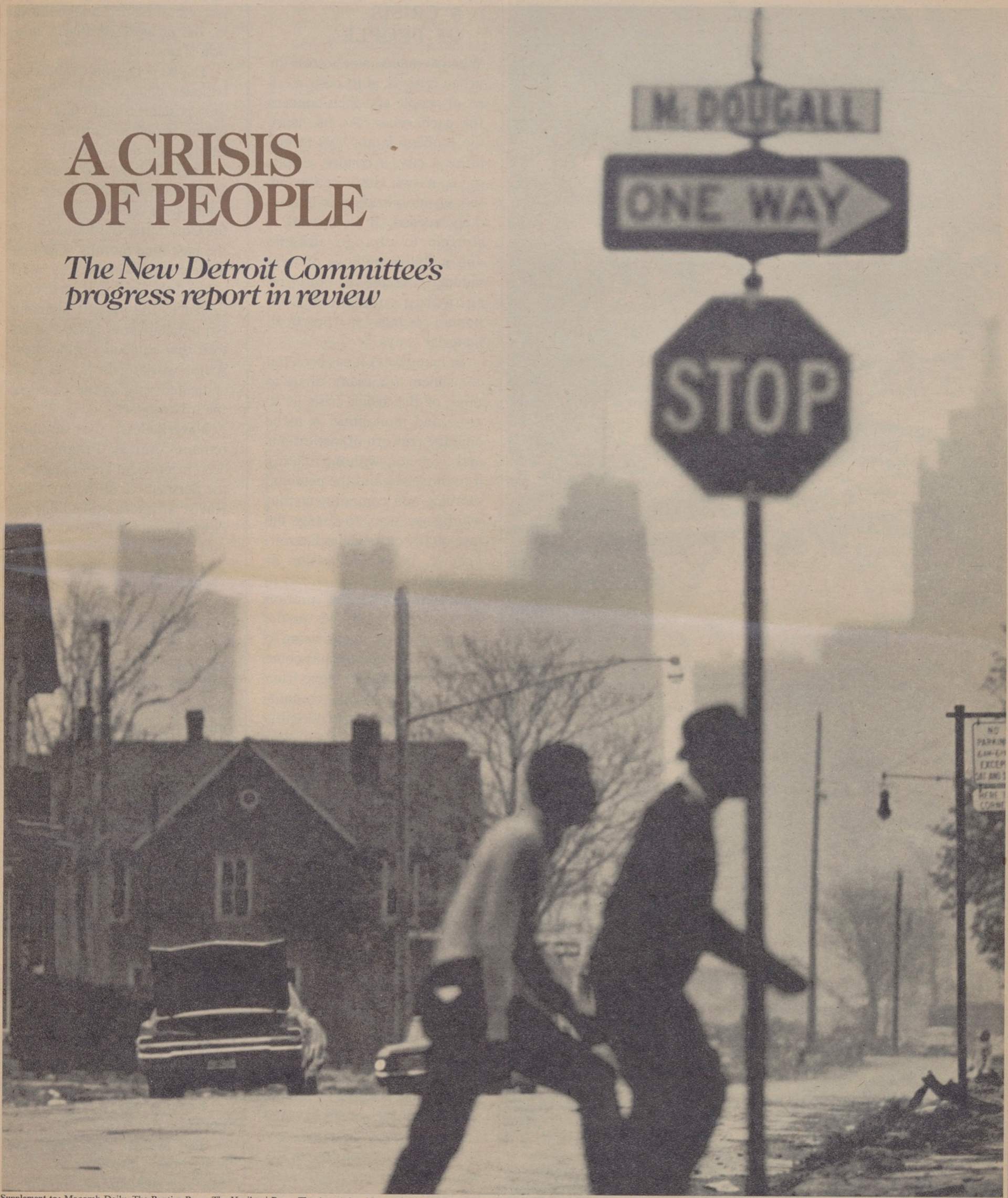


May 1968

A CRISIS OF PEOPLE

The New Detroit Committee's progress report in review



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I: A CRISIS OF PEOPLE

What we have come to call the urban crisis is, at its core, a crisis of people and their concern for each other. At its heart, the problem is not how to mobilize a city, a county, a state or a nation into action although mobilization is desperately needed. It is, instead, a struggle to change attitudes and mobilize millions of individual consciences into responding to their fellow human beings in practical, material ways.

In many ways it has been too convenient for many of us to think of the urban crisis as so gross and monolithic as to be only the concern of institutions and agencies, without relating it to ourselves and the personal sacrifice and commitment that will be necessary to change the face of any city such as Detroit. For we, in our dedication or our inaction, all have a role in the urban crisis. The solution to the urban crisis lies in the response of one human being to another. But the time has come for that response to move from mere philosophical commitment into the area of tangible accomplishment.

The measure of this response can be expressed in concrete terms: How much we as Americans and Detroiters are willing to expend in effort and financial resources, both public and private, to bring about a solution. If we are willing to pay the price, in terms of energy and money, the urban crisis can be solved. Such a solution will require commitment from every level of our society, from the personal to the national.

It will require a refocusing of national priorities, and the expenditures of vast sums of money, the channeling of national resources of energy and talent, of good will and patience. No sector of our society would remain undisturbed by the task.

The New Detroit Committee

is committed to, and believes in, the proposition that a solution is possible.

The New Detroit Committee believes change and progress are possible, and that programs, people and attitudes can change and be changed.

These beliefs are grounded in the many acts of courage and selflessness and commitment the Committee has witnessed in the past nine months. The first of these began in the very heart of the July riots, and have continued to the present moment. No moment now passes in Detroit that someone, somewhere is not working in a practical, dedicated way in the cause of the urban poor.

Nevertheless, the situation remains critical. Progress has been insufficient viewed against the perspective of the problem. Racist attitudes still afflict society. There have been failures and disappointments. There is little time for further delay.

Detroit in the spring of 1968 is too little changed from the city that exploded into the nation's headlines in July, 1967. The goals of social progress that were enunciated in the wake of the riots last year remain largely unfulfilled. Recognizing the accomplishments of the past nine months, there is still too little that is new in New Detroit.

The accomplishments and the failures of the New Detroit Committee during the past nine months mirror, to a large extent, the accomplishments and failures of individual conscience in Detroit.

In some areas, progress has been made. In others, the problems seem almost impenetrable and frustratingly resistant to treatment.

In every area Detroit must do more.

Perhaps this was to be expected.

The system that binds the urban poor into lives of grinding and demeaning emptiness was not built in a day. Cen-

turies of systematic and diligent racism, neglect, inaction, complacency and flawed communications forged today's urban ghettos. For many years, we have substituted empty phrases for solid accomplishments. All of these barriers, carefully constructed through will and through negligence, cannot be expected to fall in a day. We must proceed, however, as if they could.

In Detroit, no major area of need, no root cause of what was expressed as the riots of July, 1967, has been either cured or adequately treated. Martin Luther King's beautiful dream of a free society of equal opportunity remains the waking nightmare of our urban slums.

To meet the complexity and cost of dealing with this problem, the New Detroit Committee believes federal involvement in terms of great sums of money and leadership will be needed in order to arrest the continuing growth of inner-city hopelessness and despair. Federal control is not implied. The job cannot be done without the fullest participation of private and local interests. But full recognition must be given to the fact that Detroit's problem is the nation's problem, involving a national enterprise of will, effort and resources.

Closer to the roots of the problem, local units of government must learn how to become more responsive. Barriers to equality, both in law and in custom, must fall immediately. A broadly-based pattern of individual community response must be established. Just as in the area of air and water pollution, not much is accomplished if one community solves its problems while only a few blocks away another community acts out its life in another century.

Local government has also found itself unable to meet two of the most serious needs of the inner-city poor—jobs and housing. These are problems that

can be properly developed only with the wholehearted cooperation of industry and labor as a solid investment in the future.

Existing agencies must change or be replaced. New local agencies and institutions must be created. In many cases, the very agencies that have been charged with ministering to the needs of the poor have in themselves become major irritants.

In every sector of need new programs must emerge.

Just as in a mosaic, no single piece of tile comprises the entire work. So in the great works of a city, a state or a nation, no single program can do the entire job. It will take many. Just as in the mosaic, although no single piece of tile makes the whole, the failure to provide a single piece leaves the work uncompleted.

We must try, perhaps fail, but continue. We must do this, not because our efforts will put an end to riots, which they eventually will, or because we seek the thanks or gratitude of the poor, which is to misunderstand the meaning of what it is we are attempting to build. We must continue because it is the proper business of America to see that every man has the opportunity to live the kind of life each of us would ask for ourselves, that his children can grow up in the kind of world each of us would ask for our own children, that education, housing, job opportunity and respect for individual dignity be of the highest order an abundant society can provide.

What is perhaps most urgently needed in obtaining individual commitment is a new definition of racism and its implications in white America.

To many Americans, racism merely means active bigotry and discrimination, a charge from which they readily acquit themselves.

Racism, in reality and practice, is more subtle, and wears many masks.

It is hate. It is also indifference. It is the implied inferiority that is practically expressed in demeaning jobs, low wages, limited horizons and the countless small and unremarkable daily indignities suffered by millions of Negro Americans. It takes the form of unexamined values that casually deny status and dignity. It is complacency. It is the passive acceptance of the status quo. It is the belief that because you do not hate, you have not harmed anyone. It is the inability to put on, if only for a few moments, a black skin and look out at the world with new eyes. It is the inability to understand that each of us, in ways great and small, has benefitted because the Negro has suffered.

The New Detroit Progress Report, of which this is but a review and commentary, includes a series of proposals that have grown out of New Detroit's experience and outlook since July, 1967. The Progress Report represents a belief that the citizens of the Detroit area badly need a public inventory and assessment of their sweeping social obligations as well as their present resources for meeting them.

Underneath the cold facts and figures, behind the dry recommendations for action, there are people. We, the people, represent the ultimate agency of responsibility.

The New Detroit Committee urgently hopes that this document will be more than just another massive committee report.

It must represent an embarrassing and gnawing reminder to the people of our state of our failure to fulfill the American dream for the poor of Michigan. We must admit our past failure, and begin again.

It is hoped that this report can indicate the great distance that remains to be traveled. It should also serve as a personal

challenge to individual effort that will be needed to achieve a truly New Detroit of substance and reality.

No legacy could better serve the memory of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., an American who expressed in the works and words of his life the promise of our nation.

II: A CRY AND A RESPONSE

"Social and economic conditions in the riot cities constituted a clear pattern of severe disadvantage for Negroes as compared with whites, whether the Negroes lived in the disturbance area or outside of it. . . . Powerlessness, indignity, discouragement, and finally blind irrational rage have been the bitter fruit of generations of black frustration. And yet, a Gallup Poll, published on July 22, 1967, revealed that only one white American in 100 thought the Negro was being treated 'badly.'"

—The National Advisory
Commission on
Civil Disorders

The New Detroit Committee was born on Thursday, July 27, 1967.

It grew out of the still smoldering embers of the Detroit riots. It was rooted in the belief that man-made problems, however complex, are accessible to man-made solutions.

The 39-member committee was organized in an attempt to focus the thought of leaders from all segments of the community on practical achievement, and to establish, in the very act of its creation, a small but effective bond of communication where little or none had existed before.

The impetus for the creation of the New Detroit Committee was provided by Governor George Romney and Mayor Jerome Cavanagh, who called a meeting of 150 community leaders to discuss the city's current and future problems.

It was this group, called the Citizens Resources Committee, that quickly evolved into the symbolically named New Detroit Committee.

Joseph L. Hudson Jr., president of the J. L. Hudson Company and chairman of the board of the Metropolitan Fund of Detroit, has served as Committee chairman since its inception. Hudson agreed to serve with the understanding that the Committee would be a working group, that Committee members would not only lend their names but their talents and efforts to an enterprise of critical importance.

The Metropolitan Fund, a privately-supported, regionally-oriented urban affair research and coordination agency, provided immediate staff and financial support.

The fulltime staff of the New Detroit Committee was, and continues to be, drawn largely from local business, labor, governmental and civic groups on leaves of absence. Hudson asked from the very beginning that cooperating businesses and

other organizations send to the Committee only their most talented, irreplaceable personnel.

"If you can do without them," he said, "they won't be able to help us."

With the exception of a few core members of a permanent Metropolitan Fund Staff, all salaries of New Detroit Committee volunteers are paid by their sponsoring organizations.

The work of the Committee is divided among eight task forces, each with its own volunteer, fulltime staff, each specializing in an area of critical need. The task forces are communications; community services; education; employment; youth, recreation and cultural affairs; law; economic development; and housing.

From the beginning, the New Detroit Committee described for itself the role of "causer of good deeds." It had no power, governmental, financial or otherwise, to bring about any of the changes it became convinced were necessary. If progress were to be made, it decided, it could not be dictated.

The Committee operated under three simple guidelines:

- 1) Aim at helping the community use existing agencies more effectively, both in private and public sectors.
- 2) Stress actions and achievements, not promises.
- 3) Listen. Learn to listen better.

The Committee believes that it has learned a great deal since those early days of July, 1967. The Committee believes the roots of this experience should not be permitted to wither. The Committee, once considered a temporary organization responding to emergency conditions, is now a permanent organization. The emergency, for Detroit and for the many urban areas of our country, continues.

Looking back over those past nine months, the New Detroit Committee's public record has been a story of accomplishment, occasional reverses and continuing stalemates. To a public whose great expectations often exceed its appreciation of the obstacles, New Detroit's

effect on the local scene may occasionally seem minimal and primarily psychological.

To some, isolated by circumstance and disillusioned by experience, the Committee may seem to represent little more than a transparently predictable "establishment" reaction to a civic disaster.

But to many, the perpetuation and unflagging vitality of the New Detroit Committee as both an idea and an assemblage of concerned citizens has given assurance that change, however slow and ponderous, is on its way.

The Committee, while conscious of the pervasive racism afflicting this nation, sees signs of hope. The Committee has seen people change from apathy and indifference to fervent concern for the well-being of the less fortunate. It has observed an easing of previously inflexible views on housing and employment. It has noted the growing legislative success of open housing measures in the Detroit area and throughout the State of Michigan, with all its symbolism of inter-racial good will. Often, there are intangible successes that cannot show up on the pages of a printed report, but which reflect the changing of attitudes.

Although the New Detroit Committee has placed no special stress on public awareness of its role in programs sponsored and carried out by others, it has been deeply involved since its inception in concrete projects.

It has, in the last nine months, played a role in initiating successful hard-core employment programs. It has aided in changing attitudes and rules influencing the availability of mortgage money and loans for inner city construction and rehabilitation. It has attempted to persuade government, both in Lansing and Washington, to act constructively in the cause of the disillusioned. It has actively and persistently advocated state



The Beginning: Detroit's Hour of Agony.