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# Conference Cites Need for Community Changes

**D**r. Manning Marable's challenge was as dramatic as it was eloquent. "Buffalo stands at the brink of a potential social catastrophe," he said. "We need to launch a comprehensive program for restructuring America's cities.

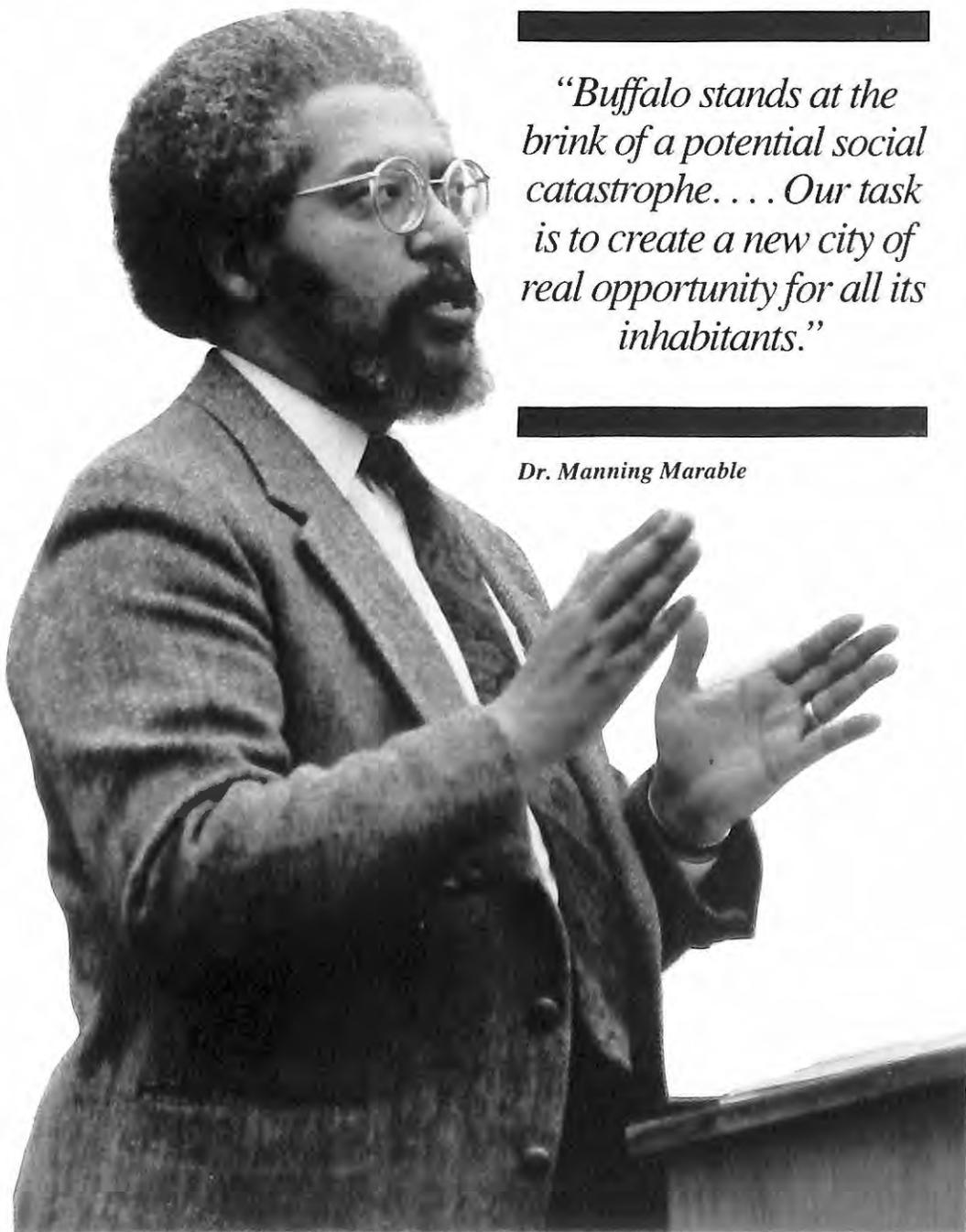
"We need an urban perestroika in this country. We must reorder federal spending priorities domestically. Our challenge is not in restoring Buffalo's mythological past. Our task is to create a new city of real opportunity for all its inhabitants."

Those bold words came during the keynote address of "Buffalo: Change & Community," a wide-ranging conference held at the Law School in April that brought together community leaders, scholars and national experts to explore the possibilities for the City of Buffalo.

Participants examined the recent history of local community organizing and economic development, and considered community-based strategies for constructive change.

According to Professor Peter Pitegoff, who teaches in the Law School's Community Development Clinic and was an organizer of the conference, "It was successful in bringing together diverse perspectives, in underscoring the need to build a common ground in Buffalo, and in demonstrating that the Law School can play a constructive role in community change."

In addition to Marable, conference participants included Bruno Freschi, dean of the UB School of Architecture and Planning; Richard Schramm, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology;



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*"Buffalo stands at the brink of a potential social catastrophe. . . . Our task is to create a new city of real opportunity for all its inhabitants."*

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*Dr. Manning Marable*



*Buffalo Common Councilman James Pitts was a conference panelist.*

Tom Monaghan of the United Auto Workers, Region 9; the Rev. Roderick Brown of the Catholic Diocese of Buffalo; Peter Clavelle, mayor of Burlington, Vt.; and Henry Louis Taylor Jr., director of UB's Center for Applied Public Affairs Studies, among numerous others.

Marable, who is a professor of political science and sociology at the University of Colorado's Center for the

Study of Race and Ethnicity in America, is widely known as a social critic, author and activist. His syndicated column, "Along the Color Line," is published in 150 newspapers in the United States, England, the Caribbean and India. In Buffalo, his column is published in *The Challenger*.

Marable's address on April 5 was sponsored by the UB Law School and served as the annual Mitchell Lecture. The Mitchell Lecture Series was established in 1950 in memory of James McCormick Mitchell, one of Buffalo's leading lawyers and president of the University of Buffalo Council during the 1930s and 1940s.

In a resonant voice that commanded the attention of the near-capacity crowd in the Moot Court Room of John Lord O'Brian Hall, Marable began by recounting the richness of Buffalo's 19th century golden age. The steel and grain industries attracted enormous capital investment, he said, as well as large numbers of ethnic minority people who came seeking work. At one point, Marable said, there were more millionaires per capita in Buffalo than anywhere else in the United States.

"But if the truth be told," he said, "this prosperity never fully included African-Americans. In most instances, people of color were locked out of positions of power." He equated this "structure of privilege and power" to the Jim Crow system of segregation that prevailed in the South for so long.

During Buffalo's economic decline from the 1970s to the mid-1980s, Marable said, it was a mistake to believe that the city simply fell victim to motiveless economic forces. "Yes, there was a trade surplus," he said, "but money was not reinvested. Rather, it was exported out of Buffalo. It was as if a person lay there hemorrhaging, the life and vitality of that person slowly ebbing away."

The federal government was partly to blame, he said, because it invested less in Western New York than Buffalo households paid in federal taxes.

Now, of course, the image of a

resurgent "new Buffalo" has spread nationwide. But Marable sees a myth there, too: the idea that a "corporate and political elite" has engineered the kind of rising tide that lifts all boats equally.

"Is all this new building and investment trickling down to African-Americans? No. Black neighborhoods in Buffalo have not profited directly from the economic renaissance," he charged.

Nationwide, he said, "Our social policies are designed to perpetuate inequality." He cited some disturbing information about the prospects for black people:

- "Violence in African-American communities across the nation virtually has become an epidemic that no longer surprises or shocks us," he said. In the next seven years, more African-American men will be murdered in American cities than there were U.S. troops killed in the Vietnam War. Shootings and knifings plague young blacks, Marable said. Black men in their 20s who live in cities have a 1-in-20 chance of being murdered.

- Infant mortality among blacks is twice that of whites, largely because many blacks lack access to quality health care.

- The average salary in the burgeoning "service sector" of the economy is less than \$11,000 a year — hardly the kind of income necessary to support a stable family.

- "Justice as it is meted out in this country is not color-blind when African-Americans are the accused," Marable charged.

To redress these inequities, Marable urged blacks to take a greater role in the political process. "The greatest domestic challenge confronting the American people in the late 20th century is the crisis in the cities," he said.

Municipalities, he said, need to be forced to establish networks that make available to all their citizens adequate housing, reliable public transportation, job training and health care.

"Democracy is not a thing," he said. "It is a process." ■