

# A metropolis of poor children [US] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

See text below.

## EXCERPTS

Every so often during a national convention, a politician says something that shines right through the accumulated oratory hanging like fog above the convention floor, creating an image that requires deeper contemplation. Though hardly known for his speaking skills, former Senator Bill Bradley did just that the other night when he told the Democratic convention that if all the 13.5 million poor children in America were gathered in one place, they would form a city bigger than New York -- and "we would then see child poverty as the slow-motion national disaster that it is."

This Dickensian vision was a wonderfully descriptive way of saying that while Americans can sympathize with individual cases of poverty, and "would never turn their backs on a starving child," it is next to impossible for them to imagine the totality of the problem. Put all these children in one place in the mind's eye, and the reality becomes inescapable.

Mr. Bradley's imagery was part of a passionate plea to his party to reaffirm its historic connection to America's underclass. So, too, was his use of another geographical metaphor, in which he noted that the 44 million Americans without health insurance equal all the people living in 12 states between the Mississippi and the Rocky Mountains.

But it was also a reminder to affluent Americans of their moral obligation to do something about America's "ill-fed, ill-housed and ill-educated" children.

"If we don't end child poverty in our lifetime," Mr. Bradley said, "shame on me, shame on you, shame on all of us."

As he made clear during his unsuccessful primary run against Al Gore, Mr. Bradley does not think his own party has done enough on this score. But it has at least done and promised more than the Republican opposition. Both sides have pledged to devote substantial resources to early childhood education, an important issue to Mr. Gore and almost a signature issue for George W. Bush. The Democrats have also offered proposals like expanding the earned-income tax credit and raising the minimum wage that would quickly put real dollars in the pockets of the poor.

But Mr. Bradley was talking about more than individual programs, however worthy. What he was talking about was the need for a sustained, systematic effort to reach out to the one-fifth of American children living in families making less than \$13,000 a year. These are damning statistics in a nation whose convention orators keep congratulating themselves on America's present prosperity, and where the main political debate involves how to spend the giant surplus generated by that affluence. There is no better place to spend that surplus than on the vast city of poverty that Bill Bradley brought to life on Tuesday night.

-Reprinted from The New York Times

**Region:** United States <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** poverty <sup>[3]</sup>

election <sup>[4]</sup>

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