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# OPINION

## Our Challenges Are Not Insurmountable

### Education key driver to opportunity

BY MARC H. MORIAL

There's no other way to say it. Black America is in crisis.

Over the past year, we have been bombarded with headlines that continue to drive home the longstanding challenges faced by black and brown communities in our nation. From the killings of unarmed black males at the hands of police officers to the introduction of new voter suppression laws that make it more difficult for people of color to exercise their constitutional right to vote, it is clear that for many in our nation, equality under



the law remains dangerously out of reach.

But beyond the headlines, anecdotes and agenda-fueled debates lie the real numbers – all facts, no chaser.

Last month, the National Urban League released its State of Black America report - "Save our Cities: Education, Jobs + Justice," the 39th annual analysis of black and Latino equality in America. For the first time it's available in an all-digital format available at [stateofblackamerica.org](http://stateofblackamerica.org) where visitors can find the e-book, web series, select data, videos, articles and other frequently updated features.

This year's report again includes the Equality Index, measuring how well blacks and Latinos are doing in comparison to their

white peers in five categories: economics, education, health, social justice and civic engagement.

What we've found is that while strides have been made in our communities, tremendous gaps continue to leave us with a crisis in education, jobs and justice. There are tremendous challenges before us, but the good news is that they are not insurmountable. For the next few weeks – and beginning with education, I will explore the findings of the 2015 report, and better still, suggest solutions to these challenges.

As our nation enjoys historically low dropout rates, the highest high school graduation rates in history and more students of color studying on college campuses, we must also contend with the reality that school districts serving the highest percentage of low-income households spend fewer state and local dollars in those districts than ones that have fewer students in

poverty.

In addition, a lack of consistent education standards and equity and excellence at scale means that the quality of education that our children receive is far too often dependent on their zip code or how much money their parents make. Without a new formula for school funding that puts the dollars where the need is greatest, the education achievement gap will grow to the detriment of our nation as we educate a workforce incapable of meeting the challenges of tomorrow.

To underscore the National Urban League's commitment to education and our belief that quality education is a key driver to opportunity, for the first time in the report's history, we have included a state-by-state education equality index and ranking. This index examines state-level racial and ethnic disparities in K-12 education, documenting black and Hispanic

achievement gaps in all 50 states and the District of Columbia in comparison to white students.

We have also included essays that feature commentary from leading figures and thought leaders in politics, the corporate arena, academia and popular culture.

This report is more important than ever. It is important because armed with data; we can all go back to our cities and states and create relevant plans to address stubborn problems. It is important because we, as a nation, cannot expect to sustain growth and compete globally while millions of our citizens are denied the opportunity to become productive citizens because of misguided policies or neglect. It is important because America can only be as good as its promise if that promise is kept to all Americans.

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

## Solidarity with Peoples Struggling Against Racism

### Learning lessons from history

BY REV. ELIZABETH LEUNG

The United Nations this month held a week of Solidarity with the Peoples Struggling against Racism and Racial Discrimination and observed March 21 as International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.



In a message that marks the observances, UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon highlighted the theme "Learning from historical tragedies to combat racial discrimination today," which aims to explore the root causes of racism and racial discrimination and stress the essential need to learn the lessons history has provided in order to combat racism and racial discrimination today.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination – one of the treaties against racism that the United States has ratified and is subjected to review for compliance.

For the past half century, there has been progress in the fight against racism – the end of co-

lonialism, the dismantling of apartheid and the rise of a global movement for equality. As the Convention says, "Yet, as history and current events attest, racial discrimination still presents a clear danger to people and communities in all regions."

The decade 2015-2024 has been proclaimed by the U.N. General Assembly to be the International Decade for People of African Descent: Recognition, Justice, and Development, ac-

opinions, ethnic origin, skin color, sexual orientation, or any other status."

The various manners in which the international community – such as the United Nations – approaches racism is neither individualistic nor ahistorical, which may be the way that many of us initially understand racism – personal prejudices, explicit hatred and intentional injury. As a consequence, the remedy has been focused on finding and punishing the "few bad apples," so that the systemic racist structures that provide conditions for such behavior to happen can remain un-

have, to journey together with others, and to act to produce conditions that will allow for the fullness of life for those who have suffered rac-

ism's destructive impact.

Rev. Elizabeth Leung is minister for racial justice for the United Church of Christ.

*"[W]e must never forget that human rights are for everyone, every minute of every day, 365 days a year, without distinction of any kind..."*

– Ban Ki-moon, U.N. General Secretary

knowledging that with regard to the access to justice, people of African descent "face alarmingly high rates of police violence and racial profiling."

In a message reminding us that more needs to be done to ensure fairness in justice and law enforcement systems, and to promote and uphold the human rights of people of African descent everywhere, the U.N. General Secretary emphasized that "[w]e must never forget that human rights are for everyone, every minute of every day, 365 days a year, without distinction of any kind – wherever we live, whoever we are, irrespective of our

touched.

Following the same logic, someone who seeks to be more than fair-minded may, with good intention, think that donning a hijab or darkening their skin for a week can help them to better "feel" racism; but does not necessarily seek the historical depth of the collective injury which is transmitted across generations.

If we are serious about addressing racism in a sustaining manner, rather than in an entertaining way, then we cannot just adopt it as a personal project or an elective hobby. Rather, it must be a way of life, with whatever privilege and humility we



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