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OPINION

#BlackLivesMatter: A Rallying Cry for our Times

The fight for equal access and opportunity

BY MARC H. MORIAL

While it is obvious to many of us that all lives matter, it is not so obvious that in our great nation founded on the principles of equality and justice that black lives matter.

Young black men are at 21 times greater risk than young white men of being shot dead by police officers, according to a ProPublica analysis of available federal data. New laws guided by the old strategies of voter suppression are aimed at reducing black turnout at the polls. Sixty years after the groundbreaking Brown vs. Board of Education ruling that put an end to legal segregation in American public schools, the practice is greater now than it was then.

And along with the resurgence of segregation comes an ever-wid-



ening achievement gap between white students and students of color. In our separate schools and classrooms, we find separate and unequal levels of achievement, and the separate and unequal distribution of resources necessary to narrow or eliminate the achievement gap.

Despite our nation's most sustained period of job creation since the devastation of the Great Recession, the black unemployment rate is consistently twice that of their white peers.

When we say "Black lives matter," we acknowledge that while our nation has made significant and important strides its journey to create a more perfect union—the scales of equality and justice are still not balanced for all.

The "Black Lives Matter" movement was created after the acquittal of George Zimmerman for the tragic and avoidable death of Trayvon Martin. Since its creation, many more unarmed black and brown men and women have

been killed at the hands of vigilantes and police officers. And, more often than not, their murderers are not held accountable.

But if police tactics were the sparks that set off firestorms of outcry, protest and demands for change from New York to Missouri, and beyond, we know that seemingly intractable poverty, long-term joblessness and the pollution of hopelessness were the tinder.

In our fight to save our cities, The National Urban League has—and will—continue to respond and shed light on the problems and inequities around education, jobs and justice, as well as offer what is needed most: solutions.

On the justice front, we presented our 10-Point Plan for Justice and Police Accountability to President Obama's taskforce on 21st century policing. We are committed to being an active part of the solutions that move our nation to deliver on its promise of fair treatment by law enforcement for every American.

We have also added our voice

and proverbial muscle to the call that Congress hold hearings on the Voting Rights Advancement Act and commit itself to protecting all of our nation's citizens against voter suppression. When it comes to jobs, we single-handedly put 16,000 people to work through our job-training programs. We also successfully advocated for key provisions that were ultimately included in the federal government's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Those provisions do the real work of training our workforce for 21st century jobs and connecting those employees with jobs that pay living wages.

On the education front, we continued to battle for equity in educational outcomes and resources. Our multimedia campaign, "Put Our Children First," strengthened our continued support for Common Core state standards. We are also advocating along with a variety of civil rights, social justice groups and business leaders to get Congress to re-authorize the Elementary and Secondary Education

Act. Fifty years ago, President Lyndon Johnson recognized that eliminating racial and economic disparities in education would play a critical role in building a more just society. Fifty years later, we are still fighting towards that goal.

If we, as a nation, are serious about our claim that all lives matter, it is paramount that we not only acknowledge the mounting disparities, but we begin to implement the solutions that open up opportunity and justice to marginalized communities—only then will all lives truly matter.

The cry that "Black lives matter," doesn't mean that those are the only lives that matter in our country; it means black lives matter, too. Our nation's citizens must be offered equal access and opportunity to quality education, jobs with living wages and fair treatment under our nation's system of justice for all lives to truly matter.

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

Teaching the Truth about America's History

When a school textbook distorts slavery

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

Were my African ancestors, who were stolen at gunpoint from their homes and families, dragged in chains into the dark and crowded into the cargo hulls of ships for the often-fatal Middle Passage, and then brutalized, beaten, and forced into chattel slavery for generations, just like many of the other "immigrants" who came to America in order to "work?"

Pearland, Texas student Coby Burren, 15, didn't think so when he saw this caption in his World Geography textbook under "Patterns of Immigration": "The Atlantic Slave Trade between the 1500s and 1800s brought millions of workers from Africa to the southern United States to work on agricultural plantations."

About 150,000 other Texas high school students received the same textbook in their history classes this year, and many of them may have mistaken that caption for truth. Coby knew it was wrong and texted his mother a picture to show her what he was being "taught." After his mother Roni Dean-Burren, a University of Houston doc-

toral student, took a closer look, she shared a video on social media documenting her outrage over the geography book's mischaracterization of slavery.

Both Coby and his mother were willing to stand up and speak out about this distortion of our national past which haunts our present and continues to threaten our future. Within hours McGraw-Hill, the book's publisher, apologized stating they "conducted a close review of the content and agree that our language in that caption did not adequately convey that Africans were both forced into migration and to labor against their will as slaves." They announced plans to make online changes immediately and reissue a corrected version of the book.

After Ms. Dean-Burren and others raised concerns about the initial promise to fix the next print edition, given that many districts who already have purchased one edition will not buy another for several years, McGraw-Hill announced it will distribute revised textbooks and/or stickers to correct the caption to all schools that own the current edition.

I'm very proud of Coby who has attended the Children's De-

fense Fund Freedom Schools program where he was exposed to excellent and carefully selected books that teach the truth about American and African American history and culture. He learned what I hope all children of all races learn—that he was not too young to make a difference in his family, school, community, nation, and world.

And I'm very grateful Coby's mother joined her son to demand an accurate recounting of forced slavery in our nation whose legacy haunts us still. Their actions may make a difference for thousands of other Texas students who would have continued using geography textbooks with inaccurate and misleading language for years.

Parents everywhere must be vigilant about the books their districts are choosing for their children, read them and, like Ms. Dean-Burren, not be afraid to speak up when changes are necessary. Perhaps we need to have parent book clubs to read and discuss the accuracy of history and geography textbooks their children read.

While it is unclear who was finally responsible for this caption, there have been other concerns about the way Texas education

officials influence the content of textbooks and the teaching of history. Because Texas is such a large textbook purchasing market with more than 5.2 million K-12 public school students, publishers may often capitulate to requests for changes that meet some state curriculum demands. Once books have been created that meet Texas standards the same texts may be distributed in other states.

Another controversy erupted recently when groups in Texas were joined by those in other states including Oklahoma, Georgia, Nebraska, North Carolina, and Tennessee and the Republican National Committee in challenging the College Board's updated framework for Advanced Placement U.S. History courses. The College Board develops the tests taken by all students in Advanced Placement courses nationwide, and critics said the framework emphasized "negative" aspects of American history too much without enough emphasis on other areas like the Founding Fathers, military achievements, and "American exceptionalism." In July the College Board announced a revised framework that included some of these suggested changes.

Who is writing and influencing the history our children are

taught? Should a few education officials in Texas or any state drive decisions about what all of our children learn or sugarcoat the truth? Coby and his mother did the right thing and students should not have to be the last line of defense against untruthful and even offensive materials getting into their school backpacks. Only the truth can make us free. George Orwell reminded us that "he who controls the past controls the future."

We must go forward in our multiracial multicultural nation and world and not slide backwards toward the dark legacies of slavery, Native American genocide, and exclusion of women and non-propertied men of all races from our electoral process by our founding fathers. And we must work tirelessly to eradicate their continuing effects on our national life and the growing voices of those who want to turn back the clock of racial and economic progress reflected in mass incarceration, voter suppression, an unjust criminal justice system, separate and unequal schools, and massive poverty and economic inequality that plague us still. Only the truth can make us free.

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