

Compassion real reason for holiday season

By Marc H. Morial
Special to Sentinel-Voice

When we first meet him at the beginning of Charles Dickens' classic morality tale, *A Christmas Carol*, wealthy financier Ebenezer Scrooge has no charity for any human being, let alone a poor one.

He was, Dickens writes in an indelible portrait, "a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching ... covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire, secret and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster ... He carried his own low temperature always with him ... [and he edged] his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance..."

Although Dickens' story was set in London nearly two centuries ago, when the poor who had jobs lived a miserable existence and those who didn't lived a brutal one, it's guiding principle — of the need for compassion and generosity toward those less fortunate — are important to adhere to today as then.

One may say that the poor

are far better off today than ever before. That would be true.

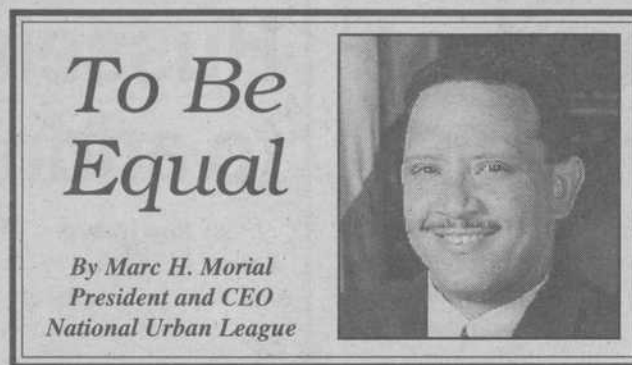
It's also no doubt true that the fact is much easier to take comfort in for those who are not poor, who are not out of work, who are not on the verge of destitution.

But it cannot obscure the regret voiced by the ghost of Scrooge's partner, Jacob Marley, when he "visited" Scrooge Christmas Eve night: that in life he had failed to realize "The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence were all my business."

One of those who's long recognized that we're all our brothers' and sisters' keepers is Alonzo Mourning, the great pro basketball center who recently retired from the sport after his doctors warned him he needed an immediate kidney transplant.

Fortunately, "Zo" found a donor among his family and underwent transplant surgery December 19.

We at the National Urban League were thrilled to have had Alonzo Mourning as one of those we honored at our Equal Opportunity Day



To Be Equal

By Marc H. Morial
President and CEO
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Awards Dinner in early November for their compassion and determination to do what they can to help others improve their lives.

Our other honorees were: Condoleezza Rice, President Bush's national security advisor, the Reverend Dr. Floyd H. Flake, president of Wilberforce University and pastor of the Greater Allen Cathedral of New York, Emmitt Smith, the National Football League's career rushing leader and running back for the Arizona Cardinals, and the United Parcel Service, the world's largest package delivery company.

Zo's brief remarks that evening struck me as the essence of the spirit of compassion and sense of obligation to the human community that we celebrate most loudly dur-

ing the holiday season — and need to celebrate loudly all year long.

Speaking more of all the kindness and love he had received growing up as a foster child in Tidewater Virginia than of the many youth programs he now sponsors or participates in, he said simply, "Giving is the reason I'm here."

Certainly, the need for those of us who have to share our good fortune with the less fortunate is as great at any time in recent memory.

The papers now are full of good news about the economy.

But it's still true that more

than nine million Americans are unemployed, and nearly two million have been out of work long past the six-month deadline for receiving unemployment benefits, and the Black unemployment rate is nearly twice that of whites.

And the incidence of hunger and homelessness is rising across the country, according to a report issued last week by the US Conference of Mayors.

Its annual survey for this year found a sharp increase in hunger and homelessness in urban areas among low-income working families — and a sharp decrease in the ability of the majority of the nation's 25 largest cities to meet the crisis.

Conference president James A. Garner, the mayor of Hempstead, New York, said the recent good news about the top of the economy would have little positive effect on the state and local budget shortfalls that have produced drastic cutbacks in social services during the past

two years.

"We don't expect it to get any better next year," he said.

That ominous prediction underscores the words the Reverend James Forbes, Jr., senior minister of New York's Riverside Church, utters in a fascinating profile of him by the Public Broadcasting Service program "NOW with Bill Moyers." The program will begin airing on the PBS network December 26.

In it, Forbes, a son of the South and the first African-American to lead the renowned church, warns of the "trends [in American society] away from parity, equality, and justice. God's heart aches," he declares, "and it is a sin to be silent."

That was the moral of Charles Dickens' timeless tale as well: that one must act to relieve the suffering of the poor and the least able among us. Those of us who are fortunate must recognize that it's always the season for compassion and giving.

Jackson

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White, Black and Latino — don't need protection from each other. They need to come together to gain protection from the special interests that benefit from their divisions. They need to elect representatives who will demand fair taxes, so that vital services aren't cut so that millionaires can get tax breaks. They need representatives who will end the tax dodges and incentives that encourage companies to take jobs from here and more them abroad. They need representatives who will change the trade policies that are draining good jobs from this country. They need greater investment in education for their children, in health care for their families, in clean air and clean water for their health.

Racial fears still exist. The recent actions of the police only feed them. The marches for dignity will be met with hostility. So the

challenge for the New South is whether we can find economic common ground, even as we still struggle against racial fears and for racial justice.

The great battles over segregation were almost 40 years ago. Across the South, we've learned to work together, to play ball together, to fight together. We go to separate churches for the most part, but we are more religious, more conservative in moral values than the secular North. But now, for the vast majority of the South, the challenge is whether we can register together, vote together, and act together to empower workers across lines of race. The result of that historic struggle will surely define the future of the New South, and of the nation.

Jesse L. Jackson Sr. is founder and president of the Chicago-based Rainbow/Push Coalition.

Overstreet

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The reality is that for the past 40 straight months there has been a decrease in the number of manufacturing jobs in America. This fact has nothing to do with "unqualified" Blacks taking jobs away from "qualified" whites.

This reality is based on the fact major American companies are shipping its manufacturing jobs abroad to take advantage of cheap labor, thus increasing these companies' bottom lines.

Further, in the few cases where an unemployed factory worker is lucky enough to find work, it is in a lower-paying, service-industry job. Thus, whether it is the

case where a white person can't find work or is working below his skill level, the result is a substantially decreased standard of living. In neither case, however, is it the result of a Black person taking a job from a white person.

If this were the case, the labor statistic where the unemployment rate for whites is 5 percent and that for Blacks is more than double at nearly 11 percent would not exist.

The only way exploitation can remain a fact in American life is if individuals continue to allow others to do your thinking, thereby control what you believe and how you act.

Saddam

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of Tikrit in an underground bunker described as "coffin-sized." Though armed, the man who is alleged to have tortured and executed many of his people surrendered without a struggle.

"He was caught like a rat," said Maj. Gen. Raymond Odierno, in an Associated Press report. "The intimidation and fear this man generated [for] over 30 years is now gone."

Responding to a tip from an Iraqi arrested Dec. 12, the troops moved on the Adwar farmhouses the evening of Dec. 13. With soldiers seconds away from tossing a grenade into his bunker, the disheveled Hussein surrendered.

"My name is Saddam Hussein," the Associated Press reports the authoritarian former president of Iraq as saying. "I am

the president of Iraq and I want to negotiate."

Hussein's capture has already paid dividends. Other high-ranking officials from his regime have been captured. However, 13 key officials remain at large.

Excited about what had taken place, a very tired Tillery called his father — a retired colonel who served 26 years in the Army — to deliver his news.

"His voice had a morale-boosting kind of tone. But you could hear the relief in his voice," said his proud father. "I don't think that they, today, understand how big of an issue this is for the ones that participated in this whole event."

Maybe Spec. Tillery does understand. In another e-mail to his father, he writes, "I guess my unit is a part of history now, huh? Feels kind of weird."

Waters

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Finally, senior military officers estimate that the United States will remain in Iraq for perhaps the next two years. What will be the cost of stationing troops in a country where they are constant shooting targets and how long will the patience of the American people last? What will be the cost of reservists doing unexpected, long-term duty and in the process losing their jobs and small businesses and coming back to experience poor health care from Veterans Administration health care system?

And what will be the response of voters next year when Bush tells them that he needs another \$100 billion dollars in order for American troops (not Haliburton) to complete the job?

Another uncertainty is that a live Saddam Hussein poses a certain threat to Bush. I get the feeling that Bush doesn't want him to live very long, may not have wanted him to have

been found alive, and now faces the problem that he doesn't know what Saddam Hussein will say.

Saddam's relationship with the United States intelligence and military services goes back a long way. He undoubtedly possesses secrets and other information that could be an embarrassment to both Bush 1 and Bush 2 — and throw in Ronald Reagan for good measure. Think about it. Why did Saddam try to kill President Bush's father? Did Hussein perceive some kind of double-cross? It will be interesting to see if he is exposed to the kind of legal proceedings where he will be allowed to engage these subjects. I doubt it.

In any case, the din of victory is loud at the moment. But conditions on the ground in the Middle East are dynamic and could change in a hurry. In fact, I am betting that they will.

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