

ARTICLES

THE RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES OF AMERICANS

Hubert H. Humphrey, Jr.*

We believe that the government . . . has an obligation to actively seek to remove those obstacles which would block individual achievement . . . obstacles emanating from race, sex, economic condition . . . We have a positive vision of the future founded on the belief that the gap between the promise and reality of America can one day be finally closed.

*Rep. Barbara Jordan***

I want to talk to you tonight about the continuation of this great struggle for human rights and human dignity. We are all fully aware that the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s did not eradicate inequality and injustice from our society. That is why I believe the concept of the civil rights movement must be broadened to include the rights and opportunities that should be available to all disadvantaged groups in America. The struggle for civil rights is a struggle for the rights and privileges and duties of all Americans.

And what do these rights include? *The right to a meaningful life*, free from poverty that today afflicts some 25 million Americans; *The right to full and equal protection* under the law—an end to the double standard applied to many of those who are less privileged, where justice delayed can become justice denied;

The right to productive and gainful employment—for all our people, as a specific national goal toward whose achievement we will apply every possible private and public resource; *The right to economic, political and social opportunity* where progress toward realizing one's full potential will confront no artificial barrier of discrimination based on race, creed or sex.

[Also among the rights which Americans ought to enjoy is] *the right to a decent neighborhood; the right to a life free from violence and terrorism; the right to quality education* on all levels, free from segregation; and *the right to live in good health* under a system that helps assure modern health care for all at the lowest possible cost. Finally, the catalogue of rights should also include *the right to be free from hunger and malnutrition, and the right to a clean and wholesome environment.*

*A.B., 1939, University of Minnesota; M.A., 1940, Louisiana State University; Vice President of the United States, 1963—1968; U.S. Senator (D. Minn.), 1948—1963; 1972—1978. This essay was taken from a speech prepared for delivery on January 13, 1978 to the National Newspaper Publishers Association annual mid-winter workshop dinner in Miami, Florida. Senator Humphrey died that same evening, but his remarks were read by Ofield Dukes, an assistant to Humphrey during his term as Vice President.

** Address by Representative Barbara Jordan (D. Tex.) at the Democratic National Convention, July 12, 1976, *reprinted in* 42 VITAL SPEECHES 645, 646 (1976).

I am an optimist. There is every reason to believe that our third century can be one of expanding freedom and opportunity for all Americans. We live by hope. We do not always get all we want when we want it. But we have to believe that someday, somehow, someday it will be better, and that we can make it so. . . .

. . . I deeply regret that I am unable to be with you personally tonight. But I urge you to make a . . . resolution that you will stay on course, and continue to work to overcome the barriers to genuine freedom and opportunity for all our people.