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OPINION

Advancing Diversity in Law Enforcement

Here's some examples to follow

BY MARC H. MORIAL

The interagency report just released by the Justice Department and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, "Advancing Diversity in Law Enforcement" is a welcome tool that examines those key barriers as well as promising practices in the recruitment, hiring and retention of law enforcement candidates that can advance much-needed diversity in our law enforcement agencies.

Developed with support from the Center for Policing Equity, the report aims to provide law enforcement agencies, especially small and mid-size agencies, with a resource to enhance the diversity of their workforce by highlighting specific strategies and efforts in



place around the country:

Make sure that the police agency's organizational culture is guided by community policing (a strategy of policing that focuses on police building ties and working closely with community members);

Follow procedural justice (the idea of fairness in the processes that resolve disputes) and cultural inclusivity (welcoming and including all people);

Engage stakeholders – both from within and outside the law enforcement agency – to help create a workforce that reflects the diversity of the community.

The report also called for police departments to be willing to re-evaluate employment criteria, standards, and benchmarks to ensure that they are tailored to the skills needed to perform job functions, and consequently attract, select, and retain the most qualified and desirable sworn officers.

The suggestions build on the recommendations of the Presi-

dent's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, to which I provided testimony on the National Urban League's 10-Point Plan for Police Reform and Accountability. It emphasizes that "while greater workforce diversity alone cannot ensure fair and effective policing, a significant – and growing – body of evidence suggests that diversity can make policing more effective, more safe and more just."

Police departments face challenges when it comes to the issue of diversity in recruiting. In her own testimony to the President's Task Force, NAACP Legal Defense Fund President Sherrilyn Ifill, said of youth in poor communities, "By the time you are 17, you have been stopped and frisked a dozen times. That does not make that 17-year-old want to become a police officer ... The challenge is to transform the idea of policing in communities among young people into something they see as honorable. They have to see people at local events as the person who lives across the

street, not someone who comes in and knows nothing about my community."

The report acknowledges those barriers, noting that "Strained relations and a lack of trust of law enforcement may deter individuals from underrepresented communities from applying to be officers," and "The reputation or operational practices of law enforcement agencies may dissuade applicants from underrepresented communities from pursuing a career in law enforcement."

However, the report found that a diverse police force that represents the population it serves eases the tensions between the police and African-American communities, likely because:

Increased representation of racial minorities increases the legitimacy of the law enforcement agency among minority residents;

A greater presence of officers who are racial minorities not only is likely to change the public's perception of the agency, but these officers are also likely to

be more knowledgeable and empathetic about the concerns and culture of minority communities;

A higher number of minority officers within an agency provide opportunities for greater contact and interactions between white and minority officers, which can shape attitudes and reduce negative opinions or stereotypes about minority communities.

The presence of minority officers is likely to introduce different perspectives into an agency, and those perspectives can undermine an unnecessarily rigid response to certain events or perceived threats.

The National Urban League strongly urges law enforcement agencies across the country to not only read, but to also adopt or adapt those successful diversity-building efforts that have already been implemented by selected law enforcement agencies outlined in this report.

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

Acknowledging Past and Sobering Present

Re-birth of a racist nation

BY KEITH MAGEE

In 1915, President Woodrow Wilson hosted a special White House screening of D.W. Griffith's "The Birth of a Nation," a film based on The Clansman, by Wilson's friend Thomas Dixon. The film was a racial marker of the time - it portrayed Black politicians as drunken buffoons and set the stage for the Ku Klux Klan's savage attempts to remove them from office.

While showing such a film would spark outrage today, it really shouldn't surprise us given President Wilson's track record at the time: he segregated federal workers in Washington, D.C. and following World War I, he blocked efforts to include racial equality as a founding principle of the League of Nations. Pretty unsavory behavior for a sitting president.

Movies have the ability to bring us out of our everyday reality and to take us into places of fiction and nonfiction, to entertain us and even awaken unconsciousness.



My all-time favorite movie is director Kasi Lemmons' "Eve's Bayou" set in our nation's Deep South. Louisiana bayous are strange and wonderful places - a world unto their own, overflowing with a wealth of stories and thematic possibilities. At the start of the film, Lemmons introduces us to the area's enigmatic nature, beginning with a declaration: "Memory is a selection of images, some elusive, others printed indelibly on the brain."

One century after Birth of a Nation premiered America is - again - grappling with indelible racism. A nation that seemingly made progress in the election of its first president of both, African and white American heritage, still sits amid painful memories. Rather than America being fully conscious of her progress, she now appears to be travelling in re-birth.

Arguably the "birther" inquisition of GOP presidential nominee Donald Trump gave credence to this resurgence. His questioning of President Obama's legitimacy and identity wasn't actually based in concern about his being born in America. Instead it speaks to an inherent privilege to determine if, where, how and to whom he belonged. America must acknowledge its own gritty memory and at

times, sobering present.

Film director and actor Nate Parker recently reclaimed the "Birth of a Nation" title and repurposed his new film as a vehicle to challenge racism and white supremacy in America. He depicts the same issues as the original film, but from a different vantage point: he points to slave rebellion leader Nat Turner (played by Parker) as his central character.

When Turner's master positions him as a preacher to fellow slaves - and makes money from the preaching engagements - Turner begins to see the scope of slavery. The system's consequences are pervasive and reach further than he'd fully imagined. He decides rather than being used for profit he'd rather become a prophet.

Parker hopes his film will give birth to "the kind of honest confrontation that will galvanize our society toward healing and sustained systemic change." In a riveting scene, Turner evokes his fellow enslaved faith community with a call towards justice: they are the individuals creating America's prominence and wealth, and thereby deserve rights.

A friend told me that giving birth to a child (beyond the agony of labor) brings something "new" into the world that you commit to nurture and protect. It is also a

time of bringing two families together as one. Our nation is just a few days from a moment that will redefine the rebirthing of our nation, from its economics to social policies to the Supreme Court.

We need leaders who have the capacity to adopt and nurture America through cultural, heritage and socio-economic growth. Martin Luther King Jr. said in Strength to Love, "That there is a deep understanding for the need of agape;

a love that is concerned with going the extra mile to ensure the well-being of others."

My mother often tells me, "Though I didn't birth you in my womb, I did birth you in my heart." A rebirth can only prevail through this kind of love.

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