



THE STATE OF BLACK AMERICA 2006

THE OPPORTUNITY COMPACT

ABSTRACTS

**Essays on The State of Black America
The 2006 Equality Index
Sunday Morning Apartheid Study
Special Section on Hurricane Katrina**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FROM THE PRESIDENT’S DESK

The National Urban League Opportunity Compact
by Marc H. Morial.....p. 1

THE NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE 2006 EQUALITY INDEX

by Rondel Thompson and Sophia Parker, Global Insight, Inc.p. 2

ESSAYS ON THE STATE OF BLACK AMERICA

ESSAY 1 Black Homeownership: A Dream No Longer Deferred?
by Lance Freeman.....p. 3

ESSAY 2 The Racial Composition of American Jobs
by Darrick Hamilton.....p. 4

ESSAY 3 Escaping the “Ghetto” of Subcontracting
by Mark D. Turner.....p. 5

ESSAY 4 The State of Our Children
by Marian Wright Edelman.....p. 6

ESSAY 5 Hurricane Katrina Exposed the Face of Poverty
by Maya Wiley.....p. 7

ESSAY 6 Race, Poverty, and Health Disparities
by Brian D. Smedley.....p. 8

ESSAY 7 The State of Civil Rights
by The Honorable Nathaniel R. Jones.....p. 9

ESSAY 8 Racial Disparities Drive Prison Boom
by George E. Curry.....p. 10

REPORT FROM THE NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE POLICY INSTITUTE

Sunday Morning Apartheid:
A Diversity Study of the Sunday Morning Talk Shows
by Stephanie J. Jones.....p. 11

SPECIAL SECTION: KATRINA AND BEYOND

New Orleans Revisited
by Marc H. Morial.....p. 12

New Orleans: Next Steps on the Road to Recovery
by Donna L. Brazile.....p. 13

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

The National Urban League Opportunity Compact

by
Marc H. Morial
President and Chief Executive Officer
National Urban League

The State of Black America 2006 report was compiled and analyzed against the backdrop of one of the most catastrophic events to ever befall our nation. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and the tragically slow government response exposed, in the starkest and most depressing terms imaginable, the race and class gaps that our previous reports and *Equality Indexes* had highlighted. This year, the *Equality Index* remains virtually unchanged from last year, once again; Black Americans continue to hover at 0.73 of the status of White Americans. The fact that this number has not changed year after year is a story in itself.

Sadly, these numbers were illustrated in sharp relief last summer when America was forced to see the gaping chasm between White and Black America, the haves and the have-nots. Americans didn't like what they saw and they demanded action. Hurricane Katrina was a wakeup call for the nation to lift many from the depths of poverty. Unfortunately, the initial flurry of concern and attention to poverty and injustice has given way to the status quo of neglect, domestic budget cuts, insensitivity and short-sighted policy priorities.

This year's report on *The State of Black America* moves these issues to the front burner. But more than simply describing the problems, we turn up the heat by offering concrete solutions for moving Americans from poverty to self-sufficiency to prosperity through the Opportunity Compact, the public policy foundation of the National Urban League's five-point empowerment agenda for closing the gaps in employment, education, health and quality of life, civil rights and civic engagement.

The Opportunity Compact is a prescription for addressing the scourge of poverty and lays the groundwork for economic empowerment of African Americans and others in four areas: homeownership, jobs, economic development and our children. The *State of Black America 2006* report opens with four essays addressing these four components. While each essay stands on its own as an independent policy analysis, together they present a cohesive and systematic approach for closing the nation's equality gaps.

We urge our public officials, policy makers, scholars and others committed to addressing the problems of race, poverty and justice to carefully study *The State of Black America 2006* report and use it as a blueprint for finally and fully attacking the problems we all live with. Poverty, the racial divide and social injustice do not impact only those who suffer most visibly; they tear apart the fabric of our nation in ways that damage and diminish us all. Alleviating poverty and injustice is a responsibility we must never forget.

The National Urban League 2006 Equality Index

by
Rondel Thompson and Sophia Parker
Global Insight, Inc.

The National Urban League *Equality Index* is used to assess the state of Black America by comparing the conditions between whites and blacks in America using multiple variables. The 2006 *Equality Index* has a value of 0.73, fractionally up from 0.729 the previous year.

The Equality Index is compiled from five subcomponents: Economic, Health, Education, Social Justice, and Civic Engagement. Each of these subcomponents has an index value of its own. In addition, each subcomponent is weighted, as a percent of the total index, according to its relative importance. Whites have been used as the control in this index, so an index number of less than one means that blacks are doing relatively worse than whites in that category. An index value of greater than one means that blacks are doing better than whites in that category.

The Economic subcomponent represents 30 percent of the *Equality Index*. There was a slight retreat that the 2006 Economic Index recorded compared to the previous year. Though the index value for Real Median Income remained nearly unchanged at 0.62, Unemployed Persons from 16 to 19 years old decreased to 0.43 (a decline of 0.05 points) versus the 2005 index value. In addition, the newly-added Transportation category provided some interesting insights. Most importantly, the index value for Reliance Upon Public Transportation was 0.25. The low index number means that nearly four times as many blacks rely more heavily on public transportation systems than whites.

Health comprises 25 percent of the index. Though the 2006 Health Index produced an identical result to last year's, two series had disturbing results. The All People Without Health Care series saw its index number slide to 0.57, a drop of 0.13 over the 2005 value. Moreover, the Uninsured Children series fell to 0.58, a decline of 0.21 versus the 2005 value. The implication of both insurance sub-indices is disturbing.

Education, which represents 25 percent of the 2006 Index, increased compared to the previous index number, comes courtesy of, among other things, an elevation in course quality. The index for high-school students enrolled in Chemistry and Algebra II saw jumps of 0.11 and 0.10, respectively, versus the 2005 data. In addition, College Enrollment of Recent High School Graduates rose 0.33 points to achieve an index value of 1.15.

The Social Justice component, comprising 10 percent of the index, had many gender-specific variables added this year that were not previously available. The gender-specific variables help to account for the increase in the Social Justice index as the data reveals that black females are treated more favorably than their male counterparts. For instance, of the sentences issued in 12 crime categories in the State Courts, sentences for black males were longer than white males in all of them. Black females found the justice system to be slightly more lenient than for black males. Of the sentences issued in 12 crime categories in State Courts, sentences for black females were longer than their white counterparts in all but four sub-categories. In addition, when looking at Probation Granted for Felons, the male designation produced an index number of 0.79. The female designation produced an index number of 1.04, which again speaks to black females faring better than black males in the justice system.

Civic engagement, which is 10 percent of the equality index, declined in number largely due to the Percent of Population Volunteering in the Military Reserves sub-index, which retreated by 0.31 points against the 2005 index number. In addition, Unionism and Union Representation both declined by 0.08. Under the Democratic Process category, the Registered Voters (0.95 index value) and Actually Voted (0.93 index value) sub-indices fell by 0.02 and 0.01 points, respectively, versus the 2005 index. It should be noted that the 2005 index had data from the 2000 presidential election. The 2006 index reflects the data from the 2004 election.

ESSAY 1

**Black Homeownership:
A Dream No Longer Deferred?**

by
Lance Freeman
Assistant Professor
Urban Planning Program
Columbia University

Black homeownership provides a foundation for financial security and is an important engine for wealth accumulation. The black homeownership rate, both absolutely and as a percentage of the white homeownership rate, is at an all-time high, thanks in large part to legislation in the 1960s and 1970s, such as the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA), intended to dismantle discriminatory housing barriers and the housing policy reforms of the 1990s that modified and strengthened them. Yet, black homeownership rates are still more than 25 percentage points below those of whites.

However, simply increasing black homeownership will not by itself close the wealth gap. While housing is still the major component of black wealth—perhaps dangerously so—blacks have much less equity in their homes than their white counterparts, largely because black homeowners are poorer than whites and, consequently, live in less costly homes.

But there are other culprits behind the lower levels of housing equity. Foremost is the high level of residential segregation between blacks and whites which in most cities has created a dual housing market whereby demand for homes in black neighborhoods is limited to black home seekers. Residential segregation also means that many middle-class and home-owning blacks live in neighborhoods that are overwhelmingly Black, where poverty rates are higher and amenities and services lower than those found for middle-class home-owning Whites. This too, leads to lower property values in Black neighborhoods and consequently less home equity and wealth among homeowners.

Another significant reason for this disparity is the unequal access to credit. Black homeowners pay, on average, six-tenths of a percentage point higher than their White counterparts. Over the course of a 30-year, \$200,000 mortgage, the difference in interest payments totals \$28,000, a sizable amount of equity lost to interest payments. While the higher interest rates paid by Blacks may reflect, in part, accurate assessments of the higher risk posed by some Black borrowers, there is evidence that some sub-prime borrowers could qualify for more favorable interest rates.

PRESCRIPTIONS FOR CHANGE

- 1) Combat racial discrimination in housing through vigorous enforcement of anti-bias laws;
- 2) Continue and strengthen policy reforms such as the Community Reinvestment Act and Home Mortgage Disclosure Act;
- 3) Improve financial literacy and education and information on access to credit.

ESSAY 2

The Racial Composition of American Jobs

by
Darrick Hamilton
Assistant Professor
Milano New School of Management and Urban Planning

Thirty-five years after Barbara Bergmann espoused the theory that black males are systematically "crowded" into lower earning occupations, occupational crowding is still relevant today. White employers' refusal to hire blacks in certain types of jobs forces them to cluster and creates crowding in less desirable jobs, reinforcing a condition of lower earnings in those occupations.

Today, there is a general pattern of exclusion in the most desired management, professional and related sector even for blacks that have the requisite educational qualifications. In contrast, service occupations offer some of the lowest wages, and contain a disproportionately high concentration of blacks. Construction, extraction and maintenance, and production, transportation and material moving are occupation sectors that require less education and offer low wages. Given the relative proportions of blacks in these two less skilled sectors, it appears as though low skilled blacks have relatively greater access to production, transportation, and material moving jobs.

There are two examples of occupational categories that, on the surface, seems to run counter to the "crowding" theory. Farm, forestry, and fishing are low-pay occupations that are not well represented with blacks while military occupations pay reasonably well and are overrepresented with blacks. Exclusion from the farm, forestry and fishing sector is likely the result of where most blacks live, and, at least in modern history, the military seems to have fewer restrictions on blacks than other occupations with similar pay.

PRESCRIPTION FOR CHANGE

Labor market interventions such as anti-discrimination laws and affirmative action policies are still needed, and must be strengthened, to redress the systematic crowding of blacks into low wage jobs and exclusion from high wage jobs.

ESSAY 3

Escaping the “Ghetto” of Subcontracting

by
Mark D. Turner
President
Optimal Solutions Group

The penchant of Black businesses for hiring and investing in minority employees, as well as supporting other Black-owned enterprises, gives testimony to the direct link between the success of Black businesses and the empowerment of the African-American community. These firms allow for the transfer of knowledge, wealth, and human capital to the community.

In recent years, small minority-owned businesses (SMB) have firmly established a niche in the world of subcontracting—proffering competency, specialized expertise, and business acumen to larger and more lucrative prime contractors. The present burgeoning of SMBs is, arguably, a direct result of the unique opportunity that subcontracting offers—a significant lowering of the barrier to entry. Typically, SMBs possess less startup capital and lack established past performance histories.

Sole dependence on subcontracting, however, limits a company’s opportunity for growth, financial independence, and self-determination. A prolonged dependence on revenues derived from one or a limited number of prime contractors is not a wise strategy for sustainable profitability. Moreover, a prolonged dependence on subcontracting has become increasingly precarious. Anecdotal evidence suggests that quite often, small firms do not have subcontract agreements that clearly delineate the scope of work, schedule of payments, and the terms and conditions for terminating contractual agreements. In some instances, they do not have anything in writing from the prime contractor. In these cases, disputes between the sub and prime contractors can result in costly litigation and possible non-payment.

SMBs and their communities will only be poised to take full advantage of the economic momentum of America’s 21st Century if SMBs escape the ghetto of subcontracting. In order for this to happen, SMBs must begin the transition from sub to prime contractors. Subcontracting allows SMBs to learn from seasoned companies, accumulate revenue, and develop their economies of scale. It provides an opportunity to solidify a corporate structure that will provide for sustainable and competitive growth.

PRESCRIPTIONS FOR CHANGE

In order to move from subcontracting to prime contracting, SMBs should:

- 1) view subcontracting as a necessary stepping stone, not a permanent state;
- 2) develop relationships not only with small business officers, but with end users and contracting officers;
- 3) Always under-promise and over-deliver; and
- 4) periodically re-assess the market, their offerings and future demand for their product/services

ESSAY 4

The State of Our Children

by
Marian Wright Edelman
President
Children's Defense Fund

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great German Protestant theologian executed for opposing Hitler's holocaust, said the test of the morality of a society is how it treats its children. The United States of America is flunking Bonhoeffer's test.

The day after Hurricane Katrina hit, the U.S. Census Bureau released the latest data on American poverty showing that in 2004 poverty increased in our rich country for the fourth year in a row. The number of American children living in poverty has grown by 12.8 percent over the last four years, and is now more than 13 million. This means 1.5 million more children were poor in 2004 than in 2000.

As these numbers were being released, the Bush administration and Congress were sharing their recently-enacted plan to cut tens of billions of dollars from the budget for programs desperately needed by low and moderate income families and especially by Katrina evacuees. Worse, they proposed to cut billions from health and mental health care, foster care, food assistance, and other safety net programs in order to give tens of billions of dollars in additional tax cuts to powerful special interests. And the callousness has not stopped with more budget cuts being proposed in the new 2007 administration budget and efforts to make permanent the irresponsible tax cuts enacted earlier. The words have been eloquent but the budgets have been mean.

In 2005, the Senate rejected Senator Edward Kennedy's amendment to set a national goal to cut child poverty in half within a decade and to eliminate it entirely as soon as possible. At a time when all the nations of the world have set Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to decrease global poverty, it is time for the richest nation on earth to lead by example and set MDGs for its own children and people. Poverty is the principal weapon of mass destruction driving the Cradle to Prison Pipeline™ crisis that wastes so many child lives. Keeping 13 million children in poverty costs taxpayers hundreds of billions of dollars in dependency and opportunity costs and lost future productivity. For less than the annual tax cut our leaders chose to give the top 1 percent of the wealthiest Americans, we could close the poverty gap for those 13 million children and put them on a path of hope and healing, towards productive adulthood rather than prison, and close rather than widen the gulf between Lazarus and Dives today, realize Dr. King's and America's dream, and save America's soul.

PRESCRIPTIONS FOR CHANGE

Congress and the Administration must:

- 1) Increase the federal minimum wage;
- 2) Set a national goal of reducing child poverty by half within a decade and eliminating it as soon as possible thereafter; and
- 3) Eliminate further tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans and redirect funds to a Child Poverty Elimination Fund.

ESSAY 5

Hurricane Katrina Exposed the Face of Poverty

by
Maya Wiley
Director
Center for Social Inclusion

As a nation, we face a rising tide. The flood waters of Lake Pontchartrain and the mighty Mississippi River reminded us that poverty, while it comes in all colors, is disproportionately black. The broken levees also showed us that our disinvestment in our public infrastructure harms us all, even if it does not harm us all equally.

We have eliminated legalized racial discrimination against people of color, but have left the structures it produced intact. This is structural racism, which has five primary characteristics: 1) it is not race neutral; 2) history matters in that the structure of our society has been constructed over time and racial hierarchy has been an integral part of that restructuring; 3) effects matter because they tell us how the structure operates so that intentional bad acts are irrelevant; 4) racial disparities are effects that show the structure does not operate neutrally; and 5) everyone is harmed by the structure, even if we see it most glaringly in majority people of color communities.

The structures have unevenly distributed the benefits and burdens of our public policies and private actions. For example, many outer-ring suburbs, which have become among the most opportunity-rich communities in most metropolitan areas, have received a much larger allocation of transportation infrastructure funds than their urban neighbors. When these wealthy, less-populated suburbs are built, inner-city tax dollars subsidize their sewers, utility lines and new schools. The poor are paying for the rich. And often lower-income blacks are paying to support better-off whites.

Policies and actions driving racialized suburbanization have divided us as a nation. It has reduced our cross-racial interaction, fragmented our governmental structures between cities and suburbs, and it has made both city and suburbs, still critical in the globalizing economy and in the national consciousness, weak and unsustainable.

However, there is a way out—the rising waters are also a rising tide of possibility. Efforts to reduce central city poverty have led to an increase in regional wealth and a reduction of regional poverty. We must cross urban and suburban governmental fragmentation, business and community group divisions, and racial group identities to work together and invest in the poorest people and their communities, to connect them to opportunities like jobs in growth sectors, training and educational opportunities, transportation and housing. The state of Black America is the state of the nation. We, black and white, single mother and two-parent household, citizen and undocumented, all of us are critical to the strengthening of our nation and the success of our democracy.

ESSAY 6

Race, Poverty, and Healthcare Disparities

by
Brian D. Smedley
Research Director
The Opportunity Agenda

“Of all the forms of injustice, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane”
— *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Americans spend nearly \$2 trillion on healthcare annually, far more per capita than any other nation in the world. Still, the United States ranks 37th of 191 countries in a World Health Organization assessment of the world’s health systems.

The United States fares poorly in large measure because of its marked inequality. The persistence of healthcare inequality is remarkable in a nation that has an abundance of healthcare resources. As with many other dimensions of American inequality, racial and poverty gaps in healthcare were never more evident than in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

The number of Americans without health insurance reached an all-time high of 45.8 million in 2004, and more than 80 million Americans lacked health insurance for all or part of 2002 and 2003. While an increasing number of businesses are reducing or eliminating employee health benefits, for-profit specialty and “boutique” healthcare services are spreading in upper-income communities. And despite growing awareness among policymakers of the phenomenon, patients’ race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status still determines the timeliness and quality of his or her healthcare. These gaps threaten to worsen if some trends—such as the drive to privatize an increasing share of public healthcare programs—continue.

Healthcare inequality must be tackled by state and federal efforts to develop a universally accessible, comprehensive, and equitable healthcare system. Access to healthcare can be expanded by: 1) Creating a “Medicare for all” national single-payer plan; and 2) covering all children under a comprehensive health insurance plan.

Achieving an equitable, universal health system in the United States will not be easy, given the nation’s long history of tacit (and sometimes explicit) tolerance of inequality in healthcare. Active partnerships between government, healthcare providers and institutions, health systems, and other important stakeholders—such as the business community, labor, faith groups, and others—will be necessary to create the political will to develop and sustain these policy goals. But the pressures for a more just, cost-effective, and fair healthcare system are mounting. We ignore them at our peril.

ESSAY 7

The State of Civil Rights

by
The Honorable Nathaniel R. Jones
Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit (Retired)
Senior Counsel
Blank Rome LLP

The state of civil rights in America is most precarious.

This should come as no surprise to the civil rights advocates who have been manning the barricades. The warning signs have been many.

The most ominous warning came from the late Justice Thurgood Marshall in the final dissenting opinion he wrote before retiring from the Supreme Court. One need only look at subsequent decisions of the Supreme Court on civil rights remedies, and in cases that impact on the rights of minorities and the poor, to know that Justice Marshall's warning is coming to pass.

Moreover, events surrounding the 2000 and 2004 presidential and congressional elections, followed by the way in which the federal judicial nominating process has been manipulated, have proven Justice Marshall prescient. Voting rights are at the core of the people's right of self-determination. When that ability is impaired, the officials who do get elected frequently dismiss or are deaf to the pleas of racial minorities.

A recent example of this took place in the cynical way United States Senators turned a deaf ear to the protests raised by black and minority voters over Supreme Court nominees. Sadly, some Senators allowed their political partisanship and electoral cowardice to override their solemn duty. This was a classic instance of non-accountability that cries out for a renewal and expansion of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

There is a daunting fear that as a result of the way federal judicial nominations were made and the confirmation process was conducted, the ability of civil rights advocates to continue relying upon the federal courts to define and enforce remedies may have been seriously undercut. Those who relied upon the jurisprudence developed and refined by Charles Hamilton Houston, Thurgood Marshall, William H. Hastie, and the civil rights bills enacted under the leadership of Clarence Mitchell, Whitney M. Young, Jr., Joseph Rauh and others, must be eternally vigilant and work to arouse the nation to the peril that confronts civil rights. As Justice Marshall warned, "scores of established constitutional liberties are now ripe for reconsideration." What was true when he wrote this is now, with the Supreme Court changed, even more true.

ESSAY 8

Racial Disparities Drive Prison Boom

by
George E. Curry
Editor-in-Chief
National Newspaper Publishers Association
and
BlackPressUSA.com

The number of persons in jail and prison grew by 462,006 in the seven decades between 1910 and 1980. In the 1990s alone, that figure was almost doubled as the number of people in prison and jail increased by 816,965. The prison and jail population grew by almost 900 inmates a week between mid-2003 and mid-2004, reaching 2.1 million people or one in every 138 U.S. residents by last June.

One study concluded, “The number of people behind bars not only dwarfs America’s historical incarceration rates; it defies international comparisons as well. While America has about 5 percent of the world’s population, almost one in four persons incarcerated worldwide are incarcerated in the U.S.” That dramatic prison growth has been fueled primarily by harsher punishment for drug offenses.

“Responding to a perceived problem of high rates of drug abuse in the late 1970s, the Reagan administration and other political leaders officially launched a ‘war on drugs’ policy in 1982,” recounts a report by the Sentencing Project. “Within a few years, both funding for drug law enforcement and a political focus on the drug war had increased substantially. As a result, there was a surge of arrests for drug offenses in the 1980s. The total of 581,000 arrests in 1980 nearly tripled to a record high of 1,584,000 by 1997 and continues to close at that level with 1,532,300 in 1999.”

Looking at it from a global perspective, the United States has 100,000 more persons behind bars *just for drug offenses* (458,131) than the European Union has *for all offenses* (356,626), even though the EU has 100 million more people than the U.S. The escalating arrest rates had another negative impact. “As the number of arrests grew, so did the proportion of African Americans, from 24 percent of all drugs arrests in 1980 to 39 percent by 1993,” says an October 1995 report from the Sentencing Project titled “Young Black Americans and the Criminal Justice System: Five Years Later.”

REPORT FROM THE NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE POLICY INSTITUTE

Sunday Morning Apartheid: A Diversity Study of the Sunday Morning Talk Shows

by
Stephanie J. Jones
Executive Director
National Urban League Policy Institute

Concerned about the paucity of African Americans in the media venues that help to shape public opinion and influence policy, the National Urban League Policy Institute undertook an in-depth study of the guest lineups of the Sunday morning political talk shows. The study, covering the period from January 2004 through December 31, 2005, revealed, among other things, that:

- Sixty-one percent of all of the Sunday morning talk shows featured no black guests;
- Eighty percent of the broadcasts contained no interviews with black guests;
- Eight percent of the more than 2,800 guest appearances have been by black guests;
- One person—Juan Williams, a commentator for Fox News—accounts for 40 percent of all appearances by black guests;
- Three guests—Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell, and Juan Williams—account for 65 percent of all appearances by black guests;
- The vast majority of interviews with black guests other than Rice and Powell focus partisan political issues such as the 2004 Elections, rather than broader policy issues such as the economy, national security, and foreign affairs.

Sunday morning talk shows are more than a mere source of news; they are a crucial staple in the public discussion, understanding and interpretation of politics and government and other public policy issues in the United States. Each Sunday, these programs frame the perception and coverage of issues that have a substantial impact on the American public. Yet, with few exceptions, week after week, they continue to present their audiences with virtually all-white panels to deconstruct the issues of the day, even after being put on notice that this problem exists, leaving the impression that interest in and analysis of these topics are “for whites only.”

Broadening the pool of guests improves the tenor and quality of the debate, offers a richer and more varied array of information to viewers and helps fulfill the news outlets responsibility to educate its audience so that they will be better equipped to make informed political and policy choices.

The National Urban League urges the cable and broadcast networks to carefully consider these findings, assess their processes and aggressively work to diversify their on-air presentations. It is time for Sunday Morning Apartheid to end.

SPECIAL SECTION: KATRINA AND BEYOND

New Orleans Revisited

by
Marc H. Morial
President and Chief Executive Officer
National Urban League

The day after Katrina, pictures of New Orleanians stranded and suffering at both the Louisiana Superdome and the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center hit the national news. Their faces, filled with so much pain and struggle, shocked both my wife and me. I was sad and angry, because I knew there was no reason that people should have been at the Superdome or the Convention Center, the landmark that bears my father's name, without food, water and medical supplies. Something had gone very, very wrong.

When I visited New Orleans a few weeks later, I arrived to a city that was completely abandoned. There were few signs of life. On that first day back, I visited my old neighborhood, Pontchartrain Park. I knew earlier it had been completely covered by water. Now dry, it was gray and lonely.

On Caffin Avenue, we looked to our left and saw the long white limousine that was a signature vehicle for the Glapion Funeral Home, had been carried two blocks by the sheer force of the water. The gap in the levee was several city blocks long and the path it cut was like a powerful bomb, shattering every structure in its wake. There was rubble; people's homes and cars were scattered everywhere. The pain, the sadness, the sense of loss that came over all of us who were part of that trip was numbing. Despite it all, many homes were still standing. I came away believing that all of these neighborhoods could make a comeback. If the will of the people was there and with proper planning, resources and a commitment by the federal government to build a first-class levee system, it could be possible.

As we rode back across the St. Claude Avenue Bridge toward downtown New Orleans, we encountered a man walking swiftly with what appeared to be a large book. He recognized me and we embraced. He said that he had walked 55 blocks, defying the order to stay away from the lower 9th Ward area. He not only wanted to see his home, but retrieve his large family Bible. That was what he carried under his arm and he said it was one of the few things in his home that was not completely destroyed. Seeing his home had brought him to closure, and retrieving his treasured family Bible gave him the power and strength to move on.

I still love the Big Easy and all of its people. We are not perfect. We have suffered so greatly, but by the grace of God and the will of our spirit, New Orleanians will rebuild and live again.

SPECIAL SECTION: KATRINA AND BEYOND

New Orleans: Next Steps on the Road to Recovery

by
Donna L. Brazile
Managing Director
Brazile and Associates, LLC

Unfortunately, while nature may treat all of us equally, Katrina and Rita showed us that society does not. Blacks and whites did not even look at the disaster through the same set of lens. According to a report by the Pew Center for The People & The Press, two-thirds of African Americans polled said that if most victims had been white, there would have been a quicker government response. By an even larger margin—77 percent—whites said race played no part in the government response to the hurricanes.

Clearly, our country still has enormous problems with racial and economic inequality that are too easily brushed aside when the next news cycle rolls in. Now, more than ever, we must have a frank conversation about what it means to be poor in America and what we can do alleviate the pain and suffering of citizens who work two and three minimum-wage jobs to survive. We owe it to the victims of hurricanes Katrina and Rita to, once again, summon this nation to eradicate poverty. We owe it to them to fight for justice. We owe it to them to increase economic opportunity for all Americans. Members of our generation must now work together to end racism and poverty in America.

Our first duty to the Gulf State residents must be to ensure that the devastation of last fall is not forgotten or pushed off the national agenda. Also, we are going to need the continued support of the president and members of Congress to get the federal funding that states require. The administration is showing a reluctance to commit to long-term rebuilding without an adequate plan from state and local leaders. We must make sure that federal housing vouchers and targeted rental assistance are available to those that need them.

Lastly, providing a living wage is also critical. Since poor families are hurt when their members lack basic needs and standards of care, we must hold our government accountable for its pledge to promote strong and stable families. And people need more than a temporary raise in wages—they must be trained for quality jobs that will permanently increase their earning potential and continue to keep them and their families afloat. Getting the training needed to break into higher-paying jobs will interrupt the cycle of poverty.



National
Urban League

*Empowering Communities.
Changing Lives.*

**Publications Department
120 Wall Street, 8th Floor
New York, NY 10005
212/558-5316 (o)
212/344-5189 (f)**

**TO ORDER
books and magazines published by
the National Urban League:**

Mail order form with company check or money order to:

National Urban League
120 Wall Street, 8th Floor
New York, NY 10005
Attn: Finance/Publications Department

or

Send order form via fax or email:
212/344-5189 ♦ rjefferson@nul.org

For additional information on bulk sales, please contact
Rose Jefferson, Publications Manager
212/558-5315 or 5316