

# OPINION

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## Entrepreneurial Mindset Needed

### Joblessness gloom must not setback economic progress

BY MARC H. MORIAL

The federal Department of Labor has delivered the latest news from the jobs front and it is gloomy.

The unemployment rate from May to June jumped from 6.1 percent to 6.4 percent as the economy shed another 30,000 jobs to add to the 200,000 lost earlier this year.

The number of Americans looking for work but unable to find it rose past 9 million for the first time in a decade. As worrisome, more than half of the unemployed have been looking for a job for longer than 12 weeks, a 20-year high. Now, the jobless spend an average of nearly 20 weeks looking for work, a 19-year high.

However, the report's most alarming fact is that the increase in unemployment was almost completely driven by the rise in black unemployment. It jumped a full percentage point, from 10.8 percent to 11.8 percent.

By comparison, the jobless rates

for adult women (5.2 percent), whites (5.5 percent), and Hispanic Americans (8.4 percent) were little changed from May. While the number of whites employed grew, the number of African Americans employed declined.

Thus, here's more evidence that the inability of African Americans to find work is returning to the "twice-as-great-as-whites" ratio that plagued Black America for most

During that decade, the black middle class recorded significant gains in income and other measures of economic vitality.

But it was the black poor who made the most significant economic mark of the period: Their hunger for work led them to rush to fill the millions of low-wage service jobs the decade's prosperity created at the bottom of the economic ladder—a "jobs rush" which drove the black

unemployment rate down to an historic low of 7.2 percent in 1999.

That historic decline indicates the potential

among African Americans for concentrated "work" on becoming economically self-sufficient isn't limited to those who are white-collar professionals, or their fortunate younger brethren crowding undergraduate and graduate business schools.

The issue is how best to develop that potential to its maximum. One step is the development of an "entrepreneurial mindset." In business terms, that means having the creativity to figure how to build the proverbial better mousetrap.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

*The inability of African Americans to find work is returning to the "twice-as-great-as-whites" ratio that plagued Black America for most of the past three decades.*

—National Urban League President Marc H. Morial

of the past three decades.

It would be cruel to blithely say, "look for the silver lining" in all this hardship and misery.

But in the face of this crisis of double-digit unemployment rates, one can soberly and in fact, urgently, advise African Americans and the nation as a whole to seize the opportunity to focus its energies even more on gaining economic strength.

I say "even more" because the 1990s made it clear that black Americans of all economic classes understand the value of economic self-sufficiency, the value of work and the honor in working.



## Bush's Vendetta with Venezuela

BY MARK WEISBROT

The United States has always had a bad reputation for the way it treats its neighbors south of the border. But now Washington's treatment of Venezuela has been an embarrassment even by the low standards of diplomacy that it maintains for the region.

The Bush administration endorsed a military coup against the democratically elected government of Hugo Chavez last year. That's about as bad as you can get, although it may have been worse: There were numerous meetings between Bush administration officials and coup leaders in the months preceding the coup. Opposition groups also received increased funding — some of it still unaccounted for — from the U.S. government prior to the coup.

The major media in the United States have mostly joined our government in its hostility to Venezuela. In an editorial that was as scandalous as the exploits of reporter Jayson Blair, "The New York Times" also endorsed the military coup. The editorial board issued a half-hearted retraction a few days later. But there were few American journalists who bothered to ask how the most influential newspaper in the world's most influential democracy could have made the mistake of endorsing a military coup against a democratically elected government.

Chavez's major crime seems to be that he was elected mainly by Venezuela's poor, who previously had little voice in the corrupt political system that had ruled the country for four decades. It appears that our government, as well as most of our foreign policy establishment, respects democracy only when "the right people" win elections.

We have gone down this road before. Our government spent bil-

*It appears that our government, as well as most of our foreign policy establishment, respects democracy only when "the right people" win elections.*

ions of dollars and financed the killing of thousands of people — mostly innocents — trying to overthrow the government of Nicaragua in the 1980s. That government was democratically elected in 1984, but it made no difference to Washington. The result of American efforts is a still devastated country — 13 years after the war ended — with most Nicaraguans actually worse off than they were 40 years ago. The impact on our own democracy was harmful as well, as it led to the

Iran-Contra scandal.

Unfortunately some of the same people who were implicated in that scandal are determining U.S. policy in Venezuela today, viewing their mission through the same distorted ideological lens. Chief among them is Otto Reich, who is currently serving as White House special envoy for Western Hemisphere Initiatives, and expresses unrelenting antagonism toward Venezuela. Last month Washington cut off credits from the U.S. Export-Import Bank to Venezuela, for reasons that appear to be political rather than economic.

Venezuela is a constitutional democracy, with complete freedom of the press, speech, assembly and association. The opposition controls the major media and their TV news broadcasts are so partisan that most people here would not recognize them as journalism. The opposition also has about 48 percent of the seats in the national congress and controls most of the country's wealth.

If the reader has the impression that Venezuela is not a democracy, it is mainly because our own media regularly repeat opposition charges — that the government is "authoritarian" or "Castro-communist" — often without rebuttal.

Mark Weisbrot is co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, in Washington, D.C. ([www.cepr.net](http://www.cepr.net)).

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