

Fixing black America: Eliminate unemployment

By Marc H. Morial
Special to Sentinel-Voice

At first glance, the federal Department of Labor monthly report released August 1 seemed to contain good news: the unemployment rate fell 6.4 percent in June to 6.2 percent in July.

But the seeming good news was a mirage: the decline stemmed from the fact that nearly half a million jobless workers who had been looking for work stopped their search entirely, and so, weren't counted as being in the labor force at all.

In other words, the unemployment rate improved statistically only because the number of people looking for jobs fell faster than the number of people holding jobs.

That destroys whatever good one might have found in the unemployment rate for blacks dropping to 11.1 percent in July, from June's 11.8 percent; and to 8.2 percent for Hispanics, from June's 8.4 percent. The unemployment rate for both months for whites remained stable at 5.5 percent.

There's little question that the fresh statistics on the un-

employment situation are dispiriting.

More than 9 million Americans are out of work.

Nearly 1.6 million have been jobless so long they've exhausted their 26-week unemployment benefits; and another million or so are close to that economic precipice.

Moreover, economists and other observers of the labor market say the immediate prospects for getting some significant number of these Americans back to work are not promising.

That's because while that measurement of economic health called productivity—which is the amount of goods and services produced for each hour workers work—is increasing, the overall economy isn't growing fast enough to spur businesses to hire workers.

Instead, they're continuing to lay workers off.

That's the harsh reality behind the necessarily abstract, numbers-filled federal report.

One economist summed up his feeling about the monthly labor market indicators for the *New York Times*



with the words, "Except for the rise in temporary workers, there was nothing good in this report."

That summary aptly describes the situation facing the African-American jobless who are being the most severely buffeted by the "equality gap" that separates all African-American from the American mainstream.

Since the recession hit in early 2001, and since it officially ended in late 2001, the black unemployment rate has returned to its historic "twice-as-great-as-whites" ratio (and the Hispanic-white rate has also returned to its historic ratio as well.)

The long economic boom of the 1990s destroyed the old shibboleths that the ratio stemmed from poor blacks

not wanting to start at the bottom of the job ladder and work their way up.

Late in the decade, when the fruits of the boom finally forced the creation of millions of jobs in the low-wage service sector, poor blacks mounted a "jobs rush" that drove the black unemployment rate to an all-time low of 7.2 percent in 1999.

Now, evidence is accumulating that African-Americans are suffering disproportionately from the economy-wide falloff in jobs.

It includes a recent study of New York City's economy over the last decade which found that while black males made the smallest gains of all groups in job-holding during the 1990s, they've experienced the big-

gest percentage drop in job-holding since 2000.

In addition, a recent report from the *Times* found that nationally black unemployment is increasing faster than at any time since the 1970s and that the losses have been largely in manufacturing, where the pay for blacks has been historically higher than in many other fields.

The black unemployment situation amounts to a crisis within the overall national unemployment crisis, and it demands concerted action.

The high rate of black unemployment from the 1970s to the 1990s produced many severe problems that bedeviled not just Black America, but America as a whole.

Can the American society of this more economically challenged, and politically anxious, world withstand a return to sharply disproportionate unemployment ratios for African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans?

The National Urban League emphatically says no.

At our annual conference in Pittsburgh last week, I pledged that the League

would soon convene at "Commission on Jobs and the Urban Economy" to develop a new economic plan for the nation's cities, where the large majority of African-Americans live.

We'll consider five specific areas: closing the skills gap; energizing African-American business development and entrepreneurship; persuading major corporations to invest more in more urban communities and inner city neighborhoods; directing public and private investment through tax and fiscal policies to repair the crumbling infrastructure of our cities; and making home ownership more affordable and available for all Americans.

And we intend to produce specific proposals for action.

Unfortunately, they won't answer the immediate need of those currently out of work for jobs.

But we'll work as hard as we can to ensure that in the future no analyst will feel the need to describe a federal report on unemployment by saying "there was nothing good in this report."

Rice

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on the side of people who are seeking freedom," Rice said. "And we must never, ever indulge in the condescending voices who allege that some people in Africa or in the Middle East are just not interested in freedom, they're culturally just not ready for freedom or they just aren't ready for freedom's responsibilities."

Rice said White House officials often turn to her on issues of race, and she infused her discussion of Iraq with references to slavery and America's civil rights battles of the 1960s.

"Our own history should remind us that the union of democratic principle and practice is always a work in progress," Rice said in reference to Iraq.

"When the founding fathers said, 'We, the people,' they did not mean the people in this room," Rice said, her overwhelmingly black audience silent. "Our ancestors were three-fifths of a man."

Friday will mark 100 days since President Bush declared major combat over in Iraq, and Rice offered a favorable picture of rebuilding there. She cited as a centerpiece the establishment of an Iraqi governing council.

Curry

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nonpartisan organization that is overwhelmingly Democratic. James Crow, Esquire, it may safely be assumed, is a registered Republican."

As any Journalism 101 student should know, it's not safe to assume anything. Ever. The National Urban League has never polled its members on their political affiliation, therefore the "Times-Picayune" can only "assume" that it is overwhelmingly Democratic. And those who referred to "James Crow, Esquire" over

the years, have used it to characterize Democratic and Republican officials. By the way, the chairman of the Urban League's board of directors is a registered Republican.

While it can be argued that Morial's hometown newspaper provided a textbook example of James Crow, Esquire, there is evidence that old Jim Crow thinking is still around.

Fairness and Accuracy in the Media (FAIR) provides some telling research on Fox News Channel's host Bill

The council puts Iraq on the road toward democracy, she said. Baghdad "can become a linchpin of a very different Middle East in which ideologies of hatred will not flourish," she said.

Rice, who traveled to Dallas from Bush's ranch near Crawford, also asked for patience from the American public as the United States oversees reconstruction of Iraq. Rebuilding Germany and the rest of Europe after World War II had many setbacks over several years, she said. Former SS officers in Germany known as "werewolves" persisted in attacking allied military convoys after the war ended, just as guerrillas are attacking American soldiers in Iraq, she said.

"We must have patience and perseverance to see it through," Rice said.

Rice has faced sharp criticism for allowing Bush to assert in his January State of the Union address that Iraq was trying to buy uranium from Africa, and the journalists in Dallas questioned her actions Thursday.

Rice and other aides have defended themselves in part by pointing to the fact that doubts about the intelligence appeared in a footnote, written by the State Department, deep in

O'Reilly.

In April, O'Reilly hosted a fundraiser in Washington, D.C., for Best Friends, a charity that benefits inner-city students.

When the singing group known as Best Men was running late, O'Reilly said, "Does anyone know where the Best Men are? I hope they're not in the parking lot stealing our hubcaps."

Earlier this year, he used the derogatory term "Mexican wetbacks." And on Feb. 25, 1999, he said: "Will African-Americans break away

from the pack thinking and reject immorality—because that's the reason the family's breaking apart—alcohol, drugs, infidelity. You have to reject that, and it doesn't seem—and I'm broadly speaking here, but African-Americans won't reject it."

What African-Americans and everyone else should reject is all forms of racism, whether it is Jim Crow or James Crow, Esquire.

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a top-secret National Intelligence Estimate. That footnote was thus not read by Bush, Rice or other top aides, said a senior White House official last month.

But Rice said last Thursday she had read the report "cover to cover, a couple of times."

She reiterated her remorse for the episode, saying that "whenever something like this happens to the president, I feel responsible because I am his national security adviser."

Yet she also repeated her contention that that element of the speech was not critical to Bush's case for war.

"The most appalling thing about this whole incident was that it for a two-week period had us discussing whether Saddam Hussein tried to get yellowcake in Africa, when of course the president of the United States did not go to war over whether Saddam Hussein tried to get yellowcake from Africa," she said.

Rice said she is working on changes to "make certain we don't have to depend on people's memories from one speech to another." She never considered resigning, and never talked to Bush about quitting over the incident, she said.

On another subject, Rice declined to say whether an international court should drop an indictment against Liberian President Charles Taylor, as Taylor has demanded, as a condition of his ceding power.

"How he's treated in terms of the indictment, I think he's going to have to deal with that once he leaves the country, but he needs to leave the country," she said.

Williams

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say no way the networks will be able to resist the ratings-grabbing urge to offer equal time to some of his more colorful competitors. So, he better take a page from *The Running Man* (1987), the film where he played a character named Ben Richards who uttered the prophetic line, "I'm not into politics, I'm into survival." Expect whatever it takes, even if it means naming Jackie Chan as his Lieutenant Governor.

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