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OPINION

Joining the Forward Together Movement

Solidarity for a common cause

BY REV. M. LINDA JARAMILLO

On Feb. 7, I got to be part of a march through Raleigh, N. C. More than 80,000 people from across the country and all walks of life



joined together in solidarity with our North Carolinian brothers and sisters to call attention to the recent emergence of state legislative actions that will further deny basic rights to those who are already marginalized.

Led by the North Carolina NAACP, the Forward Together Movement has gathered over 150 groups who have joined together in a powerful nonviolent demon-

stration of unity.

The issues of injustice being raised by North Carolinians include the rolling back of voting rights, access to health care, re-segregation of public schools, immigration reform, income inequality, women's rights, LGBT rights, and environmental justice.

Each of the 150 coalition member groups continue to focus on their primary mission, but it is clear that The Forward Together Movement has increased their visibility, strengthened their determination, and demonstrated the power of the people to come together for a common cause. It is democracy in action.

We congregated in Raleigh as a demonstration of solidarity. Overwhelming hospitality and welcome was extended by North Carolin-

ians that day. However, some press reports noted that thousands who showed up did not reside in the state, some criticizing the presence of outsiders. One such story even referred to non-North Carolinians as agitators being lured in by the North Carolina NAACP to support their dissenting views.

Another reason we joined the public rally was to remind state elected leaders that thousands of North Carolinians are left out. They do not have access to a government "of the people, for the people, and by the people." These principles give people the right to challenge their elected officials who are passing laws that are unfair and unjust. Exclusion from democracy is happening in North Carolina just as it is happening in other states through-

out the land.

All the justice issues that I named above do plague the common good in our country. One that is a glaring obstruction of justice is the right to vote. The North Carolina Legislature just passed new rules requiring that voters present acceptable I.D. cards. Furthermore, they have shortened voter hours and done away with early voting, knowing full well that 70 percent of African Americans voted early in 2012. This does not look like democracy to me.

Voting is fundamental to this nation and essential for a sound democracy. Unfortunately, in cases like these, it seems to apply only to the wealthiest and most powerful. We see it demonstrated over and over during the election season when the most viable can-

didate is measured by his or her ability to raise money rather than votes. Then highly financed lobbyists converge on elected officials to ensure that their wealth is protected during deliberations on laws meant for the common good also known as equality and fairness. This is happening in North Carolina as it is in states throughout the land.

We came from across the country as near as Georgia and Washington, D.C. and as far as Ohio and Oregon to show that Dr. King was right, "a threat to justice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." On that day, we knew that we were all North Carolinians.

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Black History Month: Now More Than Ever

America's diversity is our strength

BY MARC H. MORIAL

Ever since the election of Barack Obama as America's first black President and the 100th anniversary of the National Urban League two years later, the perennial debate about the need for Black History Month has intensified.



Some have questioned the need for a special month to recognize the many unknown and unsung achievements of African Americans. With Obama as President, the logic goes, we have now achieved Dr. King's dream of a non-racial America where everyone is judged by the content of their character, not the color of their skin. I wish it were so.

Last year we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington and the passage of the Voting Rights Act. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act and the repeal of the Poll Tax. But un-

fortunately, the suppression of voting rights and other instances of racial discrimination remain.

All one needs to do is look at the glaring disparities between blacks and whites in income, employment, incarceration rates, educational achievement and health status to see that race still matters in America. Income inequality and equal opportunity

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are still part of the unfinished business of American democracy.

In 1926, after centuries of blacks being excluded, not only from the mainstream of American life, but also from the textbooks in our schools, the African American historian, Carter G. Woodson, did a service to all Americans when he created Negro History Week, which was expanded to Black History Month in 1976.

Woodson's vision was one of unity and inclusion. He said,

"What we need is not a history of selected races or nations, but the history of the world void of national bias, race, hate and religious prejudice." That is a goal that America is still struggling to achieve.

In fact, legislatures in a number of states, including New York, Illinois, Pennsylvania and New Jersey, have passed laws man-

dating or encouraging teachers to broaden their history courses to include more ethnic, racial and gender diversity. That is why we still recognize March as Women's History Month, May as Jewish American History Month, Sept. 15 to Oct. 15 as Hispanic Heritage Month and February as Black History Month.

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able odds, our diversity is our greatest strength.

Black history is American history. While the story and achievements of African Americans are especially celebrated this month, the contributions we have made and the struggles we still face deserve recognition every day of the year.

Next year, for the first time, Black History will enter the mainstream when the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture opens on the National Mall in Washington. The Museum describes itself as "a place of meaning, of memory, of reflection, of

laughter, and of hope. It should be a beacon that reminds us of what we were; what challenges we still face; and point us towards what we can become."

As we honor those who have made history, we must also recognize that we are history in the making. Through our work, commitment to equality and civic engagement, we can and we must, in the words of President Obama, continue to "right the wrongs of history and make our world anew."

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