



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Can it be possible that all Americans aren't a bunch of self-centered slob?

I realize, with Watergate replacing afternoon soap operas, the papers full of crime-in-the-streets stories, and growing reports of political leaders bedfellowing with gangsters, things look bleak in the land of the fair. It seems we've developed a nation of people who don't care, who refuse to get involved in others' problems.

Sometimes our world affairs remind me of that classic line in "Green Pastures," when God starts the rain on Noah. After about three weeks of downpour He sends Gabriel to the parapets of Heaven to look down and see how things are going. "Uh, Lawd," Gabe says, peering down on earth and shaking his head, "everything nailed down is coming loose."

Well, cheer up, Americans. There are yet a few folks who are still nailed down. In fact, I wager there are more than a few. Despite the antics of a handful of miserables, the vast majority of Americans are still God-fearing, generous, willing-to-help folks.

Take Pittsburgh, for instance. Now I doubt if the name "Pittsburgh" conjures up immediate images of kindness and thoughtfulness. Few Americans would vote it the nation's "friendly city." It probably wouldn't even come in second. When I think of Pittsburgh I think of blast furnaces, dirty-faced iron workers and hard-hatted labor union goons.

But look again.

I was up there last week, standing in front of the fashionable

Carlton House waiting for a cab. An old lady wheezed up beside me and said, "Young man, can you direct me to the bus station?"

I pointed it out, three blocks away.

"Oh," she said, "and these suitcases are so heavy."

I started to offer her a ride in my cab (if it ever came), when two mean-faced guys in grimy, sweaty clothes and hard hats stepped up. "We're taking our lunch break, little Mother," one of them said. "We need the exercise. We'll carry your bags down to the bus depot."

Suddenly Pittsburgh soared to the top 10 of America's friendly cities — at least in my estimation.

Then, as if to confirm that such things are happening all over, when I got in the cab the driver began to tell me about a New York story that had hit the wire service that morning. Three West Side hoods snatched a woman's purse, knocked her down, hailed a cab and tried to make a getaway. But more than a hundred on-lookers rushed out into the streets, shouting and shaking their fists. They surrounded the cab and refused to let it leave until the police arrived.

Explaining their refusal to "look the other way," one of the pursuers said, "We don't want any Kitty Genoveses in this neighborhood." Kitty Genovese, you remember, was the woman who was stabbed to death while 36 people looked on but refused to help because they didn't want to get involved.

Nice going, Americans. There's hope for us, after all.