

EDITORIALS • COMMENTS • OPINIONS

To Be Equal

How Will 2016's Presidential Candidates Save Our Cities?



By Marc H. Morial
NNPA Columnist

"You must register. You must vote. You must learn, so your choice advances your interest and the interest of our beloved Nation. Your future, and your children's future, depend upon it, and I don't believe that you are going to let them down."

— President Lyndon B. Johnson on the Signing of the Voting Rights Act, August 1965

For four days beginning in July, political, business, and community leaders

will convene in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. for the 2015 National Urban League Conference. Conference attendees should expect to engage in thought-provoking discussions with leaders and experts in a variety of areas, including economics, entertainment, civil rights and politics.

This year, following a long-standing tradition of major-party presidential candidates addressing the conference, the National Urban League counts several 2016 presidential hopefuls — Republicans and Democrats alike — as invited guests. The candidates, including former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, former Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley and retired neurosurgeon Dr. Ben Carson, will share their respective vision and strategies to save our cities.

The candidates' plenary session, "Save Our Cities: Education, Jobs + Justice," falls under the umbrella of the National Urban League's "Save Our Cities" campaign, an unprecedented mobilization to influence public policy through grassroots political action.

As we know far too well, our country faces tremendous challenges. Rather than recite our problems, rather than fall into the trap of recycling failed solutions for today's and tomorrow's challenges, we will reunite in Florida to deliberate on solutions and fresh ideas to the economic and social

troubles plaguing our cities. These are discussions that are too important to take place in silos. The solutions to our challenges are stronger with buy-in, engagement and resources from all concerned stakeholders. So, it is vital that those contending for the highest office in the land be a part of that conversation.

The ravages of inequality on American families, particularly among those in African-American and Latino communities, continues to rip our nation apart. We must question and listen to any candidate's proposals to reverse this ever-widening trend of inequality.

An educated citizenry is best prepared to choose the candidate who will advance his or her interests, and ultimately, the interests of a stronger, healthier and more inclusive nation. During his remarks on the signing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, President Lyndon Johnson said, "The vote is the most powerful instrument ever devised by man for breaking down injustice and destroying the terrible walls which imprison men because they are different from other men." The stakes are too high for us, and for future generations, not to have these discussions together.

In this year's analysis of the "State of Black America," the National Urban League found that while strides have been made in Black and Brown communities,

tremendous gaps continue to leave us with a crisis in education, jobs and justice. In the case of justice, a series of horrific acts — from the deaths of Black men and women at the hands of police, to the racially motivated murder of nine people in a South Carolina church, to the legislative efforts in some states to rob Americans of their constitutional right to vote — cries out for serious and immediate reform.

While our economy is improving after the recession, the bounce back has not been as evident in many Black and Brown communities. For too many Americans, the recession is alive and well. As Congress continues to debate reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, we, along with a diverse coalition of policy-makers, families and community activists, are fighting to ensure that any new legislation adopted protects civil rights and promotes equity, equality and accountability in education.

These conversations are indispensable in this moment in which we as a nation find ourselves of perhaps the greatest social and economic upheaval in a generation. Choose to be a part of our discussion and conversation, or choose to get involved in the discussions and conversations that are happening, or will happen in your communities — every voice and vote matters.

Tear Down The Walls Of Economic Inequality



By Julianne Malveaux
NNPA Columnist

After a spirited debate, the South Carolina House and Senate voted overwhelmingly to remove the Confederate battle flag from Statehouse grounds at the urging of Gov. Nikki Haley, who quickly signed the measure into law. The flag was lowered for the final time on Capitol grounds Friday morning. Many South Carolinians hailed its ceremonious removal as a "new day" for their state as well as a fitting tribute to State Senator Clementa Pinckney, one of the nine massacred at Emanuel A.M.E. Church, where he was the pastor.

Revulsion from the Bible study slaughter sparked conversations all over the country about the Confederate flag. An Iowan who sold ice to Walmart with a confederate logo (go figure) was told he had to change his logo or sell his ice

elsewhere. The U.S. House of Representatives has banned display of the Confederate flag on sites maintained by the National Park Service. Mississippi Senators Thad Cochran and Roger Wicker say the Mississippi flag should be redesigned to remove the Confederate symbol.

At the same time, support for the Confederate flag is unwavering. A poll conducted for CNN found that 66 percent of Whites consider the Confederate flag more of a symbol of Southern pride than racism, a view shared by only 17 percent of Blacks. While 72 percent of Blacks consider the flag a symbol of racism, only 25 percent of Whites agree, with the remainder of them saying the flag represent each point of view equally, were undecided or expressed no opinion.

Removing the flag from public places and putting it in museums is a victory for those who reject this symbol of racial subjugation. Still, every economic statistic screams racial subjugation. President Obama had it right (if belatedly) when he said that employers are more willing to employ Johnny than Jamal. Last month, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported that Black unemployment rate was 9.5 percent, more than twice the 4.6 percent rate than Whites experienced. Some economists will say that African Americans are less educated than Whites, explaining part of the unemployment rate gap. Others will cite other factors, such as occupation and location. Race still plays a role in unemployment rate differentials.

White men and White high school dropouts have about the same

unemployment rate as Black high school graduates, and highly educated Blacks always have higher unemployment rates than less well educated Whites. While education pays off for Blacks, as those with better educations are paid more than those with less education, Whites get a greater return on education than Blacks.

If we want to remove vestiges of racial subjugation, we ought to pay attention to unemployment rate differentials and work as hard to eradicate them as we did to take down that Confederate flag in South Carolina. How? President Obama could sign an executive order directing the Department of Labor and other federal departments to target money and programs to the inner city or, more specifically, to African Americans. In these closing months of his presidency, he has used executive orders for other purposes. Why not use one to ensure that Jamal gets treated the same way as Johnny?

In addition to Jamal and Johnny, how about Tamika and Theresa? Though the unemployment rate gap is smaller between Black and White women, there are gaps in pay and working conditions. Because more than 40 percent of Black families are female-headed, low pay for Black women translate to different living conditions for Black families.

Similar differences are measured in the poverty rate, where more than a quarter of Black families live in poverty, compared to fewer than 10 percent of White families. Average pay for an African American family is about \$31,000, compared to about \$52,000 for White families. Congress has

been hostile to any poverty-prevention programs, fighting to reduce food stamps programs and pushing back on Obama-backed legislation to increase the minimum wage. In the midst of legislative hostility, could President Obama do anything to lower poverty and especially the gap in the poverty rate? Certainly appointing a Presidential Commission to propose legislation on poverty prevention would be a first, if only symbolic.

The wealth gap is staggering. African Americans have a scant 2.5 percent of our nation's wealth. The median wealth for White families is \$120,000, compared to \$7,000 for Black families. The wealth gap is partly a function of the inability for African Americans to attain wealth, certainly during slavery and the Black Codes era, and beyond. There were exceptions, of course, but the gaping wealth gap affects the quality of life for African Americans. What to do? The president might consider the Institute of the Black World's proposal for a John Hope Franklin Commission for Reparatory Justice to explore the possibility of, among other things, reparations.

Taking down the Confederate flag without tearing down the walls of racial economic inequality is a partial victory. While I am elated that South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley has expressed her opposition to the Confederate flag as a symbol of hate and White supremacy, I wonder if she will fight to end the institutional racism that results in higher unemployment rates, lower incomes, and less wealth for African Americans.

Congress Urges Stronger Action Against Payday Loan Vendors



By Charlene Crowell
NNPA Columnist

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) will provide \$32 million in relief to consumers who were caught in a maze of charges and fees designed to trap them in payday loans they never authorized. The enforcement action announced July 7, affects two lenders based in Kansas City, Mo. who operated as many as 16 different businesses involved in online lending. The FTC also imposed an additional \$22 million fine against the lenders and banned them from all consumer lending.

Members of Congress are urging the FTC to take similar action against similar violators.

Every day online and storefront payday lenders trap borrowers in long-term cycles of debt. Their triple-digit interest rates and access to borrowers' bank accounts or car-titles place these borrowers in financial jeopardy. FTC's actions and others undertaken by federal and state regulators reveal rampant abuses in the short-term, small-dollar lending market.

More than 100 Members of Congress representing 35 states, the District of Columbia and the Virgin Islands, recently urged the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) to enact a strong rule to curb abusive practices by payday lenders and other high-cost predatory loans like car-title and certain installment loans.

In separate letters, 33 U.S. Senators and 68 House Members urged the same action: strong regulation and enforcement of abusive and predatory consumer lending.

Their calls for CFPB rulemaking comes as the Bureau finalizes its proposed rule, first announced in late March. At that time, a letter signed by 500 consumer advocates from all 50 states waged an unprecedented push for reining in abusive small-dollar and high-cost loans engaged the White House and Capitol Hill.

Now, after listening to an onslaught of diverse and strong voices, federal lawmakers are adding their voices and influence to the continuing fight for fairness.

"Predatory lenders should not be able to continue unfair, deceptive, and abusive acts or practices that are designed to trap borrowers in a cycle of debt," wrote 33 Senators. "This is a business model rooted in preying on individuals and families that have no ability to repay, and the CFPB has a critical opportunity to protect consumers by issuing strong rules."

Members of Congress with constituencies as varied as their broad geographic expanses similarly called for CFPB to adopt strong regulation.

"While there is a need for affordable credit, unfair, deceptive and abusive payday and car title lending practices often pull consumers into a cycle of debt," wrote the members. "We support the Bureau's efforts to close the door to unaffordable loans by addressing failure to underwrite for affordable payments, repeatedly rolling over or refinancing loans, accessing the consumer's account for repayment, and performing costly withdrawals."

As consumer advocates stress the importance of the ability to repay a loan as a cornerstone of both responsible lending and effective regulation, a new poll jointly commissioned by Americans for Financial Reform and the Center for Responsible Lending, asked 2016 likely voters their opinions on consumer lending and regulation, Wall Street influences and actions taken by the Consumer Financial

Protection Bureau (CFPB).

Respondents showed strong and bipartisan support for regulation of financial services and products. By more than a **10-to-one margin, they favored** a rule requiring small-dollar lenders to verify a customer's ability to repay before a loan can be issued.

Other poll results showed:

- Nearly three-quarters — 73 percent — said they favor the central provisions of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act;
- Respondents continue to view the financial industry as under-regulated; and
- They also believed that regulations and enforcement will ensure financial institutions act fairly and responsibly.

"We are thankful for lawmakers and regulators standing up against these predatory loan practices which drain billions of dollars a year from low-income families," said Diane Standaert, director of state policy with the Center for Responsible Lending. "As CFPB moves towards issuing its proposed rules, we urge it to use its full authority to stop the dangerous debt trap of these loans, and eliminating loopholes."

According to policy experts, CFPB could act on the pending regulation sometime this fall.