

# OPINION

## Vote to Educate, Employ and Empower

A powerful weapon in the arsenal of democracy

BY MARC H. MORIAL

The National Urban League took its fight for jobs, education, voting rights and empowerment to Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., last week.

In meetings with Obama Administration officials and leaders from both parties in Congress, we demanded immediate action on the persistent jobs crisis, and we offered our own eight-point plan to educate, employ and empower the 13 million Americans who remain out of work.

The highlight of our three-day occupation of the nation's capital was the release of our annual

State of Black America report on the campus of Howard University. A host of civil rights, political, business, youth and religious leaders joined together

for an open-dialogue about some of the most pressing issues facing black America. In this election year, no issue is more important than galvanizing voter participation and turning back the current assault on voting rights that threatens to disenfranchise as many as five million Americans this year.

As Congress wrestles over measures to create jobs and grow the economy, a multi-state effort is underway to exclude those Americans most profoundly affected by the political process.

Last year, more than half a century after the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, 34 states attempted to pass legislation that would impose unrea-

sonable voting restrictions or absurd penalties limiting the registration process. Despite the efforts of civil rights groups and others, these bills have become law in 14 states, with bills in 26 states still pending.

This coordinated attack on the

have made clear, millions of Americans are fed up with growing income inequality.

Our own 2012 State of Black America "Equality Index" finds the economic status of African-Americans relative to whites is only 56.3 percent. For Hispan-

out the nation. Citizens across the country are joining the U.S. Department of Justice, civil rights groups and the Congressional Black Caucus in challenging these blatant attacks on voting rights.

Our 2012 State of Black America report also contains essays from national experts on ways to improve urban education, support small businesses, and promote better nutrition, especially among urban youth.

Although the State of Black America is not yet what we want it to be, it is my hope that this year's report will inspire all Americans to Occupy the Vote to Educate, Employ and Empower.

To find out how you can get a copy of the 2012 State of Black America, log on to [iamempowered.com](http://iamempowered.com).

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



*In a moment that cries out for greater civic participation, some are intent on silencing our voices and taking away the most powerful weapon in the arsenal of democracy – the right to vote.*

rights of citizens to participate in their government comes at a particularly perilous time for communities of color.

The African-American unemployment rate is hovering above 13 percent. Latino unemployment stands at nearly 11 percent. And as various "Occupy" movements across the country

ics, the economic equality Index is 60 percent. In a moment that cries out for greater civic participation, some are intent on silencing our voices and taking away the most powerful weapon in the arsenal of democracy – the right to vote.

Fortunately, this issue is catching fire in Washington and through-

## Bullying or Shaming Others is Never Cool

You can never undo the damage

BY BENTLEY DE BARDELABEN

Conservative media host Rush Limbaugh has made national news for provocative and misogynistic comments he made about Georgetown University law student Sandra Fluke. Ms. Fluke recently spoke before members of the House of Representatives about why she believed insurance coverage for contraception was essential for women's overall healthcare. About one month ago, CNN's Roland Martin tweeted an incendiary and



homophobic comment during the Super Bowl about men who may have found appealing an ad featuring soccer player David Beckham in his underwear. And nearly 18 months ago, Dr. Laura Schlessinger found herself in a kerfuffle when she went into a racist rant shouting the "N-word" 11 times within five minutes to an African-American female caller.

Fortunately each offender did apologize, but not before suffering some form of push back from the general public that they are well compensated to serve. To date, Rush has lost dozens of program sponsors and counting. Roland is on indefinite suspension from any CNN broadcast. And Dr. Laura, citing the violation of her "First Amendment Rights," lost spon-

sors as well and decided to end her show after her contract expired.

Apart from the horrors of chattel slavery when bullying was legal, at what stage did we decide that bullying or shaming other human beings is permissible? As citizens of a 21st century society, have we not yet learned this crucial lesson?

As an ordained minister, I am vastly aware that "be kind" is still a message taught in many homes, schools and religious buildings across the globe. As a child I heard similar sayings from my family, my elementary and Sunday school teachers who understood their role in shaping behavior around public discourse. For example, "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything

at all." Or, "Do unto others as you would want them to do unto you."

Now I am certainly not a person who would be described by others as prudish. However, although I have made my fair share of mistakes in relating to others, I must realize that I am solely responsible for my actions—positive or negative, as are the individuals cited above. I believe they also know this to be fact.

As a person who has spent countless hours as a diversity trainer, I understand that once an action has harmed another's heart and soul, you can never undo the damage. The bottom line is bullying or shaming others is never cool! It is perversely cruel. It is detrimental to the spirits of both parties.

And the cost of such behavior can hurt the wounded person for years.

As adults we can learn skills to get through these dark, sick moments. Our children, on the other hand, are not so well equipped. Therefore, let us step up as adults and leaders to counter hate messages that undermine others, no matter where the messages originate and to whom they are launched.

Together we must demand better from ourselves, our families, and our leaders no matter our race, gender, sexual orientation or political affiliation. Remember, each first step toward the change we seek begins with ourselves.

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