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OPINION

Changing Our Climate of Indifference

The media has a duty to inform

BY JILL RICHARDSON

A new scientific report predicts more dire and irreversible consequences of the climate crisis than ever before.

"No one on this planet will be untouched by climate change," declared Rajendra Pachauri, the chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which the UN runs jointly with the World Meteorological Organization.

Even though it wasn't news to me, I welled up with frustration when this news broke.

I have struggled with the exasperating realization that I have so little power to make the big changes needed to fix the problem. Sure, I can

change my light bulbs. I even drive a Prius.

But I can't make my city have better infrastructure for biking and public transportation, or put solar panels on my apartment, or influence the larger policy environment that impacts our climate much more than my light bulbs.

However, my discouragement runs deeper. I became a journalist to find and tell important stories. I didn't go to Bolivia looking for a story on the climate crisis, but I found one when I got there.

In a million ways, the changing climate is ruining lives there: changing rain patterns, floods, mudslides, crop failures, and more. As if that wasn't enough, reduced glacial melt in the Andes means decreased hydroelectric power. All of this is happening now.

My research later led me to Kenya,

where the effects of climate change were just as shocking.

Why should things that happen half a world away matter to us? Our link to their misery is simple: The United States has arguably benefited more from industrialization and greenhouse gas emissions than any other nation on earth. People in these far-flung places are suffering for it.

That won't matter to some people, so I'll add this: Violence, instability, and disease don't have borders.

In Kenya, I met Andrew Githeko, a scientist who has documented how malaria has already moved to new areas as the climate warms up. The people in these places have no immunity to the disease. When an epidemic occurs, as Githeko put it, "the bodies pile up."

Newer projections find that the changing climate will jeopardize the world's ability to produce enough

food for everyone on Earth. And the problems already hitting the tropical areas I've visited could be a harbinger of what's to come here at home in the coming years.

Trying to tell these stories as a journalist makes me sometimes wonder why I even bother. I've been told flat out by editors that their readers are burnt out on depressing climate crisis stories. They don't want to print a story that contains nothing but bad news.

Since readers would presumably prefer a hopeful story about the climate crisis, they suggest that I find an inspiring angle. Like how someone is adapting to the changing climate.

Entertaining readers is not my job. I became a journalist to tell people what they need to know. But it seems most publications are more interested in what sells than what's important. Like that story about how

a 10-foot Australian snake ate a crocodile. The images were absolutely captivating, but it's not important news.

I wish there were more happy and hopeful angles to the climate crisis. The climate story is, and always has been, a huge bummer. Or, as Al Gore says, "an inconvenient truth."

Journalists aren't entertainers, and the media has a duty to inform the public about what they need to know. Perhaps if more reporters had done their job right from the start, we would have made the changes we needed years ago. Had that happened, maybe the latest reports on climate change would instead describe how we dodged a bullet.

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*.

Report Underscores Urgency of Jobs Crisis

The racial dimensions of economic inequality

BY MARC H. MORIAL

Our Constitution, Declaration of Independence and Emancipation Proclamation all speak of equality and unity as bedrock principles of American Democracy. But the truth is we have always been battling a Great Divide of race and class that has kept the American Dream out of reach for millions and that now threatens the very future of our nation.

That fact is the central finding of the 38th edition of the State of Black America – One Nation Underemployed: Jobs Rebuild America.

This year's report underscores the urgency of the jobs crisis – both unemployment and underemployment – and offers ideas from the National Urban League and leading

voices across the corporate, academic, political, civil rights and arts arenas about how African American and other communities of color can forge a path to economic stability and upward mobility.

Our 2014 Equality Index, one of the most critical and respected tools for tracking racial equality in America, finds that the state of Black America stands at 71.2 percent of the state of white America in the areas of economics, social justice, civic engagement, health, and education. With an equality index of 75.8 percent, a similar divide exists between Latinos and whites, with Latinos experiencing only three-quarters of the full benefits America has to offer.

For the first time, the Equality Index also includes rankings of U.S. cities in a new metropolitan section, ranking cities from most-to-least equal via the black-white index (77 cities) and Hispanic-white index (83 cities) – providing a revealing look at the local dynamics beneath the national trends.

While each state and city has its own story to tell, the consistent refrain is that there is an urgent and growing disparity between the few who are reaping the rewards of economic recovery and the majority who are still reeling from the aftershocks of the Great Recession.

This year's report again sheds light on the racial dimensions of economic inequality in America. Our economics index, which compares such factors as income, poverty, employment and wealth, finds that the economic status of African Americans is only 55.5 percent of that of whites, meaning that blacks are still missing almost half of the economic pie. Hispanics are at 60.6 percent. The growing racial and ethnic divides in employment, homeownership and mortgage and home improvement loan denials drove losses in the economics index for both groups.

Our economics index also shows that unemployment inequality between blacks and whites has widened, with the white unemployment rate dropping below 7 percent and

the black unemployment rate hovering above 13 percent for much of the past year.

Further, with a black-white income equality of only 60% and with black households having just \$6 in wealth for every \$100 in wealth of white households – or a median wealth of \$6,314 vs. \$110,500, respectively, what we see emerging from the rubble of the Great Recession is a state of black America in severe economic crisis.

But the 2014 State of Black America report also points to solutions. The National Urban League continues to move forward with our Jobs Rebuild America initiative – a \$100 million, five-year effort bringing together resources from the federal government, business and non-profits to reduce unemployment, create jobs and expand economic opportunity in 50 communities throughout the nation.

We also continue to press Congress to pass the Urban Jobs Act, the Project Ready STEM Act, a transportation infrastructure bill and the Harkin-Miller Fair Minimum

Wage Act, which would raise the minimum wage to \$10.10 for all workers with an index to inflation thereafter.

This year's publication also includes thought-provoking, solutions-focused essays from jazz great Wynton Marsalis, Xerox Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Ursula Burns, author and scholar Dr. Thomas Shapiro, Housing and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, actor and philanthropist Hill Harper and many others.

Half a century after President Johnson declared the War on Poverty, the 2014 edition of the State of Black America calls us to take immediate steps to address the income and wealth divides that threaten our nation's economic recovery and our ability to compete in the global marketplace. We must act now. As America was reminded during another great crisis, "A house divided against itself cannot stand."

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



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