

A movement for a new era of transformation

Written by Scott Gray, MUL President/CEO
Tuesday, 02 July 2013 11:20

Last week at our annual gala the Minneapolis Urban League celebrated 87 years as an organization in the movement for civil rights, social justice, and economic empowerment for African Americans. With the changing times, changing demographics, and changing priorities, I am often challenged to defend the need for an organization like the Urban League. There is currently a wealth gap, an education gap, a jobs gap, an opportunity gap – each a mile long that is pervasive in the African American community and I am bothered that the fire that started the civil rights movement years ago seems to have dimmed.

In my remarks I shared that the Minneapolis Urban League is calling for a New Era of Transformation. An era that is strategic and focused, an era that is passionate about the fight, and an era that is persistent and determined to drive change in our communities. In preparing to honor our 2013 trailblazer, Dr. Josie Johnson, I had the privilege of spending some time with her discussing the progress of the movement. Dr. Johnson is someone who was around for the marches and protests of 1963 and led delegations to ensure the successful passing of the Voting Rights Act. I was inspired and reenergized to continue the press for progress.

The events of the last couple of weeks have served as a bitter reminder that our society has changed much and that a new era will require knowing and celebrating our history, employing new tactics and having a laser-like focus.

We must be strategic and focused. The Supreme Court is poised to provide greater scrutiny over affirmative action and has stricken parts of the Voting Rights Act that was so hard fought by our civil rights luminaries. We must share our disdain, hold our officials accountable and fight against legislation that sets our community back.

We must be passionate about progress and the lack thereof. And while the Supreme Court argued that racial polarization does not exist, ironic scenes played out in the media from the racist comments surrounding the mixed race Cheerios commercial, the release of George Zimmerman's interrogation in the Trayvon Martin case, or to the racist remarks in the deposition of celebrity chef Paula Dean. These are the mixed messages that consume the media while all the while our people are falling further and further behind. Let's not be caught up in the hype and the drama and recognize that while racism certainly still exists. It is most damaging when it plays out in our institutions, our workplaces, and livelihoods.

We must be passionate about driving change in our communities. The new era of transformation is a fight to close the opportunity gaps. Many of us feel that we have arrived because we've obtained status, wealth, or opportunity but the truth is there is still much work to be done. Many of us are now business owners, CEO's, executive directors, superintendents, leaders, pastors, principals, and decision makers. It is true more of us have prospered but the masses are still marginalized.

President Obama called this opportunity gap the "defining issue of our time...No challenge is more urgent. No debate is more important." We must not be afraid to drive change in our communities from the inside. Our community needs us to step up, show support, limit excuses, exhibit high ethics, and make change happen. Rekindle the passion for progress; embrace this new era of transformation and let's continue to drive opportunity for all.