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BILL MOYERS: Welcome to the JOURNAL.

You have to go searching deep into their websites, to find out what the presidential candidates think about urban issues. Their speeches on the subject have been few and far between, and during all those debates of the past year, cities were rarely mentioned. Perhaps it's because to talk about cities, we have to think about the very touchy subject of race. Or perhaps the culprit is amnesia; we've simply forgotten the past that produced the urban challenges of today. Here's what I mean:

The official name for it was the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. But it passed through the press into popular lore as the Kerner Commission report, and that's how it's remembered today — at least to those of us old enough to remember. If you think all the talk about race in this presidential campaign is savage, you should have been around 40 years ago, in 1968, when this report was published. Talk about controversy! The Kerner Report was an unflinching portrait of America — and it was born from the flames of exploding cities.

BILL MOYERS: July 1967, Newark, New Jersey goes up in flames. Reacting to a rumor that police had beaten and allegedly killed a local man, residents protested peacefully at first. But then the scene turned violent.

For six days, state troops and police clashed in the streets with rioters. Twenty-six people were killed, including a ten year old boy.

Six days later, it happened again in Detroit, Michigan

NEWS REPORTER: Detroit. It looked like the wartime blitz on London, but this was no war, it was arson, looting, a race riot blowing up into something beyond control.

BILL MOYERS: Triggered by another police action, and another angry protest gone haywire, the destruction of downtown Detroit was worse than Newark’s... the nation watched on TV as Detroit was torn apart.

As reports poured in of snipers shooting at police, President Lyndon Johnson called in the army to put an end to the violence. Thousands of blacks were rounded up, and a curfew was thrown over the city.

Five days on, forty-three people were dead, hundreds wounded, and block after block of inner-city Detroit was destroyed. Locals picked through the ruins, stunned and confused. Detroit's mayor said his city looked "like Berlin in 1945"

It wasn't just Newark and Detroit that erupted that year. Scores of other cities seemed under siege.

NEWS REPORTER: In 1967, 126 cities were hit by racial violence, with 75 incidents classified as major riots.

BILL MOYERS: The country was stunned and terrified...what was driving these events? President Johnson felt compelled to act.

LYNDON JOHNSON: We need to know the answer, I think, to three basic questions about
these riots: What happened, why did it happen, what can be done to prevent it from happening again and again.

BILL MOYERS: To answer those questions, LBJ appointed what became known as the Kerner Commission... named for its Chairman, Illinois Governor Otto Kerner. New York City's Mayor John Lindsay was Vice-Chair.

The youngest member of the panel was a populist senator from Oklahoma named Fred Harris. Just in his 30s at the time, and coming from a mostly white state, Harris nonetheless went to the floor of the Senate and called on the president to fully and publicly reckon with these awful events.

SENATOR FRED HARRIS: It's gonna take a national commitment, a massive kind of national commitment and anything less than that will not cure the ills that we have, and poverty generally, and the problems of race and the problems of our cities.

BILL MOYERS: The President listened. He was furious about these riots. Believing that militant groups such as the black panthers must've somehow been behind the violence.

But when the Kerner Commission's work was done, its findings would shake Lyndon Johnson, and the country. The Kerner Report became a moment of clarity for America. A time when the nation was forced to focus on the harsh realities of racism, poverty and injustice in our cities.

BILL MOYERS: On the 40th anniversary of this historic Kerner Commission Report, I asked that formerly-young Populist Senator Fred Harris to talk about his experience. He's one of the last of the surviving members of the original Commission.

BILL MOYERS: What was the urgency? I mean here you were just recently elected to the senate from Oklahoma, a basically white state, little town of Walters. What were you thinking? Is this the end of the country? Is this-- what is it?

FRED HARRIS: We just didn't know how-- how far this was gonna go. Johnson-- the President, later I went down to talk to him while we were working on the commission. And he said to me, "Have you seen the FBI reports about these riots?" Johnson was like a lot of people who thought maybe there's some conspiracy behind them. And I said conditions are such and the hostilities are such in these central cities that almost any random spark could've set them off.

BILL MOYERS: You and all the commission actually went to the streets where the riots were--

FRED HARRIS: That's right. We--

BILL MOYERS: What did you see? What all these years later, what are the particulars you remember most formidably?

FRED HARRIS: We divided up into teams. And my team was John Lindsay and me. John was then the Mayor of New York. You couldn't have had two more different people me from a little ole town in Oklahoma and John Lindsay.

BILL MOYERS: For one thing, he was tall, and you were short.

FRED HARRIS: That's right. And I remember one-- we went for example, we went to Milwaukee. And I spent a good portion of that day in a black barbershop. We found Milwaukee as segregated really, maybe more so, then southern cities. I kept saying to people-- "Do you run into much discrimination here in Milwaukee?" And people didn't know quite how to answer it. It turned out the reason was, that they didn't see any white people. That's how segregated Milwaukee was.

And we found there people, of course, and this was true all over. Black people had come
up there looking for jobs.

BILL MOYERS: From the South.

FRED HARRIS: And the trouble was they found very little opportunity.

FRED HARRIS: Jobs is what we heard everywhere. John Lindsey and I were walking down the streets in Cleveland, I believe it was, for example. And we'd see idle young black men on the streets, you know. And these guys get up, and they said, "What we need is jobs baby. Jobs. Get us a job, baby." I remember that so-- and that's what we heard all over.

BILL MOYERS: It was the promise of those jobs that had lured so many African-Americans up from the south in the first place. From World War II on, millions of blacks migrated north. Packing into the booming industrial cities of Chicago and Newark, Milwaukee and Detroit. There they earned wages that were the first steps out of poverty for an entire generation.

But twenty years on, even as this great migration kept bringing more and more people into the cities, many of those jobs began dwindling. Huge plants closed down. Moved out to the suburbs and beyond. Many white residents followed suit, leaving the central cities in droves.

By the mid-1960s, many of the biggest inner-cities in America had become chronically segregated. And were drying up economically.

FRED HARRIS: There was low family income, high unemployment. Almost criminally inferior schools. No jobs. The jobs had moved out to the suburbs. There was poor transportation. People couldn't get, you had to take two or three buses to get to some of those jobs. And there were jobs, the new jobs that were created, were either requiring a very high level of skills or education, or were just service jobs that were very low pay kind of flipping hamburgers kind of jobs. The people that black people saw as sort of representing society were police officers. And they were nearly all white. And most of them lived outside the central city. And came in during the day to enforce the law. So there was a great deal of hostility.

BILL MOYERS: I had a remarkable woman on this broadcast a few months ago, Grace Lee Boggs. She's 91 years old, still lives in, Detroit. She said, "Bill, this was not a riot. This was a rebellion. This rebellion against what you just described as the phalanx of white faces that surrounded the ghetto and kept it segregated." She said it was a rebellion against the loss of jobs. Do you think there's something to that?

FRED HARRIS: Well there is, in a way. Although you've gotta be careful to say, you know, it wasn't some organized thing. That is it wasn't a rebellion in the sense that somebody decided to organize it, with a definite ends in mind, goals. It was more spontaneous than that. But what we finally decided on the commission was we couldn't say what caused the violence. Or why the violence would occur, for example, in Watts in '65, but not in '67. What we could do was to describe with particularity, the terrible conditions that existed in these places, where riots had occurred.

We found as I said, no conspiracy. There were one or two on our commission said, "Well, should we actually say that?" Well, isn't that the truth?

BILL MOYERS: There was no conspiracy?

FRED HARRIS: There was no conspiracy. No organization to this. And they were, "Well, yeah. Well, let's just tell the truth."

OTTO KERNER: (Illinois Governor, Chairman of Kerner Commission) There is no indication, no fact, to indicate that any of them we're planned. The elements were there. And some fuse, an unpredictable fuse, set them off, but at this point there is still no evidence for any planning for the civil disorders within the cities.
BILL MOYERS: In March of 1968, the Report was published. It was brutal in its honesty:

While saying that a growing black militancy may have added fuel to the riots, the commission rejected the idea that there'd been any organization behind the outbreaks.

Instead, the Commission blamed the violence on the devastating poverty and hopelessness endemic in the inner cities of the 1960s.

Among their many findings:

One in five African-Americans lived in "squalor and deprivation in ghetto neighborhoods."

The unemployment rate was double for African-Americans, as compared to whites.

The report described communities that were neglected by their government, wracked with crime, and traumatized by police brutality.

Disproportionate rates of infant mortality were astonishing - African-American children dying at triple the rate of white children.

The statistics weren't new. But the Kerner Commission pushed further, and laid the blame for many of these conditions on white racism: quote "what white Americans have never fully understood -- but what the Negro can never forget -- is that the white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it. White institutions maintain it, and white society condones it."

The report's conclusion — and it's most memorable message — was this: "our nation is moving towards two societies - one white, one black - separate and unequal."

FRED HARRIS: We used the word racism. And on the commission, we had two or three people say, "Should we use that word, racism?"

BILL MOYERS: Not a word that was thrown around largely by-- government panels in the 1960s.

FRED HARRIS: We felt that was very important. I did and I think it was to say it. Because what we know is that oppressed people often come to believe about themselves the same bad stereotypes that the dominant society has. Our saying racism-- I think was very important to a lot of black people who said, "Well, maybe it's not just me. Maybe I'm not-- by myself at fault here. Maybe there's something else going on."

BILL MOYERS: I remember that the headlines based on the premature leak of a summary of the report would read-"A Commission Blames Riots on Whites."

FRED HARRIS: That's right.

BILL MOYERS: White racism. And that inflamed-- whites who didn't want to be blamed.

FRED HARRIS: No, that's right. But we felt-- now I think if we had time to background it so that people would have understood it a little better. What we telling about-- with racism was not-- one white person hating one black-- or all black people. We're talking about kind of an institutional racism which existed. And where people live in all white neighborhoods. Send their kids to all white schools. Drive quickly through black section maybe, or on the train, to a job where all their associates are white. And don't see anything odd about it. That was what-

BILL MOYERS: The natural order of things.

FRED HARRIS: That's right. That's what we were talking about.
BILL MOYERS: For civil rights leaders like the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. the Kerner Report confirmed reality.

MARTIN LUTHER KING: And now we see the surfacing of old prejudices and hostilities that have always been there and they’re out in the open — that’s very good they’re out in the open because you can deal with them much better when they are there to see and when people admit them. My analysis was no more pessimistic or gloomy than the Kerner Commission’s report the other day. I do feel that we’ve got to say in no uncertain terms that racism is alive and on the throne in American society and that we are moving towards two societies... separate and unequal and if something isn’t done to stop this in a very determined manner, things can really get worse.

BILL MOYERS: The Kerner Commissioners suggested a series of solutions to tackle the problems they’d diagnosed. Everything from better early childhood education to a crackdown on police brutality. They pushed for massive job creation, more affirmative action, and an expansion of the social safety net.

But critics saw the Commission as wrongheaded. They blasted Kerner for blaming everyone in society except for the rioters themselves.

Commission members had hoped to spend six more months explaining their report to the public and lobbying for their recommendations, but in the face of all the criticism, LBJ shelved that idea.

BILL MOYERS: Looking back all this time, what did the Kerner Commission get right?

FRED HARRIS: I think well virtually everything was right. And I could add onto that this. I think one of the awfulest thing’s that came out of the Reagan presidency and later was the feeling that government can't do anything right. And that-- everything it does is wrong. The truth is that virtually everything we tried worked. We just quit trying it. Or we didn’t try it hard enough. And that’s what we need to get back to. We made progress on virtually every aspect of race and poverty-- for about a decade after the Kerner Commission Report. And then, particularly with the advent of the Reagan Administration, and so forth, that progress stopped. And we began to go backwards. There are consequences from our acts, and when we-- cut out a lot of these-- social programs, or the money for them, or cut it down-- we don't emphasize jobs and training, and education, and so forth as we had been doing, there are bad consequences from that.

BILL MOYERS: The Reagan conservatives were quite critical of the Kerner Commission as being unbalanced and simplistic. They say, for example, that you failed to take into consideration that the close correlation between being born out of wedlock, and growing up without a father, and being poor, that your work over the years actually exempts the poor from being responsible for their own condition.

FRED HARRIS: Well, you know, the breakdown in families is just like sort of crime and narcotics and so forth. These are the consequences. They're the handmaidens in the sense of-poverty

FRED HARRIS: I said at the time, there are a lot of people who want to-- punish people for being poor. You know, say, "It's your own fault." We want to punish people for being poor. I said, "I used to be poor myself. And being poor is punishment enough.” I think what you need to do is to help people-- up, give 'em a hand up. And recognize the kind of terrible conditions that they're grown up in.

BILL MOYERS: For the last thirty years, Fred Harris has been teaching politics at the University of New Mexico.

FRED HARRIS: Power was diffused and one way it was diffused was to break all these committees down into subcommittees...

BILL MOYERS: But he never lost his commitment to the cause of the Kerner Commission.
When he's not in the classroom, he's part of major, ongoing investigation into the issues of race and poverty today.

Harris sits on the board of the Eisenhower Foundation based in Washington D.C. the Foundation was created to continue the Kerner Commission. Its work is to research and support successful programs in the inner cities.

Every few years, Eisenhower publishes an updated set of findings: a report card of how the country is dealing with the key issues raised by Kerner.

Alan Curtis is President of the Eisenhower Foundation.

**ALAN CURTIS:** The Kerner Commission said, "Look. These problems can be solved. Let's not give up hope. And so, we try to be keepers of the flame of that message. That there is hope. There are solutions. And we remind America every so often, that we still have a long ways to go in fulfilling the prophesies of those commissions and their recommendations.

**BILL MOYERS:** Alan Curtis and Fred Harris have been holding hearings in Washington, Detroit and Newark to prepare a report on the 40th anniversary of Kerner.

**ALAN CURTIS:** We want to listen. We're taking testimony. We would encourage you to discuss today not only the solutions, but how to change political will in America so that we can embrace the priorities of the Kerner Commission and we can begin to fulfill America's promise.

**BILL MOYERS:** In those cities, they heard a striking set of voices

**KOMOZI WOODARD:** We've gone from an urban crisis in the '60s to an urban catastrophe in the 21st Century. That's what you're looking at when you look at Katrina. That's what you're looking at when you look at gentrification. We are in an urban catastrophe community, we need to be blunt about it because if we use the wrong words, it doesn't wake people up, It puts them to sleep. This is not an ordinary situation and it is a national situation. It is not a Newark situation.

**JUNIUS WILLIAMS:** Big northeastern cities are home to some of the most concentrated poverty in the country, and that's your new split. That's your new division.

**RONALD ANGLIN:** We're seeing lives of quiet desperation that we have cordoned off communities in which we allow crime to exist. We allow lots of bad things to exist, and as long as they don't spill over, that's okay.

**RICHARD CAMMARERI:** I would take issue with one of the premises of the most famous quote in this that we're moving towards two societies. I would respectfully suggest that we never were one society in this country. This country has simply never confronted the issue of race. . Race is, I guess to use a religious term, the original sin of this country.

**HEASTER WHEELER:** I believe 40 years later, today the conditions here in Southeast Michigan are just as ripe for protest, and demonstration, and possibly all those other negative things as they were 40 years later. You need not look too far to see Jena, Louisiana and all of the other challenges.

**MAUREEN TAYLOR:** On my way here, there are people on corners, standing up with signs, say, "Will work for food." But we're in here, talking about what's the problem?

**JOSEPHINE HUYGHE:** You want to know what's going on? It's somebody say, "It's the same old, same old." With the continuation of white flight that started in the '50s has been compounded by the exodus of the middle and upper class blacks as Detroit experienced a 'brain drain'.

**DR. HERBERT SMITHERMAN:** In 1970, the infant mortality rate, that is our babies dying before age of one, was about 65 percent higher in the black community than in the white
community. Currently, it's 205 percent higher in the black community than in the white community.

**GEORGE GALSTER:** The City of Detroit constitutes 85 percent black residents, only nine percent white residents. The poverty rate -- white, it's only 5.9 percent, blacks: 24 percent. The median family income -- for whites, over $65,000, for blacks, only $37,000. We could go on and on, but, it's very clear that there are these measurable distinctions between blacks and whites in metro Detroit.

**REV. KEVIN TURMAN:** The young people of my congregation and my community are as industrious as you will find anywhere. They are as innovative and as intelligent as any that you will find anywhere. But unfortunately, they have a number of challenges that have been un-addressed, because the recommendations of the Kerner Commission were ignored or dismissed.

**ROY LEVY WILLIAMS:** The one industry which has flourished is the prison industry. And, yes, it has become an industry. During the last 15 years, this state has been averaging one brand new prison a year

**GLENDA MCGADNEY:** We have got to get serious about what's going on and what our government is allowing to happen to us, and how we're losing our rights every single day. And all this money that's being spent for the war, we need to pray about that. Because it should not be going to Iraq. It should be right here in our cities, in our neighborhood.

**DR. HERBERT SMITHERMAN:** When we had 9/11, we were arguing about Social Security reform. Where are we gonna find the money for it? And within 48 hours after 9/11, we found $40 billion for New York City, a billion dollars an hour. When we want to do something as a country, we do it. This is not about can we do. This is about a will. This is about do we want to do. When you start saying I'm gonna have cuts in Medicare and Medicaid, cuts to housing in urban development, no subsidies to mass transit, eliminate funding for job training, cut school lunch programs for inner city children, eliminate school loan programs for minority students, repeal after-school programs. What I'm saying is this is about public policy. This is about resource implementation.

**KARL GREGORY:** The 1968 Kerner Commission conclusion that racism is deeply embedded in the American society is still true. Racism is still as American as apple pie in this area. The existing huge disparities by race could not exist without racism.

**BILL MOYERS:** The Eisenhower Foundation has now issued their preliminary report and it echoed the testimony they heard across the country:

While noting that certain things have improved - such as the dramatic growth of the black middle class - the foundation nonetheless concludes that "America has, for the most part, failed to meet the Kerner Commission's goals of less poverty, inequality, racial injustice and crime."

Among the troubling facts:

Thirty seven million Americans live in poverty today. But African-Americans are three times as likely to be at the very bottom of the scale, living in what's known as 'deep poverty'

Median non-white families have just one-fifth the wealth of white families

And...over the last 20 years, three times as many African-American men go to prison as go to college

**ALAN CURTIS:** Many people today-- Americans have short memories, of course-- don't realize, for example, that the sentence for a minority person is longer than a sentence for a white person going to prison. Minorities are more likely to get the death sentence than white. The sentences for crack cocaine, used disproportionately by minorities, are longer than the sentences for powdered cocaine, used disproportionately by whites. And so, there is still this endemic, institutional racism in America that people forget about. And I think
they need to be reminded about that.

**BILL MOYERS:** The Eisenhower Foundation's full report will be released later this year.

**BILL MOYERS:** Fred, you've been teaching democracy down there at the University of New Mexico for 30 years. Your textbook on democracy is used in universities all over the country. Why can't democracy deal with these persistent, chronic realities that the Kerner Commission described and you here 40 years later are restating?

**FRED HARRIS:** Well I think first of all-- people don't really realize that conditions are so bad for so many people in poverty and-- and for African-Americans, and for Hispanics. I think a lot of people say, well, didn't we do all that? And I think if people knew these conditions and that's what we ought to do on the 40th anniversary of the Kerner Report is to get people to see that these problems of race and poverty are still with us. Also, I think we need to approach this on a basis of that we're all in this together. Somebody said we may not have all come over on the same boat but we're all in the same boat now.

And here's the interesting thing. Every poll that's taken shows that two-thirds of Americans think America's on the wrong footing. They're headed in the wrong direction. And there's overwhelming support for example this: do you think we ought to spend more on-- in prevention-- by putting money in education and training and jobs, instead of police and prisons. Overwhelmingly people say, yes. Do you think that we ought to have a social net-- so-- just to catch people falling out and to give them another chance? Oh, yes, they strongly believe in that. What about healthcare? We got 46 million people without health insurance. And yet overwhelmingly Americans say, yes, I think we ought to have-- healthcare even if-- everybody-- universal healthcare even if it costs us more money. So the public is way ahead of the politicians I think.

And I just think that, as I said, it's in our own interests, and everybody's interests to try to do something about it. We can do it.

Now we go to a man half Fred Harris' age who all these years later is trying to pick up where the Kerner Commission left. Cory Booker was only 32 years old in 2002 when he first ran as a reform candidate for mayor of Newark, New Jersey.

**CORY BOOKER:** I can't even see you, I'm talking to a screen but I'll just let you know, I'm running for mayor

**BILL MOYERS:** His campaign was documented by the Oscar-nominated film STREET FIGHT.

**CORY BOOKER:** Newark faces real challenges. We have a murder rate that's twice the Bronx. We have almost a third of our people living below the poverty line. And we graduate only about 40% of our kids from high school. There's no excuse for this. This city could be doing so much better for the people that live here.

**BILL MOYERS:** Booker ran against a powerful and popular, though corrupt incumbent. Opponents said this Rhodes Scholar, Stanford football star, and Yale Law School graduate wasn't black enough...called him a pawn of white society trying to take over Newark... Booker lost. But four years later he came back again - to win.

The city he took over was one of the most dysfunctional and dangerous in America. Poverty rates, unemployment, and crime all higher than the national average -- while education and quality of life standards remained dismally low.

But Cory Booker had long been driven to save Newark. His commitment began over a decade ago when he left the comfortable suburbs to move into the city's notorious Brick Towers housing project -he stayed for 8 years - battling an entrenched bureaucracy and challenging thousands of tenants to fight for better living conditions. As mayor, Booker has defied liberals and conservatives alike with innovations in every department of city government.
After the brutal murders of three young people last year his changes in the police department have resulted in Newark's longest stretch without a murder since before the 1967 riots. I talked with Mayor Booker in his office earlier this week.

BILL MOYERS: Do people in Newark even talk about the Kerner Commission? Even talk about the riots of 1967? Do they remember them?

CORY BOOKER: You know, it's interesting. I mean, there is a generational divide. I was born after the Civil Rights Movement. I never saw Martin Luther King alive. But there's still a scar here in the city of Newark and it's never been talked about, I think to the point where we can really start healing.

You have to understand the Newark Riots - a lot of people understand that the pain was the initial explosion of anger and alienation, but after that, the response, sending the National Guard troops -- a lot of violence was carried out and perpetrated by those who were allegedly coming here to protect residents. There were thousands of rounds of bullets that the National Guard couldn't account for as they were sweeping through firing into -- indiscriminately into -- housing projects.

People here will still tell stories, tell me, especially around the anniversary of the riots about having to sleep on the floor, talking about people that were murdered or killed by bullets coming through their window that were being shot by friendly fire. So, it was this time that there is a lot of pain and I still think we as a city we as a culture have to heal.

BILL MOYERS: Most people don't know that up until the riots, Newark was run by the mob, along with a corrupt Democratic administration in politics.

CORY BOOKER: And people don't realize that the overt racism that was being exacted upon the population here. The good intentions of the Federal government sending large block grants to the city that were then doled out in corrupt ways really starting to aggravate the frustrations of residents of this city that really felt that the judicial system was not a place they could go for justice, the government was not a place that they could go for justice. They were being locked out of job opportunities. It became a sense which is the most toxic element in American society then and now, there began to be a sense of hopelessness that the system was not making a space for their cries for justice.

BILL MOYERS: To what extent is race still casting a pall over what you're trying to do here?

CORY BOOKER: It concerns me especially now that a new generation of African-Americans are coming to the fore and I hear reporters ask me all the time, that "You are part of a generation of blacks who is creating a race-transcending society." And that bothers me--

BILL MOYERS: Why?

CORY BOOKER: Well, I don't want us to be an America that is sanitized, homogenized, "deodorized" as a friend of mine says, and forgets about race. The richness of America is that we are diverse. We're not Sweden. We're not Norway. We are a great American experiment. And as soon as we start trying to forget race or turn our back on race, number one, we don't confront the real racial realities that still persist. But, number two, is we miss the great delicious opportunities that exist in America and no where else.

So, I don't want to be a race transcending leader. I want to be deeply understood as a man, as African-American, as a Christian, all that I am. But, ultimately it's a portal to punch through to a deeper and more textured, more nuanced understanding of the beauty and the brilliance of America. So, that involves a difficult conversation -- not a sound bite.

BILL MOYERS: I hear what you're saying, but what do these -- I brought some statistics from this week's Washington Post and I'd like to know what you think about these. "The average black person in America is 447 percent more likely to be imprisoned than the average white person, and 521 percent more likely to be murdered. Blacks earn 60 cents
to the dollar compared with whites who have the same education levels and marital status... And because of long standing patterns of inheritance, blacks and whites begin life with substantial disparities in family wealth." That's this week's Washington Post. What do these findings say to you?

CORY BOOKER: Well, I think that anybody who believes in America, who believes in justice, who believes in what we stand for has to find those statistics nauseating and realize that we, as a country, are not complete yet. That this is not a nation that's seeking a black justice or seeking a white justice -- we profess certain values. Our children pledge it every single day that we will be "One nation, under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all."

BILL MOYERS: But, these realities defy that--

CORY BOOKER: Exactly. So, what's the challenge to my generation? And that's really where I come back to is, you know, we can have the courage to deplore the situation. But, that's not gonna heal it. I do not believe-- I'm not gonna have the same conversation my father has now. I watched him. He sat with me--

BILL MOYERS: He's how old?

CORY BOOKER: He's now in his early 70s.

BILL MOYERS: And what was that conversation?

CORY BOOKER: You know my dad was the most optimistic guy, came up to Newark one day and he said-- My father was born to a single parent. He said, "I couldn't afford to be poor. I was po'. P-O. Couldn't afford the other two letters. I was a po' boy from North Carolina "-- born to a single mother in a viciously segregated town. And to have my dad say, "Here we are decades later and I still see kids in a viciously segregated world, still see kids growing up in poverty. But, what I worry about is that their life chances are even worse than mine were growing up in the 1930's and '40s.

BILL MOYERS: Well there's plenty of evidence to suggest that. I mean, right here, 20 years ago, the birth rate among single women, fatherless families was very big out here. And now, according to statistics today, nearly 70 percent of children in Newark are born out of wedlock. Can you ever deal with these issues unless you start with breaking that cycle?

CORY BOOKER: Well, if you if you look at single mothers and I love this analysis because there's been a lot of studies on the increase in unwed mothers, which I think is not a good thing for our nation. But, as much as it's increased in the black community, the proportion of unwed mothers between black and white has stayed the same. So, it may have increased, it's actually increased in both.

So, a lot of these issues, and I often say that if you want to take the temperature of America and where we are evolving as a country, it's good to dip into the Latino community, the black community 'cause you get a clarity of the urgencies that our nation still faces, but that does not mean that these aren't real issues within the white community or in American in general.

BILL MOYERS: What's the most stubborn reality that you face here in Newark?

CORY BOOKER: It is a spiritual crisis of people not believing in the greatness of who we are. And I know in my experience, and I've dealt with some of the most difficult situations our country has ever seen -- if you take away options for people or where they don't believe, rightfully or wrongfully, that there is hope for their lives in the pathways in which we, as Americans, view as a righteous path, they're gonna stray, people are gonna stray from that path where they feel they have limited choices.

I mean, take for example, a 15 year-old kid, and I see this, who's growing up in a household with perhaps their parents are not present, and they are not getting the kind of
education available in their schools. And we have some very challenged educational institutions in our nation. And they make a mistake -- smoking marijuana or caught with a significant amount -- and they don't have pre-trial interventions available to them, they don't have lawyers to come and help them out and they get thrown in jail. They come out maybe weeks later and now, they have a criminal conviction. And they have a criminal conviction; they have no education, formal education. They have nobody there to mentor them. All these things begin to mount up for them. They realize I have no other option or believe that they have no other option.

BILL MOYERS: Than the crime, drug trade--.

CORY BOOKER: Than to continue in the drug trade, which is so easy and right there.

BILL MOYERS: So, it's an economic engine for them that gives them respect? Dignity?

CORY BOOKER: One might say in the rawest form, and I don't believe it, I think it's a spiritual deficit. But, in the rawest form, they might say that this is a rational, economic decision that they're making. But here is America. And what is our response to that? We could just line up and deplore it. We can say that we need to build more prisons and hold these criminals. Or we can say, "Let's end this madness and look at practical policy decisions that we can make."

BILL MOYERS: Such as?

CORY BOOKER: We can make a great investment in an alternative to detention program that has statistically has proven through longitudinal studies to reduce recidivism by 60, 70 percent. But, we don't invest in those programs on the front end.

BILL MOYERS: Why? Is it because of blackness? Race?

CORY BOOKER: You know, I don't think it's as simplistic as that. You have to understand race now is ground into a complicated crucible with poverty and so many other issues -- geographic dislocation -- you name it. What we have to realize is we can get caught up as pundits sitting there talking about sound bites and race, which is so not helpful. Or we can say, "Hey, black, white or whatever, let's change policy to react to the concerns that we have. "My passion, my life is not about trying to create justice for one group over another group. It's to understand that we are one nation. We are in this together. We're either gonna race together to the bottom or we're gonna rise together to the top.

BILL MOYERS: But, you're dealing with the reality right here in Newark. And that is the statistics, the facts, the figures are all devastating here.

CORY BOOKER: Right, but that's the attitude I'm competing against where people say that we face this leviathan of a problem that's so implacable that we can't deal with. "Cory-" and I've heard this so much. "We're 40 years where we've been dealing with these problems." I have people, the most sincere individuals come to me and tell me, "Oh, Mayor, murder it's going up all over the country. There's nothing you can do about it. This year, it's even gone up in New York City. What can you do about it?"

Well, here we are year to date -- we're down 70 percent on murders because me and a group of very committed grassroots activists and police decided we were gonna choose a different way. We have a choice as Americans. We can continue to talk about problems and I will not have this same conversation when I'm 70 something years old with my child. We are going to shut up in this city and fight.

BILL MOYERS: So what's the strategy? I think this is what-- I've got a nationwide audience all over the country listening to the mayor of Newark. What is the new strategy? It's not civil rights legislation. We did that in the '60s. Billions of dollars have been poured into the cities, billons right here in Newark. What is the strategy that you think people living in urban areas all over this country should follow to deal with these intractable, real, grim facts on the ground?
CORY BOOKER: I say simply this: don't look at government to do it, don't look at somebody else, look in the mirror and ask yourself, "I benefit from this nation. I benefit from incredible sacrifices. What am I willing to do different this year to make a difference in the problems in America?"

BILL MOYERS: You're saying that to these black kids who are going to-- being arrested and being sent to prison?

CORY BOOKER: Absolutely, and I've sat with those kids that you're-- that you're talking about at this point. I've sent with young people as a mentor and looked them in the eye. It's your life, it's your destiny, you choose. But, I'm telling you this right now. You know, King, again, said it so much eloquently. It's not the vitriolic words and the violent actions of the evil people that threaten us as a nation. It's the appalling silence and inaction of the good people. And we, as Americans, have to understand that change will never roll in on the wheels of inevitability. It necessitates sacrifice and struggle by true warriors.

BILL MOYERS: Is that money? Do you need more money?

CORY BOOKER: You know, there's no simple answer and that's the--

BILL MOYERS: But, do you...

CORY BOOKER: That's a knee-jerk reaction to spend more money. Well, you know what? I can show you places in the city of Newark where we're doing more with less simply because we have good people stepping forward and saying, "I'm not gonna tolerate this any more in my nation, in my community, on my block."

BILL MOYERS: What are they doing?

CORY BOOKER: They're doing mentoring programs. You have grassroots leaders -- young, black men starting up organizations like Prodigal Sons and Daughters here in the city of Newark welcoming people back to the community, because if you're a Christian, that's one of the seminal stories. If somebody's coming back from doing wrong, you don't just point a finger at them and say, "Bad, bad, bad," for the rest of your life. You get up and you embrace them, and you help them, and put them back, and I see people in our grassroots doing that.

I hear groups like Stop the Shooting -- young, black men who just said they're tired of seeing what's going on in their communities. And they reach out. And they mentor and they work with people. The power of our country always has never been the leadership, please! The Civil Rights Movement was done by young kids that, young people that we never will know their names that made this country change.

BILL MOYERS: I'm struck that you've been emphasizing so called "quality of life" issues. You know, picking up the litter on the street. I've heard that you'll get angry at somebody in the car ahead of you who throws wrappers out on the street.

CORY BOOKER: Yeah, I'll stop my car, put my lights on and pull them over and give them the trash back.

BILL MOYERS: Why?

CORY BOOKER: Because it's all about the spirit. It all comes down to a spiritual transformation. And if your city looks messy, we have a lot of challenges with that in Newark with litter and illegal dumping. If you're unkempt. It's all about self respect, it's all about the spirit. And it all starts with how you feel about yourself and what you know about yourself. Look, I'm not saying, I ran to become mayor of the city of Newark because I wanted to make policy changes. And we're doing it. We're getting-- ex-offenders hired by going out and talking to companies and saying, "Hey, if we trained them, if we give them soft skills, if we help these men to understand who they really are, will you hire them?"

And companies are stepping up and doing it. We're creating incentives to help them. Free, legal services to help our brothers and sisters coming home. So, we're making clear policy...
changes.

But, at the end of the day, I need that law firm like the one in the city of Newark who's willing to give those free legal services. I need those companies who understand that you can do good and do well at the same time. I need the churches who are willing to run some of the programs.

BILL MOYERS: But, you need jobs too, don't you?

CORY BOOKER: Yeah, but, the thing is if you re-imagine your economy- BILL MOYER: How? How so?

CORY BOOKER: Oh, there's so many ways. Look, we have to save inner city buildings like, the city of Newark, we're hemorrhaging energy -- nobody's weatherized the city of Newark. Nobody's looking at insulation. So, all of the sudden, you realize wait a minute, you could save money, millions of dollars for government, for schools, for businesses if you weatherize, if you insulate. And all of the sudden, you realize, wait, you've created a business model right there.

Then you can create businesses and, therefore, jobs right here in the city of Newark running around and doing these things. If you re-imagine your economy and realize and go to people and say, "Wait a minute. You've got a law here that makes no sense whatsoever preventing young, black men who have criminal convictions from getting jobs in the port area. Why are you denying.."

BILL MOYERS: In the port area?

CORY BOOKER: In the port area. Or let me give you a worse. I had a guy that came to my open office hours who couldn't get a taxi license 'cause 20 years earlier he had a criminal conviction. He wanted to be an entrepreneur. But yet government was restricting his ability to get a license because of 20 years ago. Every state in America has these nonsensical laws that undermine the potential of individuals.

There's so many things that we can do that are sound, rational policy that are not right and not left. Not Democrat, not Republican, that are American, in my opinion, that we all can agree on, but we're just not doing it, and any elected leader like me is betraying their office if they run for office, and they sit in office and say, "Government's gonna do for you." What I'm looking for in leadership whether it's my president, whether it's my governor, whether it's my mayor -- I want leaders that are going to ask more from America.

BILL MOYERS: We've seen the specter of race intrude into the presidential race, and I know you experienced it when you were running because some people said, some blacks said you weren't black enough to be Mayor of a basically black city. How is race playing out in your life here now?

CORY BOOKER: Well, I think that's the frustrating for me often is the dialogue I hear on the news in the media is very different than the dialogue for real Americans on their everyday lives. You know, I spent a lot of years of my life, you know, did my undergraduate study in urban issues. I did my masters degree studying that. In law school, my focus was all these issues. And I could sit here and give you a treatise on the causal factors of racial disparities. But, at some point, I think we need to start having a conversation about what are we gonna do to solve it?

What I'm trying to say is that you can get so caught up in looking for blame. Who's to blame? Is society to blame? Is it white folks to blame? Is it the prisoner himself to blame? But at some point in America, we're going have to get beyond blame and start accepting responsibility. So, again, I have to say, I'm not that old--

BILL MOYERS: How old are you now?

CORY BOOKER: Thirty-eight years old. But, I'm already getting fatigued with the
conversation, and feeling that there's a dearth of action. That it may be in vogue right now because of this presidential election to talk about race, to study and to flip it over. But at the end of the day, is it gonna motivate action? We had the courage to deplore the reality in which we live, but we will we show the equal courage to do something about it? Not wait. Not point a finger. Not sit and have debates about a divided America. But, to get into the trenches, to roll up your sleeves, to do the hard, difficult work it takes to manifest the greatness of this nation.

America was born out of collective sacrifice, out of a lot of fights and a lot of struggles. And here, our generation of living Americans, has to decide what they're gonna do. If they're gonna sit back and just let this be a spectator sport, we will devolve in the same way the great Roman empire did. But, if you're willing to get up and continue the fight, to continue the struggle, to understand that we are not a nation who has manifested their ideals. That when our children pledge allegiance to that flag whether they're in Newark, New Jersey or Beverly Hills, those kids are saying words, "One nation under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all," that are aspirational. We haven't achieved that. And, therefore, this generation has to manifest the same struggle that my parents' generation did. And my parents' parents' generation did.

BILL MOYERS: But the founding fathers who proclaimed life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness as our ultimate values also nurtured slavery in the cradle of liberty.

CORY BOOKER: Absolutely, and I love that civil rights leader that said, "Constitute, Constitute," I can't say the full word. I can only say two fifths or three fifths of the word because Americans were judged in, black Americans or Americans were judged in that fraction. That in the very Declaration of Independence, Native Americans are referred to as savages. Obviously, there is racial divisiveness, degradation that seeped into the very founding of our nation.

But, the beauty of America is that the people of this country, black and white and Jewish and Quaker, saw within this nascent nation, saw within it the, the very manifestation of the divine. And helped this country overcome itself, its limitations and its divisions and created a nation in which I'm proud of. But, ultimately, which I know is not complete yet. If you realize that, what are you doing about it?

That's the final question people should ask. What am I doing to deserve this country? I'm an American. That comes with obligations. We have the Statue of Liberty on one side. I think we should build another statue in this country called the Statue of Obligation, the Statue of Responsibility. And people should understand that by the very nature people are fighting to become citizens of the United States of America, willing to do whatever it takes, but, we're taking for granted what that legacy means.

BILL MOYERS: I've watched you since your first race, which you lost. I've watched you on the city council. I know that you're trying to move us into a new direction. How do you adjust to not being able to do all the important things you want to do?

CORY BOOKER: I'm stubborn. And, I made a decision in my life what I'm willing to die for, what I'm willing to live for. And I'm, maybe call it an arrogance, to believe that I live in a time where me and my team members and my community can do anything. And I've often been criticized for it. I've often been told I'm unrealistic. But, I think this country was formed on unrealistic ideals.

BILL MOYERS: You've also been the subject of death threats?

CORY BOOKER: I've been the subject of death threats. I've seen my share of violence in my days.

BILL MOYERS: A young man died in your arms, didn't he?

CORY BOOKER: A tragic situation where a kid was shot and fell backwards into my arms, and I held him, vainly trying to stop the blood. You have a choice to make every day. Will you do everything you can despite the circumstances to generate love and light? Or will
you give in to the darkness around you?

And I believe that in this city that I love, I’ve been able to connect to so many people that you will never read about or see on TV. Not people who are involved in debates about race on TV, not people who are pointing fingers. But, you see these neighborhood leaders on their block who step up who take time to sweep in front of their house and even a little bit further down the street even though they don’t own the property who watch the kid walking home from school and ask them how their day is. Ask them what kind of grades they’re getting.

The tenant leader in my building when I lived in some projects who on Valentine's Day or St. Patrick's Day -- she ain't Irish - but yet, she's collecting money from all the residents in the basement of the building to have a St. Patrick's Day party for a bunch of black children. This is the spirit of America. You know, this same tenant leader, I'll never forget - her son was murdered in the building in which we live. And I remember saying to her, "Why would you stay here after your son, who served in the American military no less, and came home and was savagely murdered?" And she folds her arms and looks at me with a toughness. And she says, "Why am I still here in Brick Towers? These high rise projects?"

And I said, "Yeah, why are you still here?" And she says, firmly, "Because I'm in charge of homeland security."

Now, here's a woman that gets it. It's not about the President. It's not about the Congress person. It's about me. This is my country. I'm gonna fight for it. I'm gonna remake in the image of our ancestors. I'm gonna show that love will prevail over ignorance, over bigotry, over division, that I will unify our country through my spirit, through my blood. And if everybody stopped talking and started focusing on doing something more than I did yesterday in order to change tomorrow, then we're gonna have the America of our dreams.

BILL MOYERS: We remember the Kerner Report for its searing conclusion that "our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white- separate and unequal." African-Americans at the time were fast becoming concentrated and isolated in metropolitan ghettos, and the Kerner Commission said that by 1985, without new policies, our cities would have black majorities ringed with largely all-white suburbs.

The commissioners acknowledged that government policies like urban-gentrification, and the construction of huge high-rise projects had helped to blight stable black communities. So they offered some specific and practical remedies - new jobs, affordable housing, and new steps to confront the destructive ghetto environment. But following the civil rights movement of the mid-sixties - the peaceful marches and demonstrations, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the riots triggered a mounting white backlash. LBJ’s escalation of the war in Vietnam added fuel to the fires.

The Kerner Report was published on March 1, 1968. Hardly five weeks later - on the fourth of April, forty years ago next week - Martin Luther King was assassinated. Flames again engulfed dozens of cities, and the possibility of large-scale change perished in the blood and ashes and racist toxins. The president had told the Kerner Commission: "let your search be free...as best you can, find the truth and express it in your report." They did. But the truth was not enough. The country lost the will for it.

Cory Booker wasn't even born when this report appeared my generation read and shelved it. His must now write the next chapter.

That's it for the JOURNAL. See you next week. I'm Bill Moyers.