

# Time to encourage black educational success

By Marc H. Morial  
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Next year, 2004, will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the momentous decision of the United States Supreme Court in the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* school desegregation case.

That unanimous decision was momentous for many reasons.

One was that it declared segregation of blacks and whites in the nation's public schools unconstitutional, giving African-American schoolchildren the legal right to pursue equality of educational opportunity.

Secondly, by ruling school segregation illegal, the Supreme Court decision not only destroyed the bedrock of the South's perverse system of legalized racism, it also repudiated the North's less rigid but still widespread "custom" of racial discrimination.

In addition, the *Brown* decision completed the collection of dynamic forces Black America had been gathering unto itself during the early and middle decades of the twentieth century that

produced the explosive mass-action Civil Rights Movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s.

For all these reasons, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* deserves our renewed attention in the coming year.

But there's also one additional reason we need to keep the great decision in our sights.

It is to remind us how much yet remains to be done to fulfill its promise.

The litany of what is wrong with public schooling in America—particularly as it affects children of color—is long.

For all of the schools' considerable achievements, and for all the considerable achievements of the African-American youth who've grown up in the post-*Brown* era, America remain a paradox of progress for African-Americans, one in which the "equality gaps" in many areas loom large.

Those gaps are nowhere more dramatic than in education.

Fifty years after *Brown*, we

## To Be Equal

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face the fact that America has not closed the achievement and resource gaps which make it more likely for a black child to attend an overcrowded and dilapidated school where performance is low and drop-out rate is high.

And that jailhouses are in better physical condition than many schoolhouses in black neighborhoods.

And that the rate of incarceration of young black men continue to exceed their rate of going to college. In 2000 there were at least 13 states in which there were more African-Americans in prisons than in college.

At our just concluded annual conference in Pittsburgh, I pledged that to spark a more vigorous campaign to close

the equality gap in education the National Urban League will convene a "National Summit on Urban Education" during this school year.

We intend to identify existing techniques and develop new ones to ensure that every child, be they from the south side of Chicago, the South Bronx, or the Hill District of

Pittsburgh have the intellectual skills they need to read at the highest levels, do math with great proficiency, and academically perform with distinction.

We intend to bring together the best minds in education and public policy and dig at the roots of the achievement gap in order to develop a comprehensive strategy for improving the quality and equality of public education.

We will discuss such issues as the adequacy of pay for teachers, and whether more hours of instruction should be mandated; and whether universal access to early childhood education and after-school tutorials will help children more quickly

acquire reading; and whether more resources and new strategies are needed to deal with the problem of adolescent literacy.

We will unveil a second phase of the Urban League's Campaign for African-American Achievement, and demand that America stop building fancy prisons and redirect these resources to build fancy schools with computers, playgrounds, libraries, and everything else our children need to compete and win in the challenging global marketplace of the 21st century.

Our goal is not just to leave no child behind. It is to push every child ahead. That's (See Morial, Page 14)

## Anderson

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vote on punch-card machines that had been ceremonially mothballed by county officials earlier this year.

By contrast, voters in some small rural counties will cast their vote on optical-scan voting machines, which are the most reliable.

Also as in Florida, there will be widespread voter confusion. Voters will confront a confusing multi-card ballot with 135 candidates listed in random order. While Palm Beach County's "butterfly" ballot was in the media spotlight in 2000, the multi-page ballot design in Duval County resulted in tens of thousands more uncounted votes.

Truth be told, the recall election is a cautionary tale about the perils of taking Democratic base voters for granted. Gov. Gray Davis' narrow five-point margin of victory no doubt emboldened Republicans to seek his ouster. If Davis had courted Blacks and Latinos in the 2002 general election, he would be better positioned to fend off an actor who is trying to muscle him out of his leading-man role in Sacramento.

Consider this: The Black share of the statewide turnout was reportedly 4 percent, down from 13 percent in 1998. The Latino share of the total vote fell from 13 percent four years ago to 10 percent last November. This double heaping of disaffected minority voters contributed to the 50.57 percent turnout—the worst in California's history. Davis ended up with 1.3 million fewer votes than he received in 1998.

So Davis has now flipped the script and is wooing minority voters. He has vowed to sign legislation allowing undocumented

workers to apply for driver's licenses. "You put it on my desk and I'll sign it in a heartbeat," declared Davis at a recent labor rally. His veto of a similar bill two years ago alienated Latinos for whom this issue is a high priority.

The recall election is eerily reminiscent of the Louisiana runoff election between Democratic Sen. Mary Landrieu and Suzanne Haik Terrell last December. There, too, the incumbent took Democratic base voters for granted in the general election. But Landrieu flipped the script when she was forced into a one-month sprint for her political life.

With the help of a high Black voter turnout, Landrieu beat her Republican rival, who was reportedly handpicked by the White House.

As national Democrats rush to the Golden State, they should pay heed to a recent poll by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press that found that most Democrats are not happy campers. Six in ten Democrats are dissatisfied with their party's performance on issues that involve core Democratic values and principles.

Those principles include protecting the right to vote and restoring voters' confidence in the fairness of the electoral process. Democratic leaders must mount a full-court press to ensure that every eligible voter has an equal opportunity to vote and that every vote is counted before the election results are certified by the California secretary of state.

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## Walters

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then, can be regarded as a racist act.

The United States has used troops and manpower to rush into Bosnia to stop the "ethnic cleansing," to go into Iraq twice to save Yemen, but no, no, not into Africa. A recent analysts from the Heritage Foundation said "let's face it, the United States has no vested interests in Liberia." That sentiment is all too prevalent in this country, largely among elite, Right-wing policy makers.

However, a survey by the Program in International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland found that the American people, by and large think that this is not true. In fact, 74 percent of the people surveyed thought that argument was unconvincing and 44 percent—a plurality—thought that we were not concerned enough about problems in Africa.

The view that is a product of policy racism is supported by Rep. Don Payne who called upon Bush to send troops to Africa based partially on the proposition that Liberia has long ties to this country.

This country, however, has rejected the notion of a special relationship to African Liberia, while acknowledging such a special relationship to England: I understand the latter, but I don't understand the former, i.e., why this government would not want to honor a relationship that goes back to 1847.

If the United States truly wanted to show that it supports Africa, Liberia would be the best place to start. Liberia should be a showplace on the African continent and how do you rationalize that it is not, except for the rampant neglect that is a product of disease of racism.

Nevertheless, the greatest antidote to the notion that America has no vital interests in Africa is that we are here, but as long as we refuse to act like we are of African descent, the shabby treatment of African countries will only continue.

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## Curry

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Americans, Asians and Native Americans is expected to exceed \$1.5 trillion in 2008, according to the University of Georgia.

Hispanics, which can belong to any race, will have an annual spending power of slightly more than \$1 billion in 2008.

Dr. King explained, "We don't have to argue with anybody. We don't have to curse and go around acting bad with our words. We don't need any bricks and bottles, we don't need any Molotov cocktails. We just need to go around to these stores, and to these massive industries in our country, and say, 'God sent us by here, to say to you that you're not treating his children right. And we've come by here to ask you to make the first item on your agenda—fair treatment, where God's children are concerned. Now, if you are not prepared to do that, we do have an agenda that we must follow. And our agenda calls for withdrawing economic support from you.'"

Dr. King directly challenged African-Americans.

"...We've got to strengthen our Black institutions," he said.

"I call upon you to take your money out of the [White] banks downtown and deposit your money in Tri-State Bank. We want a bank-in movement in Memphis... We have six or seven Black insurance companies in Memphis. Take out your insurance there. We want to have an 'insurance-in.'"

Dr. King summed up his strategy succinctly: "We begin the process of building a greater economic base. And at the same time, we are putting pressure where it really hurts." Instead of focusing so much on Dr. King's dream, which we are not even close to realizing, we need to focus on what he said while he was awake.

Surprisingly, the focus on demanding what movement leaders call "economic justice" has waned in recent years.

If we spend too much time this week dissecting Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech, we will miss the larger point of self-empowerment.

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