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OPINION

Triumphs and Tragedies for Progress

Pointing the way forward

BY MARC H. MORIAL

As the sun rises over the promise of a brighter new year, we have put together a list of the top 10 events of 2013



that have particularly affected African Americans and communities of color over the past 12 months.

Presented in no particular order, this list is a mix of triumphs and tragedies that mark the progress we've made, highlight the problems that still plague us, and point the way forward in 2014.

1. Voting Rights/Voter Suppression: Despite an unprecedented outbreak of voter suppression efforts across the nation and the Supreme Court's appalling ruling in June that Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act was unconstitutional, African Americans are going to the polls in record numbers. In fact, Black voters were decisive in ensuring the second inauguration of Barack Obama last Jan. 20. African American voter turnout in the presidential election surpassed white voter turnout for the first time in history. As voter suppression efforts grow more intense, African Americans must continue the fight where it matters most -- at the polls.

2. George Zimmerman Acquittal: African Americans and people of goodwill throughout the nation were stunned by the July 13 not guilty verdict in the trial of George Zimmerman, the man who shot and killed Trayvon Martin, an unarmed 17-year-old high school student on Feb. 26, 2012. The killing reminded us of the persistent gap in racial attitudes in America and generated new calls for an end to racial profiling.

3. March on Washington Anniversary: 2013 marked the 50th anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington and Martin Luther King Jr.'s historic "I Have a Dream" speech. On Aug. 24, the National Urban League joined thousands of citizens in a return pilgrimage to the Lincoln Memorial and the new King Memorial to commemorate that historic moment in a march for Economic Power and Justice -- and to call for a continuation of the work that remains undone.

4. Affordable Care Act: While start-up problems have plagued the roll-out, the new law expands access to affordable health care to more than 30 million people, including 6.8 million African Americans who make up the largest share of the uninsured. This isn't about politics. It's about people.

5. Stop-and-Frisk/Shop-and-Frisk: On Aug. 12, a District Court Judge ruled that the New York City police department's stop-and-frisk program, which disproportionately

targets African Americans and Latinos, was unconstitutional. An appeals court subsequently overturned that ruling. Mayor-elect Bill de Blasio has pledged to make changes in the policy, which is practiced in communities across the country, and has appointed a new police commissioner.

African American shoppers in stores across the country have also been unfairly profiled. The New York State Attorney General has launched an investigation into security practices at a few retailers after at least four customers claimed they were unfairly targeted for police action while shopping in the stores. The National Urban League, National Action Network and other civil rights organizations were instrumental in working with several national retailers on the release of a "Customers' Bill of Rights" aimed at protecting customers from profiling practices. We will continue to work with the retailers on recommendations towards high standard, best-in-industry store security protocols and cultural sensitivity efforts that can be adopted by retailers across the country.

6. Government Shutdown/Effects of Sequestration: The across-the-board "sequestration" budget cuts that went into effect in 2013 slashed funding for Head Start, youth job training, long-term unemployment benefits and other critical human service and safety net programs. With the nation's highest

unemployment rate at 12.5 percent, these cuts fell especially hard on African Americans, who still have double-digit unemployment. The 17-day Government Shutdown in October also had an out-sized impact on African Americans who make up a large share of the Federal workforce. Thankfully, Congress has taken necessary steps to avoid a repeat in 2014. However, while "governing by crisis" has ended for now and there is partial relief from sequestration cuts, a major flaw of the budget deal is its failure to include a crucial extension of federal jobless aid where more than 1.3 million workers will immediately lose unemployment benefits -- a vital source of income that covers basic family needs.

7. African American Leaders Convening/Release of the 21st Century Agenda for Jobs and Freedom: At the National Urban League's "Redeem the Dream" Summit during the 50th Anniversary March on Washington celebration in August, national civil rights leaders joined together for the first time for an historic release of a policy agenda addressing five urgent domestic goals for the nation -- the 21st Century Agenda for Jobs and Freedom. It covers critical areas including jobs and the economy, healthcare, education, voting rights and criminal justice system reform.

8. Rise of Economic Inequality: While the richest 1-percent have seen their incomes rise astronomically over the past 20 years, millions

of middle class and low-wage workers are falling into poverty and struggling to make ends meet. This phenomenon worsened in the wake of the recession and has only widened through the recovery. This growing inequality is not only unjust; it is unsustainable for our economy. In 2013, Pope Francis, President Obama and a growing number of economists sounded the alarm.

9. The Death of Nelson Mandela: On Dec. 5, the world lost one of the greatest champions for freedom, justice and peace ever to walk this Earth. After 27 years of political imprisonment as a leader in the fight against apartheid, Mandela was released from prison in 1990. In 1994, he became South Africa's first democratically elected president. His leadership was marked by his constant reliance on forgiveness, reconciliation and unity in the building of a new South Africa. His life and legacy will forever inspire the world.

10. Banner Year for Black Films: This year was a notable one for Black films ranging from the true event-inspired stories of the "The Butler," "12 Years a Slave," "Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom," and "Fruitvale Station" to the highly anticipated "Best Man Holiday" and holiday classic "Black Nativity."

In the words of Oprah Winfrey, "Cheers to a New Year and another chance for us to get it right."

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

This Low-Carbon Diet is Good for You and the Planet

Reducing consumption of animal products

BY JILL RICHARDSON

2014. A new year. The time to make resolutions. It's when we all join gyms, sign up for dating sites, and start new diets -- only to quit them a few weeks later.

If you're into resolutions, I've got one for you to consider: In 2014, try a low-carb diet. Not a low-carb (ohydrate) diet, but a low-carbon one. As in carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas causing the climate crisis.

If you think it sounds a bit strange, hear me out.

Humans produce greenhouse

gases several ways. The most obvious one is burning fossil fuels. Heat, air conditioning, transportation, and electricity all fall into this category.

And I'll be honest. I'd love to reduce the amount of fossil fuels I use. But I have very little ability to make my city improve its public transportation, walkability, and bike paths. Some people can afford major investments like solar panels or even better insulation for their homes, but I can't. And neither can many other Americans.

But an awful lot of greenhouse gas emissions come from agriculture. Including the impacts of deforestation due to agriculture, getting our food from farm to table accounts for more than 27 percent of global emissions.

The good news: Changing your diet is affordable -- even delicious. We all eat three times a day, after all.

And a low-carbon diet is actually healthier and often cheaper than what most Americans eat already.

How do you do it? The short answer is "eat less meat." But please keep reading before you dismiss this as a vegetarian rant.

It takes 40 calories of energy to produce just one calorie of beef, with a similarly lousy ratio for eggs, and an even worse one for lamb. It takes 14 calories to produce one calorie of either milk or pork, and four calories to produce one calorie of chicken.

That's because we grow enough grain to feed 800 million people, and we feed it all to livestock. Those animals do produce meat, milk and eggs, but they also burn a lot those calories off as they grow.

The amount of calories fed to livestock is far greater than the calories humans obtain from their meat, milk, and eggs. It's far more efficient

for humans to eat plant foods ourselves.

There are also other paths to a lower carbon diet. Choosing locally grown foods, buying organic, gardening, and avoiding processed foods all help. But the simplest, most reliable, and most impactful way to shrink your footprint is by eating lower on the food chain.

This isn't news. Scientific American wrote about it in 2011, and the United Nations Food and Agriculture reported on it in 2006. Anna Lappe published a book on climate and diet called *Diet for a Hot Planet* in 2010.

If you aren't ready to go veg, don't worry. Baby steps are better than nothing. That's the idea behind the Meatless Monday campaign. Just avoid meat one day a week. Eat some vegetarian chili or lasagna. Dip veggies in

hummus for a snack. Have a bean burrito or munch on fresh fruit.

Personally, I think reducing your animal product intake is easiest if you crowd out meat, milk, and eggs with plant-based food that you enjoy. If you're busy stuffing your face with crisp apples or roasted butternut squash, you'll be too full to feel deprived.

Best of all, you'll help your health as well as the planet. As it turns out, vegetarians and near-vegetarians are 24 percent less likely to die of heart disease than meat eaters. That means a resolution to reduce your meat consumption will help ensure that you'll be around to enjoy many more New Years to come.

OtherWords columnist Jill Richardson is the author of *Recipe for America: Why Our Food System Is Broken and What We Can Do to Fix It*.