



Bill Clinton on Poverty and Opportunity

Excerpts from recent speeches by Governor Bill Clinton

There's a special challenge in the New Covenant for the young men and women who live in America's most troubled urban neighborhoods, the children like those I met in Chicago and Los Angeles who live in fear of being forced to join a gang or getting shot going to and from school.

Many of these young people believe this country has ignored them for too long, and they're right. Many of them think America unfairly blames them for every wrong in our society -- for drugs, crime, poverty, the breakup of the family and the breakdown of the schools -- and they're right. They worry that because their face is of a different color, their only choice in life is jail or welfare or a dead-end job, that being a minority in an inner city is a guarantee of failure. But they're wrong -- and when I'm President, I'm going to do my best to prove they're wrong.

I know these young people can overcome anything they set their mind to. I believe America needs their strength, their intelligence, and their humanity. And because I believe in them and what they can contribute to our society, they must not be let off the hook. All society can offer them is a chance to develop their God-given abilities. They have to do the rest. Anybody who tells them otherwise is lying -- and they know it.

As President, I'll see that they get the same deal as everyone else: they've got to play by the rules, stay off drugs, stay in school and keep out of the streets. They've got to stop having children if they're not prepared to support them. Governments don't raise children. People do.

And for those young people who do get into trouble, we'll give them one chance to avoid prison, by setting up community boot camps for first-time non-violent offenders -- where they can learn discipline, get drug treatment if necessary, continue their education, and do useful work for their community. A second chance to be a first-rate citizen.

We need special efforts to empower the poor to work their way out of poverty. We'll make work pay by expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit for the working poor, and by supporting private and public partnerships to give low-income entrepreneurs the tools to start new businesses, through innovative institutions like Shore Bank in Chicago and its rural counterpart, the Southern Development Bancorporation in Arkansas. We've got to break the cycle of dependency and put an end to permanent dependence on welfare as a way of life, by really investing in the development of poor people and giving them the means, the incentives, and the requirement to go to work.

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