

To Be Equal: The state of Black America: Washington are you listening?

Written by Marc H. Morial
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“Welcome to America in the second decade of the 21st century.□ An army of long-term unemployed workers is spread across the land, the human fallout from the Great Recession and long years of misguided economic policies.” - Bob Herbert’s final column for the New York Times

Last week, the nation’s leading historic civil rights organization, the National Urban League, came together with the nation’s leading historic Black university, Howard University, to hold the first ever State of Black America town hall meeting focusing on the jobs crisis in urban America. The Town Hall, hosted by Howard President, Sidney Ribeau, culminated two days of meetings with Congressmen and Senators on Capitol Hill where Urban Leaguers from across the country made the case: There can be no complete economic recovery as long as already too high unemployment for African Americans continues to go up even as the overall unemployment rate gradually ticks down.

Yes, we were pleased to learn last week that the unemployment rate has fallen to 8.8 percent, the lowest level in two years. And, we applaud the actions by the Obama Administration – the Stimulus bill, Health Care Reform and Bank Reform – that have kept the mighty titanic of the American economy from sinking to the bottom of the sea. But, this is no time for a victory party. As the National Urban League’s 2011 Equality Index reveals, there remain large and widening gaps between the status of African Americans and whites in this country, particularly in the areas of economics and children’s health. For Hispanics there are big gaps too, especially in the area of college enrollment. And, with Black unemployment now at 15.5 percent and Hispanic unemployment at 11.3 percent, clearly, it is time to declare war on inequality and unemployment in urban communities of color.

As we stated at the Town Hall, we must not let other major concerns, including war and partisan fights about deficit reduction, distract us from the number one issue facing the American people – jobs, jobs, jobs. The National Urban League’s nearly 100 affiliates across the country haven’t lost that focus. We remain economic first responders for millions of Americans desperately seeking to rebuild their lives, families, and communities in the wake of the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. We highlighted three outstanding examples at our Town Hall.

Lonnie Grayson, President of Environmental & Safety Solutions, Inc. has been able to win new contracts and double his workforce with the help of the Entrepreneurship Center of the Urban League of Cincinnati. The Urban League of Philadelphia helped David Simms, owner of Eatible Delights Catering, develop new branding and marketing tools that have boosted his business. And Donna Hodge Harper of Newark, an unemployed casualty of the great recession, said that were it not for the job training and job placement assistance she received from the Urban League of Essex County, she doesn’t know where she would be today.

Lonnie, David, and Donna show us how to dig urban America out of the great recession: Training for 21st century jobs. Putting investments in people over the politics of deficit reduction. Summer jobs for teens. All of these solutions are part of the National Urban League’s 12-points jobs plan. Washington, are you listening?

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To view the town hall webcast and find out how you can obtain a copy of the 2011 State of Black America Report log on to www.nul.org

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