



**BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS
OF AMERICA**

“WHO WOULD HAVE EVER IMAGINED?”

**SOUTHEAST S.O.A.A.P. PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT SEMINAR**

Luncheon Keynote

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My message today paints a grim picture of the landscape of our nation. It is a snapshot of a bleak reality for the millions of children, young people, families and communities we serve every day in our Clubs worldwide. It is not a feel-good message that will leave you smiling or doubled over with laughter, but rather a message that is sobering and contemplative, one that will make us more determined than ever to serve the unserved, reach the unreachable and have a laser focus on young people who need us most. This message is a reminder of why we work so hard every day to make a profound difference to achieve our 3 priority outcomes of academic success, good character & citizenship and healthy lifestyles. I am going to address the gritty issues we are grappling with every day to try to survive: the daunting and demoralizing pain of hunger, the displacement of immigration and segregation and the growing skills gap caused by a lack of education and literacy. I want us to be fully cognizant of the **new** portrait of America revealed by the U.S. Census Bureau and the plight of children and families as researched by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Brookings Institution. We need to know what's happening in America so we can equip and prepare ourselves to tackle the pervasive sense of hopelessness and break down the barriers of despair that stunt the success of those we serve. Now more

than ever, **WE** are the **GAMECHANGERS**, the one entity in communities who will boldly take a stand to change and save lives. Our nagging question today and when we return to our Clubs should be: “**WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?**”

Today’s message is titled, “**WHO WOULD HAVE EVER IMAGINED?**”

Let’s take a step back in time... On January 8, 1964 President Lyndon B. Johnson declared a “War on Poverty”. The national poverty rate was around 19%, making it a national concern. This set in motion a series of bills and acts, creating programs such as Head Start, Food Stamps, work study, Medicare and Medicaid. And now, 47 years later, a record number of Americans are living in poverty—46 million. That’s more than any time since the Census Bureau began tracking poverty data in 1959.

The number of **POOR CHILDREN**, 16.4 million, exceeds the entire combined population of Haiti and Liberia, two of the poorest countries on earth. The number of **EXTREMELY POOR** children, 7.4 million in our nation is equivalent to the population of Israel. Children don’t have any belts to tighten, have no power to speak up about the CUTS in their survival

programs. More than 1 million children fell into poverty between 2009 and 2010 and almost half million fell into extreme poverty. **CHILDREN**, the **POOREST** people in America, experience the steepest rise in poverty and the largest single year increase since the 1960's.

We are in the **WORST** economy since the Great Depression, yet the Jobs Bill is under assault, cuts are being threatened for nutrition programs for low-income women and children, unemployment benefits are shortened or eliminated and health care coverage is far from ever coming to fruition. At least 23 states have reduced education spending making class size larger, school hours shorter and deemed pre-kindergarten programs unnecessary. The safety net we once had is full of gaping holes and low expectations have become a **VULTURE** in our lives eating away at our resilience to combat adversity.

We live in awful times for far too many people. We're in a rut that shows little sign of getting better soon. Middle-class people are getting **CRUSHED** into the working class; the working class is getting **CRUSHED** into the working poor, and the working poor are getting **CRUSHED** into the **UNDERCLASS** while the underclass is reaching up to touch bottom!

Let's look at what this means in terms of **MONEY**:

- The median household income fell 2.3% to \$49,445 last year;
- The poor, the young and minorities had the biggest income **DROPS** last year;
- The median income for Black households fell 3.2% to \$32,068.

Officially, poverty means living in a family of 5 with an annual income **LESS** than \$25,991; a family of 4 with an income **BELOW** \$21,954; a family of 3 with an income LESS than \$17,098 and a family of 2 with an income **BELOW** \$13,991.

69% of Latino and 71% of Black children live in low-income households and more than 40% live in households with **neither** savings nor investments.

Nearly 21% of Black households with children report having **NO money** left over at the end of the month compared to only 9% for white households.

According to Census data, the wealth gaps between whites and minorities have grown to their widest levels in a quarter-century. The recession and uneven recovery have **ERASED** decades of minority gains with major setbacks leaving whites on average with 20 times the net worth of Blacks and 18 times that of Hispanics.

Our many racial and ethnic groups find themselves living in the same country but inhabiting completely different landscapes. Our children of color are more likely to live in the most economically fragile households. They are concentrated in pockets of racialized poverty: neighborhoods with poor schools and dropout factories; unsafe communities; a lack of mainstream financial institutions; insufficiently sound housing stock; a lack of good jobs or steady employment; poor access to transportation; food deserts or stores that are not stocked with healthy foods; a lack of environmental safety—all exacerbate a lack of opportunity that comes with far fewer financial resources.

The recession not only made the **POOR POORER**, it snagged those who thought they had finally worked themselves out of poverty and blindsided those who **NEVER** thought they would

ever be caught in its net. Now among the **POOR** are the college-educated, the **FORMER** middle-class worker, the suburbanite and the homeowner. The result is that large numbers of our nation's children are living in families that continue to face **DEEP** economic insecurity. Any dramatic downturn can send them over the edge!

WHO WOULD HAVE EVER IMAGINED?

That 36% of ALL American **CHILDREN** are now **HOMELESS???**! More and more people are experiencing homelessness for the very first time. There has **NEVER** been such a demand for emergency housing, Section 8 vouchers and rental assistance due to unemployment and foreclosures. In the past, grandparents moved in with their adult children and grand children because they could no longer maintain their home. Now, during the recession, multi-generational households are being created because adult children have moved in with grandparents. It is adult children struggling in the economy.

WHO WOULD HAVE EVER IMAGINED?

That the once booming **SOUTH**, which entered the recession with the **LOWEST** unemployment rate in the nation, is now

struggling with some of the **HIGHEST** rates??? Several southern states, including South Carolina, whose 11.8% unemployment is the 4th highest in the nation—have **HIGHER** unemployment rates than they did a year ago.

UNEMPLOYMENT in the south is now **HIGHER** than it is in the NE and the MW! Unemployment will likely remain HIGH for several **YEARS!!!** **JOBLESSNESS** is rampant.

WHO WOULD HAVE EVER IMAGINED?

That an astounding **49%** of all children born in this country are born to families who receive food supplements from the federal WIC program. **Half** of all American children come to school **HUNGRY** every day. The Agriculture Department says nearly 1 in 4 young children lives in a family that had difficulty affording sufficient food at some point last year.

The Census Bureau has an annual survey that looks at food insecurity in 2 categories: “low food insecurity” means people who have to make changes in the quality and quantity of their food because of limited budget, and “very low food insecurity” meaning people who have to cut back or skip meals on a frequent basis. **There is a changing face of hunger in America today.** People who used to volunteer at the Food

Bank or food pantry are now **going there regularly for themselves and their families**. Some food pantries are being asked to open at **MIDNIGHT** so nobody would **SEE** them use it! Many are so ashamed they don't want anyone to know how **HARD** they have **FALLEN**. To them, it feels like a **BAD DREAM—A NIGHTMARE** that just continues.

WHO WOULD HAVE EVER IMAGINED?

That although we are a nation of **IMMIGRANTS**, we are developing more and more stringent immigration laws. The new anti-immigration law in Alabama is the nation's harshest and is already causing dislocation and gripping **FEAR**. The immigrant community has families packing up and **moving in the middle of the night** leaving behind homes still filled with furniture, TVs, and refrigerators stocked with food; family photos still on shelves and closets full of clothes. Businesses are closing and employers are wondering where their workers have gone. Earlier this month, about **2,300** Hispanic children did **NOT** go to school for fear they or their parents would be **DEPORTED**. And if they are NOT going to school, you can bet they are NOT going to come to the Club either! It's a **NO-WIN** situation as immigrants are being demonized more than ever!

On the other side of the immigration coin is the **SEGREGATION** issue. Blacks continue to be the most **SEGREGATED** minority followed by Hispanics and Asians. The average Black American lives in a majority Black neighborhood. The recession has the opportunity to have a **POLARIZING** effect and has produced a “**GHETTO-BELT**” of extremely high and fairly consistent levels of segregation in the NE and MW.

WHO WOULD HAVE EVER IMAGINED?

That at 9 months of age, **ALL** children start out with fairly similar scores on a standard child development test, but **by 2 years of age**, racial disparities emerge—with children of color lagging behind their white and Asian peers.

Only 53% of Black students will graduate on time with a regular diploma compared to 58% of Hispanic students, 76% of White students and 80% of Asian students. Only 14% of Blacks and 17% of Latino 4th graders can even read at grade level! Some 7 million Americans today are **ILLITERATE**, 27 million can't read well enough to complete a job application and 30 million can't read a simple sentence. The 25 fastest growing occupations today demand workers with exceptional literacy skills. Today, if

you **CANNOT READ**, you are sentenced to social and economic **DEATH** in our globalizing world.

In my introductory remarks to you this afternoon, I asked you a nagging question, “**WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?**” Despite the plethora of negative statistics and despairing news in the world due to our staggering debt, rampant joblessness and deepening recession, I still believe that our **GREATEST** moments are in **FRONT** of us! Our children **CANNOT** be viewed as **ROAD KILL**. There will always be curve balls in life and we must teach our children how to **THRIVE** amidst adversity. As youth development professionals and leaders in the youth development arena, we cannot afford to lose our **SPARK** as we walk our talk, bond with our Club members, believe in them when no one else does, raise the bar and have **HIGH EXPECTATIONS** for their success. Your Clubhouses are places where **MAGICAL** things happen and children and young people make amazing transformations. As we leave this seminar knowing what we are up against in life struggles, I don't want us to leave disillusioned. Instead, let us always remember to find the **SPARK** that gives young people **JOY** and **ENERGY**. What is it that gives their lives **HOPE, DIRECTION** and **PURPOSE?**

Plutarch, a Greek philosopher, once said that youth are not vessels to be filled, but **FIRES TO BE LIT!** What will we do to find the inner light in those we serve and nourish it so that it shines brightly every day?

Let us uplift each other, galvanize others to commit to the ideals of the **SOCIETY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN PROFESSIONALS** and maintain an eternal optimism for our children and young people to achieve Academic Success, Good Character & Citizenship and Healthy Lifestyles.

For we know that in the Boys & Girls Club Movement...**GREAT FUTURES START HERE!**

Thank you for all you are and all you continue to do for America's children every day!