST APPROPRIATE THAT

THIS SYMPOSIUM BE HELD AS PART OF KING WEEK -FOR THE SOCIAL JUSTICE THAT DR. KING FOUGHT

FOR DOES MEAN AN END TO THE DEBILITATION OF
POVERTY AND HUNGER.

WORLD HUNGER HAS RECEIVED A LOT OF ATTENTION

THIS YEAR IN THE AMERICAN PRESS AND ON RADIO

AND TELEVISION. AND TODAY, YOU HAVE ADDED TO

THE EFFORT TO ALLEVIATE THESE PROBLEMS.

BUT, I AM AFRAID WE AMERICANS WHO RESPOND TO
THE DEVASTATION OVERSEAS STILL DO NOT PAY
ENOUGH ATTENTION TO THE HUNGER THAT EXISTS IN
OUR OWN COUNTRY.

WE SEEM TO ASSUME THAT BECAUSE WE ARE THE RICHEST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD, HUNGER EITHER DOES NOT EXIST OR THAT IT EXISTS ONLY AS AN OCCASIONAL AND SHORT-LIVED PHENOMENA,

THAT IS NOT THE CASE,

HUNGER NOT ONLY EXISTS IN THIS COUNTRY. IT INCREASES EVERY DAY. THE U.S. CONFERENCE OF MAYORS REPORTS CASELOADS HAVE INCREASED 300 TO 400 PERCENT IN THE FOOD PANTRIES AND SOUP

KITCHENS OF THEIR CITIES. SIMILAR RESULTS

ARE REPORTED BY THE FOOD RESEARCH AND ACTION

CENTER, SECOND HARVEST AND THE PHYSICIANS

TASK FORCE ON HUNGER.

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BUT YOU CAN'T REALLY UNDERSTAND HUNGER IN

AMERICA UNTIL YOU LOOK BEHIND THOSE NUMBERS AND

THOSE REPORTS. THEN YOU FIND A WOMAN WHOSE DIET

CONSISTS PRIMARILY OF COFFEE AND CRACKERS TWICE

A DAY, SO HER CHILDREN CAN HAVE THE SMALL AMOUNT

OF NOURISHING FOOD THAT IS AVAILABLE TO THE

FAMILY,

YOU FIND A FAMILY THAT TRIES NOT TO SPEND ANY MONEY ON FOOD ONE WEEK A MONTH SO THE CHILDREN CAN HAVE SHOES AND CLOTHING AND THE FAMILY CAN STAY OUT OF DEBT,

YOU FIND AN ELDERLY WOMAN WHO EATS A CUP OF
BEANS AND A SMALL SQUARE OF FRIED BREAD EACH
DAY -- AND NOTHING ELSE -- BECAUSE SHE IS TOO

EMBARRASSED TO ASK FOR HELP.

You FIND A ONE YEAR OLD BABY WHO WEIGHS ONLY 15 POUNDS AND CAN BARELY SIT UP,

YOU FIND PEOPLE WHO, R DEPRIVATION

AND CONSTANT STRL: INSIST THEY ARE

NOT SUFFERING FRON i-

THESE PEOPLE ARE YOUNG, MIDDLE-AGED AND ELDERLY. THEY ARE WHITE, BLACK, HISPANIC, ASIAN AND NATIVE AMERICAN. THEY LIVE IN CITIES, SMALL TOWNS AND RURAL AREAS, THEY ARE

FOUND IN EVERY SECTION OF THIS NATION, THEY INCLUDE THE CHRONICALLY POOR AND THE WORKING

POOR. FOR SOME, THE STRUGGLE FOR FOOD IS A FAMILIAR STORY. FOR OTHERS, IT IS A NEW EXPERIENCE.

BUT THOUGH THEIR SITUATIONS AND CIRCUMSTANCES

ARE DIFFERENT, THEY ALL SHARE A COMMON BOND:

THEY ARE HUNGRY OR MALNOURISHED,

IMENTION ALL PEOPLE BELIEVE

THE HUNGER ISSUES ARE OVERSTATED OR OVER-DRAMATIZED

IN THE U.S. THE SKEPTICS SAY THE FAMILY THAT
MISSES FOUR MEALS A MONTH HAS A DIFFERENT
LEVEL OF NEED THAN THE FAMILY THAT MISSES
TEN MEALS A MONTH. THEY SAY ONE SHOULD
NOT

COMPARE THE FAMILY THAT HAS BEEN UNABLE

TO PROVIDE ENOUGH FOOD FOR THEIR CHILDREN

FOR A

YEAR WITH THE FAMILY THAT HAS ONLY BEEN
IN THAT SITUATION FOR A FEW WEEKS. THEY
SAY DO NOT PLACE THE PERSON WHO DOES
NOT REGARD HIMSELF OR HERSELF AS A VICTIM

OF HUNGER IN THE SAME CATEGORY AS A

PERSON WHO DOES.

IN A NARROW SENSE, THESE CRITICS ARE RIGHT.

THE MILLIONS OF HUNGRY OR MALNOURISHED AMERICANS

ARE NOT ALL IN THE SAME CIRCUMSTANCES. THEIR

LEVELS OF NEED DO VARY. THEIR VIEWS OF

THEMSELVES VARY. THEIR HOPES, EXPECTATIONS

AND EXPERIENCES ALL VARY, SO DO THE BUREAUCRATIC

OBSTACLES THEY V !ERCOME IN ORDER TO

OBTAIN FOOD FROM GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS.

BUT HUNGER IS NOT A COMPETITION TO DETERMINE
WHO IS THE MOST HUNGRY, THE MOST NEEDY, THE
MOST DESERVING, IT IS NOT A CONTEST IN WHICH
THE GOAL IS TO DEVISE A SCALE OF NEED AND THEN

RIGOROUSLY DOLE OUT OUR COMPASSION AND ASSISTANCE
TO THOSE WHO MEET THE APPROPRIATE CRITERIA.

DO WE WANT A STANDARD OF NEED THAT

SAYS ONLY THE DESPERATE SHOULD APPLY?

DO WE HONESTLY

THEIR PRIDE AND DIGNITY DO NOT FEEL THE
PANGS OF HUNGER OR THE PAIN OF BEING
UNABLE TO ADEQUATELY CARE FOR THEIR
FAMILIES? OF COURSE NOT.

THE ISSUES WE NEED TO ADDRESS ARE NOT WHETHER FAMILY A IS HUNGRIER THAN FAMILY B; MR. X MORE CAPABLE OF PROVIDING FOR HIS CHILDREN THAN MR. Z; OR THE RATIO BETWEEN THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE

WHO ARE CHRONICALLY HUNGRY AND THE

NUMBER WHO ARE EPISODICALLY HUNGRY.

THAT DEBATE HELPS NOBODY, THE ISSUES

WE NEED TO ADDRESS ARE:

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FIRST, OUR INADEQUATE RESPONSE TO THE HUNGER THAT EXISTS IN THIS COUNTRY TODAY.

SECOND, THE POVERTY THAT IS THE PRIMARY CAUSE OF HUNGER,

THIRD, THE VERY REAL POSSIBILITY THAT WE ARE

BECOMING A TWO-TIERED SOCIETY - A SOCIETY

DIVIDED BY INCOME, LIVING STANDARD,

EDUCATION,

HEALTH AND OPPORTUNITY; A SOCIETY THAT

IS PERHAPS TOO COMPLACENT ABOUT

POVERTY AND HUNGER.

THE SHORTCOMINGS OF FEDERAL NUTRITION

PROGRAMS HAVE BEEN AMPLY DOCUMENTED

BY MANY DIFFERENT SOURCES. SOME \$12

BILLION HAS BEEN CUT FROM THESE

PROGRAMS IN THE PAST THREE YEARS --

\$7 BILLION FROM THE FOOD STAMP
PROGRAM AND \$5 BILLION FROM THE
SCHOOL MEAL PROGRAMS,

THE FEDERAL FOOD STAMP PROGRAM	NO LONGER IS A
PROGRAM BASED ON HOW MUCH IT AG	CTUALLY COSTS
PEOPLE TO EAT. IT'S A PROGRAM	DESIGNED TO
KEEP FEDERAL SPE'	"WM, THE
"THRIFTY FOOD F_ CH TH	E PROGRAM
IS BASED IS THE CHEAPEST FOOD I	PLAN EVER
DEVISED BY THE U.S. DEPARTMENT	Γ OF AGRICULTURE.
"THE THRIFTY FOOD PLAN," AS ONE	<i>'</i>
TASK FORCE NOTED, "IS AN EXAMP	LE
OF BUREAUCRACY GONE	

AWRY. A FEDERAL EXPENDITURE LEVEL

WAS SET, AND A COMPUTER WAS

PROGRAMMED TO DESIGN A FOOD PLAN

EQUAL TO THAT LEVEL -- IRRESPECTIVE

OF HUMAN NEEDS,"

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THE SECOND ISSUE WE HAVE TO ADDRESS IS WHY

PEOPLE ARE HUNGRY OR MALNOURISHED, MANY

REASONS CAN BE CITED: UNEMPLOYMENT, REDUCED

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE, BUDGET CUTS IN FEDERAL

AND STATE "SAFETY NET" PROGRAMS, THE INCREASED

TAX BURDEN PLACED ON THE WORKING POOR, INCREASED

LIVING COSTS WHILE INCOME REMAINS STABLE OR

DECLINES, AND INADEQUATE NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION,

BUT THE BASIC REASON MOST PEOPLE GO HUNGRY
IS THAT THEY ARE POOR, THEY JUST DON'T HAVE
ENOUGH MONEY TO BUY THE FOOD THEY AND THEIR
FAMILIES NEED.

REPORTED THAT POVERTY HAD DECLINED FOR THE
FIRST TIME IN SEVERAL YEARS, DROPPING FROM

THE 15.2 PERCENT TGI.TF 1983 TO 14.4

PERCENT IN 1984 OF THE MOST SUBSTANTIAL

DECLINES IN THE PAST 17 YEARS. SINCE THE

POVERTY RATE TRADITIONALLY MOVES IN CLOSE

TANDEM WITH THE ECONOMY, THIS DATA PROVIDED

GROUNDS FOR SOME OPTIMISM.

EXCEPT THAT THE MOST SIGNIFICANT NEW DATA TO

EMERGE FROM THE NEW CENSUS REPORT WERE NOT THE

NUMBERS SHOWING A DECLINE IN POVERTY BETWEEN

THIS YEAR AND LAST YEAR. THEY WERE THE NUMBERS

SHOWING HIGH RATES OF POVERTY CONTINUING TO

PERSIST OVER TIME IN SPITE OF THE FACT THAT

UNEMPLOYMENT HAS BEEN STEADILY DECLINING.

THE IMPLICATIONS ARE STUNNING, BECAUSE THE

DATA SUGGESTS THAT DESPITE YEAR-TO-YEAR

SHIFTS IN POVERTY RATES, A DRAMATIC

INCREASE HAS OCCURRED IN THE BASIC

BEDROCK OF POVERTY, IN OTHER WORDS, A

SUBSTANTIALLY LARGER GROUP OF

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PEOPLE IS RELATIVELY <u>UNAFFECTED</u> BY

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IMPROVEMENTS IN OVERALL ECONOMIC

PERFORMANCE, WE HAVE, IT SEEMS, REACHED A

NEW PLATEAU OF POVERTY, AND IT'S A HIGHER

PLATEAU, NOT A LOWER ONE,

THIS BRINGS ME TO MY THIRD POINT,

FOR THE PAST FEW YEARS, WE HAVE WITNESSED THE FULL DEBILITATING EFFECT OF POVERTY -- OF

HOMELESSNESS, HUNGER, UNEMPLOYMENT, ILLITERACY, ISOLATION, LACK OF OPPORTUNITY; NOT NECESSARILY ALL AT ONCE, BUT FREQUENTLY ENOUGH AND IN COMBINATIONS THAT MAKE IT ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE

FOR LARGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE TO ESCAPE FROM
THIS TRAP INTO WHICH THEY HAVE FALLEN,

NOW, HOWEVER, I FEAR WE MAY BE WITNESSING
SOMETHING ELSE: A NATION ON THE WAY TO
BECOMING A TWO-TIERED SOCIETY: ONE AFFLUENT,
WELL-HOUSED, WELL-EDUCATED, WELL-FED, IN GOOD
HEALTH AND FULLY EMPLOYED; THE OTHER POOR,
INADEQUATELY HOUSED, INADEQUATELY FED,
UNEMPLOYED OR UNDEREMPLOYED, AND IN POOR
HEALTH,

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THE NEW YORK TIMES TOOK NOTE OF THIS TREND
IN A FRONT PAGE ARTICLE ON POVERTY AND
YOUTH ON OCTOBER 20. "COMPLEX SOCIAL,
ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL FACTORS ARE
CREATING A VAST NEW

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CLASS OF POOR AMERICANS WHO ARE MUCH
YOUNGER, LESS EDUCATED AND LIKELY TO GIVE
BIRTH SOONER THAN RECENT GENERATIONS OF
THE POOR," THE TIMES NOTED,

THE ARTICLE POINTED OUT THAT 32

PERCENT OF ALL CHILDREN LIVING IN

POVERTY WERE BLACK

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EVEN THOUGH BLACKS COMPRISED ONLY 15

PERCENT OF THE POPULATION; MORE THAN

HALF OF ALL POOR CHILDREN LIVED WITH

THEIR MOTHERS IN A SINGLE-PARENT HOME;

AND THAT POVERTY RATES NOW WERE

INCREASING AMONG TWO-PARENT

HOUSEHOLDS AS WELL.

THE REASONS FOR AND IMPLICATIONS ABOUT THE DATA WERE NOT FULLY CLEAR. BUT THE TRENDS

WERE FRIGHTENING ENOUGH TO DRAW THE FOLLOWING
COMMENT FROM SENATOR DANIEL PATRICK MOYNIHAN:

"THE U.S. TODAY MAY BE THE FIRST SOCIETY IN HISTORY WHERE CHILDREN MUCH WORSE OFF

THAN ADULTS. I REALIZED WE HAVE

A PROBLEM OF SIGNII-ICANT SOCIAL CHANGE UNLIKE

ANYTHING WE HAVE EXPERIENCED IN THE PAST,

AND WE ARE COMPLETELY IGNORING IT."

SO HOW DO WE AVOID THIS CHAIN OF EVENTS?

WE START WITH A CHANGE OF ATTITUDES.

AMERICA IN 1985 IS A COUNTRY THAT, ON THE WHOLE, IS PRETTY SATISFIED WITH ITSELF, MOST

OF US ARE IN GOOD FINANCIAL SHAPE, WE
CERTAINLY HAVE MORE LUXURIES AND LEISURE
TIME THAN WE

EVER EXPECTED TO HAVE, AND WE WANT TO PROTECT AND MAINTAIN ALL THAT WE HAVE ACCUMULATED.

THERE IS NOTHING WRONG WITH THAT. BUT

I WONDER IF TOO MANY OF US ARE

STARTING TO FEEL THAT THE ONLY WAY TO

KEEP WHAT WE HAVE IS TO MAKE SURE

NOBODY ELSE GETS ANY. I WONDER IF THE

EMOTIONAL GENEROSITY THAT ONCE WAS THE

HALLMARK OF THIS COUNTRY IS BEGINNING

TO GIVE WAY TO A MEAN-SPIRITEDNESS; A

SENSE OF I'VE-GOT-MINE-AND-THAT'S-ALL
THAT-COUNTS";

A FEELING THAT IF YOU'RE POOR, IT'S
YOUR OWN FAULT; IF YOU'RE HANDICAPPED, IT'S BECAUSE YOU

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WE USE WORDS LIKE "FAMILY," "COMMUNITY,"

"SHARING," AND "UNDERSTANDING," BUT THOSE

WORDS WILL HAVE LITTLE MEANING IF OUR PEOPLE

AND OUR INSTITUTIONS BECOME INCREASINGLY

DISCONNECTED AND ISOLATED FROM EACH OTHER,

ALL OF US WANT OURSELVES WE ARE DOING

MORE FOR OTHERS, WE NEED TO BE CAREFUL THAT

WHEN WE TALK THE LANGUAGE OF SACRIFICE,

WE DO NOT PRACTICE THE POLITICS OF SELFISHNESS,

PERHAPS OUR AWARENESS THAT THE ECONOMIC PIE,
ONCE CONSIDERED INFINITE, ACTUALLY HAS SOME
LIMITS IS THE REASON FOR THIS APPARENT SHIFT
IN NATIONAL ATTITUDES, WHATEVER THE REASON,
THE TASK BEFORE US REMAINS THE SAME, THIS
NATION NEEDS TO REDISCOVER THE SOCIAL VISION
IT HAS HAD IN YEARS PAST: A SOCIAL VISION
BASED ON SOMETHING MORE MEANINGFUL AND MORE

ENDURING THAN A DESIRE TO PROTECT THE PERSONAL POSSESSIONS WE HAVE ACCUMULATED AND THE STATUS WE HAVE ATTAINED IN OUR PRIVATE LIVES. WE NEED TO DEVELOP A CONSENSUS BASED ON COMPASSION FOR OTHERS, THAT LOOKS AT HUNGER, POVERTY AND LACK OF OPPORTUNITY NOT AS ECONOMIC, MEDICAL OR EVEN POLITICAL ISSUES; BUT AS HUMAN ISSUES.

I BELIEVE WE CAN REAWAKEN THAT SENSE OF CARING AND COMPASSION.

MANY PROPOSALS HAVE BEEN ADVANCED THAT WOULD

ALLOW THIS NATION TO COMBAT HUNGER, REDUCE

POVERTY AND STOP APPARENT DRIFT TOWARD A TWO
TIERED SOLI. THAT MERIT SPECIAL

ATTENTION INCLUDE:

- O AN UNEQUIVOCAL PUBLIC COMMITMENT TO

 PROVIDE PEOPLE IN NEED WITH ACCESS TO A

 DIET THAT IS BOTH NUTRITIOUS AND

 AFFORDABLE,
- O JOB CREATION STRATEGIES THAT ENABLE

 LOW-INCOME PERSONS TO

 COMPETE MORE EFFECTIVELY

 IN THE JOB MARKET.

- 0 USING OUR TAX SYSTEM AS A MEANS OF KEEPING PEOPLE OUT OF POVERTY,
- NATIONAL MINIMUM BENEFIT LEVELS TIED TO

 INFLATION FOR THOSE WHO WILL CONTINUE TO

 NEED PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS SUCH AS

 AID TO FAMILIES WITH DEPENDENT CHILDREN,
- O AND YES, COALITIONS AND PUBLIC PRIVATE

 PARTNERSHIPS THAT INVOLVE ALL SECTORS IN

 THE EFFORT TO STIMULATE OUR ELECTED

 REPRESENTATIVES TO SET APPROPRIATE

 PRIORITIES AND ACT ON THEM.

WHEN THE CHAIRMAN OF A MAJOR AMERICAN

CORPORATION PROPOSES INCREASED FEDERAL

SPENDING FOR PROGRAMS DEALING WITH HUNGER AND

POVERTY, SOMEONE - - WHAT ABOUT

THE ROLE OF THE FIRTLE SECTOR? CLEARLY, THERE IS A ROLE FOR VOLUNTARISM AND PRIVATE SECTOR

PROGRAMS AIMED AT COMBATING HUNGER AND POVERTY,

PRIVATE OR VOLUNTARY EFFORTS ARE FREQUENTLY

MORE RESPONSIVE TO INDIVIDUALS THAN LARGE

BUREAUCRACIES, AND THERE ARE ASPECTS TO THESE
PROBLEMS THAT DO NOT LEND THEMSELVES TO
POLITICAL OR PUBLIC POLICY SOLUTIONS,

I AM A BUSINESSMAN WHO WAS TRAINED

AS AN ECONOMIST, I KNOW THE DANGERS

OF DEFICIT

SPENDING, AND I STRONGLY FAVOR A PROGRAM

THAT REDUCES THE DEFICIT, I KNOW WE

NEED TO

SUSTAIN LONG-TERM, NON-INFLATIONARY

ECONOMIC GROWTH, I KNOW REDRESS OUR

STAGGERING TRADE.

BASICALLY, THOUGH, THE TASKS BEFORE US ARE

ONES IN WHICH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

MUST TAKE THE MAJOR LEADERSHIP ROLE,

THE PRIVATE SECTOR CAN HELP, BUT THE

BASIC LEADERSHIP, COMMITMENT AND FUNDING

MUST COME FROM GOVERNMENT, THERE

SIMPLY IS NO OTHER WAY, WE HAVE SEEN HISTORY REPEAT ITSELF IN THE PAST FIVE YEARS WITH THE INCREASE IN HUNGER AND WE HAVE THE MODELS FOR AN EFFECTIVE SOLUTION,

WE CANNOT BE DETERRED BY THOSE WHO
SAY THE FEDERAL DEFICIT IS OUR FIRST
PRIORITY,

BUT I AM UNWILLING TO PUT OFF

RENEWING OUR COMMITMENT TO THE POOR

AND THE HUNGRY UNTIL WE PUT OUR

ECONOMIC HOUSE IN ORDER. I AM

UNWILLING BECAUSE WE ARE SEEING MORE

AND MORE EVIDENCE THAT THE GAP

BETWEEN THE RICH AND THE POOR CAN

WIDEN EVEN WHEN THERE IS ECONOMIC

GROWTH. I AM UNWILLING BECAUSE

THINK PROGRAMS TO ALLEVIATE POVERTY AND HUNGER SHOULD BE DETERMINED BY NATIONAL NEED, NOT THE OFTEN ABSTRACT AND UNATTAINABLE CONCEPT OF

"DOLLAR AVAILABILITY." I AM UNWILLING
BECAUSE THE POOR AND THE HUNGRY HAVE
BEEN ASKED TO SHOULDER TOO MANY BUDGET
CUTS ALREADY.

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CUTS IN SOCIAL PROGRAMS DEALING WITH

POVERTY AND HUNGER ONLY INCREASE

SUFFERING WHILE MAKING A TOKEN IMPACT

ON THE DEFICIT, IF WE REALLY WANT TO

MAKE A DENT IN THE DEFICIT, THERE IS

MORE THAN ENOUGH FAT IN THE DEFENSE

BUDGET TO SUPPORT DEFICIT REDUCTION AND

INCREASED SPENDING FOR THE HUNGER AND

POVERTY PROGRAMS I HAVE DESCRIBED, WE ARE

CONTINUALLY TOLD WE MUST CHOOSE BETWEEN

GUNS AND BUTTER. BUT THIS COUNTRY DOESN'T

NEED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN GUNS AND BUTTER.

THIS COUNTRY NEEDS TO STOP USING THE

BUTTER MONEY TO BUY GUNS. THIS IS

ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT AS WE GRAPPLE

WITH BALANCED BUDGET LEGISLATION, WE CAN NOT ALLOW FURTHER CUTS IN HUNGER AND POVERTY PROGRAMS.

FINALLY, WE NEED TO

REMEMBER THAT WE ARE NOT

JUST A PLURALISTIC

SOCIETY; WE ARE ALSO AN

INTERDEPENDENT SOCIETY.

AND NO SOCIETY, NO MATTER

HOW STRONG OR SECURE IT

FEELS AT ANY GIVEN MOMENT,

CAN SURVIVE IF ITS PEOPLE

LOSE

SIGHT OF EACH THEY EXIST APART FROM EACH OTHER AND TO RESPOND TO EACH OTHER.

THAT IS THE DANGER BEFORE

US AND WHY, IN MY

JUDGEMENT, WE SHOULD PAY

PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO

WHAT FRANKLIN DELANO

ROOSEVELT TOLD US

MORE THAN 50 YEARS AGO. "THE

TEST OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY,

ROOSEVELT SAID, IS NOT HOW

WELL WE TAKE CARE OF OUR

AFFLUENT. IT IS HOW WELL WE

TAKE CARE OF OUR POOR."

THANK YOU.