THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

January 24, 1969

FOR: Honorable John A. Volpe
Secretary of Transportation

FROM: Daniel P. Moynihan

At the President's request, I am sending two memorandums written during the transition period. I hope they may prove helpful.

WASHINGTON

January 9, 1969

TO: The President

FROM: Daniel P. Moynihan

In the months ahead I will be harrassing you with details of the "urban crisis." Whatever the urgency of the matters I bring before you, I will be doing so in an essentially optimistic posture, which is to say that I will routinely assume that our problems are manageable if only we will manage them. This is the only position possible for government. Yet, of course, it does not necessarily reflect reality. It may be that our problems are not manageable, or that we are not capable of summoning the effort required to respond effectively. It seems to me important that you know that there are responsible persons who are very near to just that conclusion. (To be sure, twenty years ago in many scientific/academic circles it was taken as settled that the world would shortly blow itself up, yet we are still here.)

I had thought to summarize the views of the apocalyptic school, ranging in style as it does from the detached competence of Lewis Mumford who for forty years had foretold the approach of "Necropolis," the City of the Dead, all the way to the more hysterical members of the New Left who assume that the only thing that can save this civilization is for it to be destroyed. However, I have just come upon a document that states the case much more effectively than I might, being a summary of the views of a group of careful men who recently met to discuss the state of New York City. I am associated with a quarterly journal, The Public Interest, which is devoting a special issue to New York. On December 17 we assembled a group of city officials and similarly informed persons for a day-long session at the Century Club. (I could not be present owing to my new assignment.) Paul Weaver, a young assistant professor of government at Harvard, attended as a kind of rapporteur. Later he summarized his impression of the meeting in terms that seem to me persuasive, and as he himself put it, "not a little chilling."

His central point -- an immensely disturbing one -- is that the social system of American and British democracy that grew up in the 18th and 19th century was able to be exceedingly permissive with regard to public matters precisely because it could depend on its citizens to be quite disciplined with respect to private ones. He speaks of "private sub-systems of authority," such as the family, church, and local community, and political party, which regulated behavior, instilled motivation, etc., in such a way as to make it unnecessary for the State to intervene in order to protect "the public interest." More and more it would appear these subsystems are breaking down in the immense city of New York. If this should continue, democracy would break down.

To be sure, New York City is not America, etc. Yet my discussions with District officials would suggest that things are not that different in Washington. Throughout the nation, in general, trends are in the New York direction. (You may have noted that Lindsay's next budget provides for 1.3 million persons being on welfare by June 1970.)

What this comes to is the realization that much of what is now termed "the crisis of the cities" is more a moral and cultural crisis than a material one. Indeed it is frequently the former that produces the latter. Weaver, for example, refers to the "growing rate of building abandonment" in New York. It would seem impossible that land in New York City could become valueless, but this is true in the worst slums. Whole "zones of abandonment" are growing up in Brooklyn, with owners literally leaving their vandalized properties behind, much as slum dwellers abandon junked automobiles on city streets.

Clearly material programs are a necessary condition of reversing the trend of events, but they are not sufficient in themselves. Somehow the country must come to understand the nature of its "urban crisis." This is the highest task of leadership.

The key problem is that of late the rhetoric of "realistic liberalism" in its more narrow political sense, has become increasingly hostile to those subsystems. As a result, "The thoroughly liberal society, . . . cannot know what makes it work."

Here is Weaver's summary of the day's discussion:

1. The social fabric of New York City is coming to pieces. It isn't just "strained" and it isn't just "frayed;" but like a sheet of rotten canvas, it is beginning to rip, and it won't be too long until even a moderate force will be capable of leaving it in shreds and tatters. No doubt I'm being too apocalyptic. Still, consider some of the evidence. Among a large and growing lower class, self-reliance, self-discipline, and industry are waning; a radical disproportion is arising between reality and expectations concerning job, living standard, and so on; unemployment is high but a lively demand for unskilled labor remains unmet; illegitimacy is increasing; families are more and more matrifocal and atomized; crime and disorder are sharply on the rise. There is, in short, a progressive disorganization of society, a growing pattern of frustration and mistrust. This, I take it, is one of the reasons for the high and growing rate of building abandonment; the immediate area surrounding the lot is such as to render the value of the land nil, even for the potential resident owner. This general pathology, moreover, appears to be infecting the Puerto Rican community as well as the Negro. (It is a stirring, if generally unrecognized demonstration of the power of our welfare machine.) A large segment of the population is becoming incompetent and destructive. Growing parasitism, both legal and illegal, is the result; so, also, is violence.

2. Something comparable is happening in the political arena. New York used to be the very model of moderate, materialistic, incremental Madisonian politics. Only the goo-goos challenged the whole system, but not out of self-interest, and rarely intemperately. Otherwise, participation was limited to the pursuit of limited self-interest; live-and-let-live logrolling was both fact and value; and conflict was avoided as much as possible. But today, there is the "spirit of confrontation," in which self-interest and a desire to change the system are merged in groups which depend for their existence on pursuing a "conflict" strategy. The result is that, to the extent this pattern

exists, political executives are less free to determine the mix of (partly inconsistent) values and interests which best defines the public interest; public tranquility is unsettled; and political cohesion is threatened. The consequence is to increase the tension between responsibility and responsiveness in government. Thus, Lindsay orders a "no-arrest" policy at precisely the point when law and order are manifestly in decay; it "cools" the city "off" in the short run but may heat it up in the long run. The general problem is whether representative government can maintain a country or city which is divided against itself and which discounts its long-term interest so heavily.

3. Are we then witnessing the ultimate, destructive working out of the telos of liberal thought? The viability of liberal thought rested on the ability of the country which adopted it to be largely self-regulating, self-maintaining, and self-improving. As long as the typical individual was formed and directed in socially useful ways by the more or less autonomous operations of private subsystems of authority, a government which permitted great freedom and engaged largely in the negative and peripheral activity of the umpire was possible. It was also possible for citizen and statesman to live with a rhetoric which denied the existence, functions, and basis of those private subsystems. Being traditional, those subsystems were (on the rhetoric's terms) "irrational;" being particularistic, they were not "universal;" constituting and maintaining differences among men, they fostered "inequality;" and forming character and directing energy as they did, they were "authoritarian." The thoroughly liberal society, in short, cannot know what makes it work. Now, in parts of New York City, those subsystems are absolutely breaking down. At the same time, the rhetoric is getting an ever stronger and more blinding grip on "informed" opinion as well as on partisan opinion. The rhetoric leads to policies which actually hasten the dissolution of the subsystems.

That the society is breaking down means that the liberal state will no longer do. It must, on pain of anarchy or civil war, be replaced by a regime which

explicitly recognizes the necessity of the subsystems and which is prepared to create substitutes for those subsystems when they break down. Our problem is that informed opinion is moving in precisely the opposite direction.

4. All of which is to say that we are moving from Locke to Hobbes. This does not mean we need the Leviathan because the war of all against all is still confined to one segment of the population. There are plenty of public spirited and peaceful people around. But their opinions need to be changed, and the resources of their government increased, or at least centralized.

January 15, 1969

MEMORANDUM

TO: Bob Haldeman
cc: Moynihan
FROM: RN

-- The Moynihan memorandum of January 9 on urban problems should be made available to the research team and to the Cabinet members who are on the Urban Affairs Council. It should be emphasized in distributing this memorandum and others like it, which will be coming in, that this is not a final policy paper but the kind of incisive and stimulating analysis which I think should constantly be brought to the attention of policymakers. Be sure also that Garment gets a copy of this memorandum and of others like it in the future.

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT-ELECT
RICHARD M. NIXON
WASHINGTON, D. C.

3 January 1969

MEMORANDUM

TO: The President Elect

FROM: Daniel P. Moynihan
Assistant for Urban Affairs

Before the storm breaks, as it were, on the 20th, I would like to send in a few extended comments on some of the longer range issues that face you, but will tend, I should imagine, to get lost in the daily succession of crises.

I would like to speak first of the theme "Forward Together."

This appeal was much in evidence in your very fine acceptance speech at Miami, and during the campaign the logic of events, and your own sure sense of them, brought it forward ever more insistently. In the end it was the theme of the campaign and, in the aftermath of victory, it stands as the most explicit mandate you have from the American people. I would hope it might be the theme of your administration as well.

It has fallen to you to assume the governance of a deeply divided country. And to do so with a divided government. Other Presidents -- Franklin Roosevelt, for example -- have taken office in moments of crisis, but the crises were so widely perceived as in a sense to unite the country and to create a great outpouring of support for the President as the man who would have to deal with the common danger. Neither Lincoln nor Wilson, the two predecessors whose situations most resembled yours, in terms of the popular vote and the state of then current political questions, had any such fortune. No one would now doubt that they proved to be two of our greatest leaders, nor yet that their administrations achieved great things. But, alas, at what cost to themselves.

A divided nation makes terrible demands on the President. It would seem important to try to anticipate some of them, at least, and to ponder whether there is not some common element in each that might give a measure of coherence and unity to the President's own responses and, by a process of diffusion, to provide a guide for the administration as a whole.

I believe there is such a common element. In one form or another all of the major domestic problems facing you derive from the erosion of the authority of the institutions of American society. This is a mysterious process of which the most that can be said is that once it starts it tends not to stop.

It can be stopped: the English, for example, managed to halt and even reverse the process in the period, roughly, 1820-40. But more commonly, those in power neglect the problem at first and misunderstand it later; concessions come too late and are too little; the failure of concessions leads to equally unavailing attempts at repression; and so events spiral downward toward instability. The process is little understood. (Neither is the opposite and almost completely ignored phenomenon: some societies -- Mexico in the 1920's -- seem almost suddenly to become stabilized after periods of prolonged and seemingly hopeless chaos.) All we know is that the sense of institutions being legitimate -- especially the institutions of government -- is the glue that holds societies together. When it weakens, things come unstuck.

The North Vietnamese see this clearly enough. Hence the effort through the subtleties of seating arrangements to establish the NLF as an independent regime, and the Saigon government as a puppet one. In contrast, Americans, until presently at least, have not been nearly so concerned with such matters. American society has been so stable for so long that the prospect of instability has had no very great meaning for us. (As I count, there are but nine members of the United Nations that both existed as independent nations in 1914 and have not had their form of government changed by invasion or revolution since.) Moreover we retain a tradition of revolutionary rhetoric that gives an advantage to those who challenge authority rather than those who uphold it. Too little heed is given the experience of the 20th Century in which it has been the authority of democratic institutions that has been challenged by totalitarians of the left and the right.

Even the term "authority" has [illegible] cast, largely one suspects from its association with the term "authoritarian." Yet it remains the case that relationships based on authority are consensual ones: that is to say they are based on common agreement to behave in certain ways. It is said that freedom lives in the interstices of authority: when the structure collapses, freedom disappears, and society is governed by relationships based on power.

Increasing numbers of Americans seem of late to have sensed this, and to have become actively concerned about the drift of events. Your election was in a sense the first major consequence of that mounting concern. Your administration represents the first significant opportunity to change the direction in which events move.

Your task, then, is clear: to restore the authority of American institutions. Not, certainly, under that name, but with a clear sense that what is at issue is the continued acceptance by the great mass of the people of the legitimacy and efficacy of the present arrangements of American society, and of our processes for changing those arrangements.

For that purpose the theme "Forward Together" responds not only to the deepest need of the moment, but also, increasingly, to a clearly perceived need, as the facts of disunity more and more impress themselves on the nation's consciousness.

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What has been pulling us apart? One wishes one knew. Yet there are a number of near and long term developments that can be discerned and surely contribute significantly to what is going on.

Of the near term events, the two most conspicuous are the Negro revolution and the war in Vietnam. Although seemingly unrelated, they have much in common as to origins, and even more as to the process by which they have brought on mounting levels of disunity.

The French philosopher Georges Bernanos once wrote: "There are no more corrupting lies than problems poorly stated." I, at least, feel that this goes to the heart of much of the present turmoil of race relations and foreign policy. In a word, those in power have allowed domestic dislocations that accompany successful social change to be interpreted as irrefutable evidence that the society refuses to change; they have permitted foreign policy failures arising from mistaken judgements to be taken as incontrovertible proof that the society has gone mad as well.

The fact is that with respect to Negro Americans we have seen incredible progress since, roughly, the Brown vs. Board of Education decision of 1956 and President Eisenhower's subsequent decision to send Federal troops to Little Rock, thus commencing the Second Reconstruction. Nowhere in history is there to be encountered an effort to bring a suppressed people into the mainstream of society comparable to the public and private initiatives on behalf of Negro Americans in recent years. As I would like to discuss in a later memorandum, the results have been dramatic. Yet it was only after that effort had begun, and had been underway for some time, that it became possible to see the true horror of the situation white America had forced on black America and the deep disabilities that came about in consequence. The first to see this, of course, were the blacks themselves. The result on the part of many was a revulsion against white society that has only just begun to run its course. Large numbers of middle class, educated blacks, especially young ones, have come to see American society as hateful and illegitimate, lacking any true claim on their allegiance. Well they might. The problem is not that one group in the population is beginning to react to centuries of barbarism by another group. The problem is that this cultural reaction among black militants is accompanied by the existence of a large, disorganized urban lower class which, like such groups everywhere, is unstable and essentially violent. This fact of lower class violence has nothing to do with race. It is purely a matter of social class. But since Watts, the media of public opinion -- the press, television, the Presidency itself -- have combined to insist that race is the issue. As a result, middle class blacks caught up in a cultural revolution have been able, in effect, to back up their demands. This has led

to a predictable white counter-reaction. And so on. In the process, we have almost deliberately obscured the extraordinary progress, and commitment to progress, which the nation as a whole has made, which white America has not abandoned, and which increasingly black America is learning to make use of.

To the contrary, it has been the failures of policy that have seemed ever more prominent. The essence of the Negro problem in America at this time is that despite great national commitments, and great progress, a large mass of the black population remains poor, disorganized, and discriminated against. These facts are increasingly interpreted as proof that the national commitment is flawed, if not indeed fraudulent, that the society is irredeemably "racist," etc. This interpretation is made by middle class blacks and whites for whom, outwardly at least, society would seem to have treated very well, but the continued existence of black poverty makes their argument hard to assail. Moreover, increasingly that argument is directed not to particulars, but to fundamental questions as to the legitimacy of American society.

Vietnam has been a domestic disaster of the same proportion, and for much the same reason. As best I can discern, the war was begun with the very highest of motives at the behest of men such as McNamara, Bundy, and Rusk in a fairly consistent pursuit of the post war American policy of opposing Communist expansion and simultaneously encouraging political democracy and economic development in the nations on the Communist perimeter, and elsewhere. At the risk of seeming cynical, I would argue that the war in Vietnam has become a disastrous mistake because we have lost it. I quite accept Henry Kissinger's splendid formulation that a conventional army loses if it does not win, the opposite being the case for a guerilla force. We have not been able to win. Had the large scale fighting by American forces been over by mid-1967 (which is my impression of what Bundy anticipated in mid-1965), had the children of the middle class accordingly continued to enjoy draft exemption, had there been no inflation, no surtax, no Tet offensive, then I very much fear there would be abroad at this point at most a modicum of moral outrage.

But this is not what happened. The war has not gone well, and increasingly in an almost primitive reaction -- to which modern societies are as much exposed as any Stone Age clan -- it has

been judged that this is because the Gods are against it. In modern parlance this means that the evil military industrial complex has embarked on a racist colonialist adventure. (I have heard the head of S. N. C. C. state that we were in Vietnam "for the rice supplies.") But the essential point is that we have been losing a war, and this more than any single thing erodes the authority of a government, however stable, just, well intentioned, or whatever. I would imagine that the desire not to be the first President to "lose" a war has been much in President Johnson's mind over the past years, and explains some of his conduct. But the fact is that he could not win, and the all important accompanying fact is that the semi-violent domestic protest that arose in consequence forced him to resign. In a sense he was the first American President to be toppled by a mob. No matter that it was a mob of college professors, millionaires, flower children, and Radcliffe girls. It was a mob that by early 1968 had effectively physically separated the Presidency from the people. (You may recall that seeking to attend the funeral of Cardinal Spellman, Johnson slipped in the back door of St. Patrick's Cathedral like a medieval felon seeking sanctuary.) As with the case of the most militant blacks, success for the anti-war protestors has seemed only to confirm their detestation of society as it now exists. Increasingly they declare the society to be illegitimate, while men such as William Sloan Coffin, Jr., the chaplain at Yale, openly espouse violence as the necessary route of moral regeneration.

The successful extremism of the black militants and the anti-war protestors -- by and large they have had their way -- has now clearly begun to arouse fears and thoughts of extreme actions by other groups. George Wallace, a fourth rate regional demagogue, won 13 percent of the national vote and at one point in the campaign probably had the sympathy of a quarter of the electorate, largely in the working class. Among Jews -- I draw your attention to this -- there is a rising concern, in some quarters approaching alarm, over black anti-semitism. They foresee Negro political power driving them from civil service jobs, as in the New York City school system. They see anti-semitism becoming an "accepted" political posture. With special dread, they see a not distant future when the political leaders of the country might have to weigh the competing claims of ten million black voters who had become passionately pro-Arab as against one or two million

pro-Israel Jewish voters. In the meantime we must await the reaction of the Armed Forces, and the veterans of Vietnam to whatever settlement you get there. No officer corps ever lost a war, and this one surely would have no difficulty finding symbols of those at home who betrayed it. All in all there are good reasons to expect a busy eight years in the White House.

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There is a longer term development contributing to the present chaos which bears mentioning. Since about 1840 the cultural elite in America have pretty generally rejected the values and activities of the larger society. It has been said of America that the culture will not approve that which the polity strives to provide. For a brief period, associated with the Depression, World War II, and the Cold War there was something of a truce in this protracted struggle. That, I fear, is now over. The leading cultural figures are going -- have gone -- into opposition once again. This time they take with them a vastly more numerous following of educated, middle class persons, especially young ones, who share their feelings and who do not need the "straight" world. It is their pleasure to cause trouble, to be against. And they are hell bent for a good time. President Johnson took all this personally, but I have the impression that you will make no such mistake!

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It is, of course, easier to describe these situations than to suggest what is to be done about them. However, a certain number of general postures do seem to follow from the theme "Bring Us Together." I would list five.

First, the single most important task is to maintain the rate of economic expansion. If a serious economic recession were to come along to compound the controversies of race, Vietnam, and cultural alienation, the nation could indeed approach instability. It would be my judgement that the great prosperity of the 1960's is the primary reason we have been able to weather this much internal dissension. The lot of Negroes has steadily improved, and so has that of most everyone else. Black demands for a

greater share have thus been less threatening. The war has been costly, but largely has been paid for through annual fiscal increments and recent deficits. Consumption has been affected not at all. If this situation were to reverse itself, your ability to meet Black needs, the tolerance of the rest of the society for your efforts, the general willingness to see military efforts proceed, would all be grievously diminished.

Second, it would seem most important to de-escalate the rhetoric of crisis about the internal state of the society in general, and in particular about those problems -- e.g., crime, de facto segregation, low educational achievement -- which government has relatively little power to influence in the present state of knowledge and available resources. This does not mean reducing efforts. Not at all. But it does mean trying to create some equivalence between what government can do about certain problems and how much attention it draws to them. For this purpose the theme you struck in presenting your cabinet on television seems perfect: yours is an administration of men with wide ranging interests and competence whose first concern is the effective delivery of government services. There is a risk here of being accused of caring less than your predecessors, but even that will do no great harm if you can simultaneously demonstrate that you do more. It is out of such perceptions that the authority of government is enhanced.

It would seem likely that a powerful approach to this issue will be to stress the needs and aspirations of groups such as Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, American Indians and others which have also been excluded and exploited by the larger society. This, of course, is something you would want to do in any event.

Third, the Negro lower class must be dissolved. This is the work of a generation, but it is time it began to be understood as a clear national goal. By lower-class I mean the low income, marginally employed, poorly educated, disorganized slum dwellers who have piled up in our central cities over the past quarter century. I would estimate they make up almost one half the total Negro population. They are not going to become capitalists, nor even middle class functionaries. But it is fully reasonable to conceive of them being transformed into a stable working class population: Truck drivers, mail carriers, assembly line workers; people with dignity, purpose,

and in the United States a very good standard of living indeed. Common justice, and common sense, demands that this be done. It is the existence of this lower class, with its high rates of crime, dependency, and general disorderliness that causes nearby whites (that is to say working class whites, the liberals are all in the suburbs) to fear Negroes and to seek by various ways to avoid and constrain them. It is this group that black extremists use to threaten white society with the prospect of mass arson and pillage. It is also this group that terrorizes and plunders the stable elements of the Negro community -- trapped by white prejudice in the slums, and forced to live cheek by jowl with a murderous slum population. Take the urban lower class out of the picture and the Negro cultural revolution becomes an exciting and constructive development.

Fourth, it would seem devoutly to be wished that you not become personally identified with the war in Vietnam. You have available to you far more competent advice than mine in this area, and I am sure you will wish to proceed in terms of the foreign policy interests of the nation in broader terms, but I do urge that every effort be made to avoid the ugly physical harrassment and savage personal attacks that brought President Johnson's administration to an end. The dignity of the Presidency as the symbolic head of state as well as of functioning leader of the government must be restored. Alas, it is in the power of the middle class mob to prevent this. -I would far rather see it concentrate, as faute de mieux it now seems to be doing, on attacking liberal college presidents as "racist pigs."

I fear the blunt truth is that ending the draft would be the single most important step you could take in this direction. The children of the upper middle class will not be conscripted. In any event, the present system does cast a pall of anxiety and uncertainty over the lives of that quarter of the young male population which does in fact require four to eight to ten years of college work to prepare for careers which almost all agree are socially desirable, even necessary.

Fifth, it would seem important to stress those things Americans share in common, rather than those things that distinguish them one from the other. Thus the war on poverty defined a large portion of the population as somehow living apart from the rest. I would seek programs that stress problems and circumstances that all

share, and especially problems which working people share with the poor. Too frequently of late the liberal upper middle class has proposed to solve problems of those at the bottom at the expense, or seeming expense, of those in between.

Obviously the theme "Forward Together" is essential here, and there are other symbols at hand of which I would think the approaching 200th anniversary of the founding of the Republic is perhaps the most powerful. In the final months of your second term you will preside over the anniversary ceremonies of July 4, 1976. It would seem an incomparable opportunity to begin now to define the goals you would hope to see achieved by that time, trying to make them truly national goals to which all may subscribe, and from which as many as possible will benefit.

Hopefully our 200th anniversary will see the nation somewhat more united than were those thirteen colonies!