

OPINION

Pressing On for Jobs and Equality

Obama defends progressive values

BY MARC H. MORIAL

After months of reaching out to the other side to find common ground on the issues of job creation and deficit reduction, President Obama's recent speech at the Congressional Black Caucus dinner signaled a shift towards a more robust defense of the progressive values he shares with the CBC, the National Urban League and millions of middle class and working class Americans.

The President used the speech to contrast his vision of equal opportunity and shared sacrifice with those in Congress who are only looking



out for big business and the wealthy.

He also reminded us that despite fierce opposition, his Administration, with the help of the CBC, has accomplished much that has benefitted African Americans. This includes a payroll tax cut; an expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit; enactment of the strongest consumer financial protections in history; making college loans more affordable; investments in early childhood education, community colleges and HBCUs; and passage of a health care law that has already resulted in one million more young people having health insurance.

This real progress has largely been

drowned out by the loud and raucous partisan opposition that has dominated much of the President's first term in office. But President Obama also acknowledged that with unemployment approaching 17 percent among African Americans and almost half of African American children living in poverty, much more needs to be done.

The blueprint for the work that lies ahead is contained in his American Jobs Act, which includes a number of measures I have personally pushed for in direct meetings with the President. These include summer jobs for teens, infrastructure investments and direct job creation.

The President also shares our belief that funding for these and other provisions in his bill requires that the wealthiest Americans and

the biggest corporations pay their fair share. He said, "Warren Buffet's secretary shouldn't pay a higher tax rate than Warren Buffet."

A teacher or a nurse or a construction worker making \$50,000 a year shouldn't pay higher tax rates than somebody making \$50 million a year. That's just common sense." We agree.

And while I support the President's demand that Congress pass this jobs bill now, I have also urged improvements to ensure that its benefits do not bypass urban communities.

For example, infrastructure spending needs to be expanded beyond schools and transportation to include work on community centers and libraries to bring more jobs to urban neighborhoods.

Job training is also needed to prepare more urban residents for work refurbishing foreclosed properties. And funding for these and other projects should be provided directly to municipalities rather than through the states to ensure that communities hardest hit by unemployment are not left behind.

The President's speech paid homage to the leadership and sacrifices of civil rights legends like Rev. Joseph Lowery and Congressman John Lewis. He urged all of us to follow their example and "press on" for the sake of jobs, equality and our children. I urge him to keep up the pressure and carry that message to every corner of this country.

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

Serious Case of Misguided Nostalgia?

Learning from the Columbus' story

BY SARA JOSEPH

Many of us will never forget that famous elementary school rhyme: "In fourteen hundred ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue."



At the time, it's not likely that we would have sensed any looming controversy behind those grade school lessons. With Columbus Day being observed this week, however, it's worth asking whether affection for the holiday is really a serious case of misguided nostalgia.

Columbus Day celebrates the "discovery" of the Americas. But it's clear that the continent had already been inhabited by well-established indigenous communities.

The people who already lived in the region welcomed the first European immigrants with curiosity and open hearts and minds. But it soon became clear that the explorers sent by European royalty had come to dominate, defeat, and destroy.

On Oct. 12, 1492, Columbus wrote of the native people he encountered: "They should be good servants...they can all be subjugated and made to do what is required of them."

Columbus is credited with forging the first links between American and European civilizations. But whether the manner in which

these cultures collided merits commemoration as a federal holiday is doubtful at best.

Throughout most of the Americas, schoolchildren don't remember Columbus Day with cutesy images of the Nina, Pinta, and Santa Maria. In fact, it's often called by an entirely different name: Dia de la Raza (Latin American Heritage Day). This is a way to recognize indigenous roots in the Americas. It also serves as a tribute to the lives and civilizations lost in the name of slavery and European expansion — beginning with Columbus' arrival in 1492.

Today, Latin American and Caribbean schoolchildren that migrate to the United States are unlikely to

receive a hero's welcome. In fact, they are often forced to live in the shadows as their parents struggle to survive. Presidential hopeful Michele Bachmann recently went so far as to mock Rick Perry's statement that anyone with a "heart" would want to protect the rights of immigrant children to an education — even if they were brought to the United States "through no fault of their own."

Migration across what's now the U.S.-Mexican border has existed for centuries. The reality is that this history was marked by periodic shared interest in promoting immigration. But as economic and anti-narcotic policies initiated by Washington have increased pressure on Latin American people to migrate, immigration has become a hot-button is-

sue for people across the political spectrum.

To many, the flow of immigration seems daunting. Bachmann recently proposed a solution: "Build a barrier, a fence, a wall...every mile, every yard, every foot, every inch will be covered on that southern border."

But spending billions on border militarization hasn't stopped undocumented migration. In fact, one of the only notable outcomes of beefing up the border has been more death, danger, and lives lost in the desert.

Ideally, every October we would celebrate the coming together of the cultures of the Americas. Sadly, the legacy of cultural domination and separation continues with border

militarization as a tenet of our foreign policy.

According to President Barack Obama, it is Columbus' "intrepid character and spirit of possibility that has come to define America, and is the reason countless families still journey to our shores."

To whom is Obama referring if not the immigrants who come to the United States for a chance to support their families? On this Columbus Day, let's consider the discrepancy between how newcomers are celebrated in our history but ostracized in our society — and what we can learn from a modern analysis of Columbus' story.

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