

# Corporate America needs to plug diversity gap

By Marc H. Morial  
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For four decades now businesses across America have invested enormous resources in making their workforces more diverse, and trying to make sure not only their own workers but also the general public knows it.

One dramatic manifestation of corporate America's commitment to diversity came early last year amid the debate about which way the U.S. Supreme Court ought to rule in the affirmative action case involving the University of Michigan.

Then, as the court prepared to hear oral arguments and accept friend-of-the-court briefs, scores of prominent American companies, including 64 Fortune 500 corporations (and 30 of America's top former military and civilian defense officials), joined civil rights groups, labor unions, and institutions of higher learning in supporting Michigan's pro-affirmative action position.

Kenneth Frazier, senior vice president and general counsel for Merck, the giant pharmaceutical company, succinctly expressed the "bottom line" case for business when he said, diversity creates stronger companies. The work we do directly impacts patients of all types around the globe. Understanding people is essential to our success."

And yet, in broad terms, it's hard to tell with precision

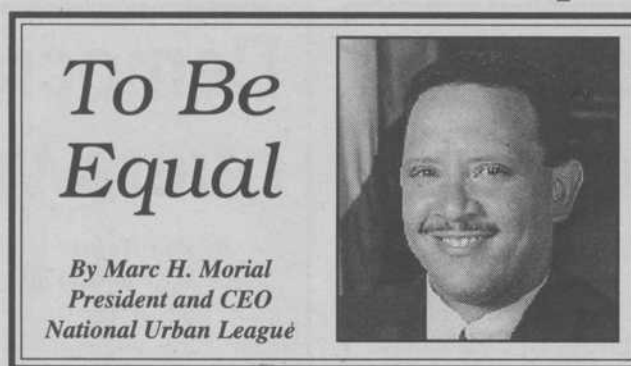
what the business community's effort on diversity has produced because it's never developed a meaningful measure of the effectiveness of diversity programs.

That's one reason the National Urban League, with generous support from Enterprise Rent-A-Car, the nation's largest rental car company, undertook a study of perceptions about diversity in corporate America. The recently released report, "Diversity Practices that Work: The American Worker Speaks" (available online at [www.nul.org](http://www.nul.org)), surveyed more than 5,500 American workers on the topic of diversity.

It was conducted by the management consulting firm of Global Lead.

The results are a wake-up call for American businesses in several ways.

Employees, who in substantial majorities support diversity, have more favorable perceptions of diversity initiatives at companies where leaders show a personal commitment to diversity and hold themselves and others accountable; where training programs are established to foster greater awareness of diversity issues and the positive impact diversity can have on overall company performance; where an established track record exists of recruiting people of diverse backgrounds; and where employees earn rewards for their contributions



in diversity.

But the "Diversity Practices" study found that while most workers consider diversity good for business, many believe their current employers don't have an effective diversity initiative.

Even more worrisome is that one in eight employees believes their company is still at risk for a diversity-related lawsuit.

Business executives should find these results troubling because the survey determined that companies participating in the study which had diversity practices employees considered effective boasted a productivity rate 18-percent better than that of the overall American economy. Further, three-quarters of these companies have generated productivity results equal to or better than their major competitors.

In other words, by making use of a good leadership and management practices, advancing diversity actually enhances overall business performance: a fully diverse workplace can make the bot-



tom-line difference between an average company and a world-class economy.

But business leaders have

significant work to do, because while 80 percent of employees surveyed said they were comfortable working in diverse teams, and a significant majority, 65 percent, agree that diversity improves creativity and innovation, only 45 percent believe that diversity is part of their company's corporate culture, and only 32 percent believe their company has an effective diversity initiative.

By contrast, more than two-thirds of the corporate executive's surveyed hold

more favorable views of the success of their company's current diversity programs than their employees do.

That gap in perception suggests that, at the least, companies need to review their diversity initiatives in order to ensure they're doing what they're supposed to — and revamp programs that aren't achieving their goals and enhance those that are.

An inclusive workplace and a successful work environment is everyone's business.

## Overstreet

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Since Garcia arrived on the scene four years ago, trying to relate to the African-American community by using the "N" word. Under his leadership, quality education has completed the journey of "going to hell in a hand-basket."

Back in 1955, the district was comprised of 20,045 students and 1,171 employees or 17 students for each employee. Under Garcia, the just completed year had 267,894 students and 24,705 employees or 10.8 students per employee. This represents a 57 percent increase in the ratio of students to employees.

Just during the years of Garcia's tenure, the school budget has gone up an average of

8.52 percent per year. During the same period of time, student enrollment has gone up 9.4 percent or only 3.1 percent per year.

Thus, one can only conclude that the superintendent is lying when he says the public hasn't been throwing money at education.

Fact is, throwing more money at education has been a fruitless exercise in that the result has been to experience annual declines in the quality of education students are receiving.

Today, in America, the only difference between apple pie and lying, at least to me, is the pie still goes down a lot easier. Lying to me causes me to throw up whatever it is you are trying to feed me.

## Powell

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The World Bank and other multilateral financial institutions estimate the Caribbean country needs \$1.36 billion for reconstruction through 2006. After taking into account Haiti's current resources and pledges it has received, the World Bank estimated there was a \$924 million gap.

Powell said U.S. aid to Haiti for 2004-2005 will amount to \$230 million. The Inter-American Development Bank already has \$400 million in projects under way in Haiti and pledged an additional \$260 million over the next two years.

Other major pledges came from the European Union, \$325 million, and Canada \$135 million.

The U.S. figure does not include money that the United States will make available for

peacekeeping in Haiti, State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said.

Powell said the people of Haiti deserve a chance to succeed, especially since over the past 12 months they have experienced economic crisis, political chaos, devastating floods and fires.

Haitians earn on average \$361 a year, just under \$1 a day. Half of the country's urban population does not have access to clean drinking water. About five percent of the population of 8 million is estimated to be infected with HIV/AIDS, the highest rate in the Western Hemisphere.

Human rights groups protested outside the donors' meeting and contended in a statement the pledged money could end up in "the pockets of foreigners and Haitian elite with little reaching the people in need."

## Walters

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for such measures for fear of upsetting the possibility of a smooth Kerry/Edwards train ride into the White House. The Congressional Black Caucus has held two Black Leadership Summits and the Kerry campaign has held periodic telephone conference calls. But precious little of this input has gone into the bowels of the platform process.

One example of what I mean is that the statehood for the District of Columbia, a predominantly Black city, was contained in the 2000 version of the Democratic Party platform. However, when the draft of the 2004 platform was finished in Miami on the weekend of July 10, it was not there. Another is that Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr. attempted to get the Platform Committee to go on record supporting a Constitutional Amendment for the right to vote and this set off a tortuous round of negotiations and debate with the Kerry folks that controlled the drafting process, ending in some vague compromise language.

Finally, Dennis Kucinich delegates challenged the platform language at the drafting session by demanding that American troops withdraw from Iraq. After rejection of this notion and much negotiation, Kerry operatives pressured them to accept the Kerry notion of leaving when it is appropriate. In short, the progressive edge of the issues have been blunted for the sake of not allowing Kerry to appear too liberal, thus making him

even more vulnerable to his opponents on this score, and for the sake of "party unity." This year in particular, the strength of the pressure of "party unity" also blunts issue specifics because the campaign is not so much about Kerry as it is about getting George Bush out of the White House. Thus, there is the sentiment, even among Black political leaders, that anything that appears to interfere with that goal should be sacrificed.

This means at least two things. First, the Black agendas that are written outside of the formal political process are the best picture that we can get in this election cycle of the specific goals of the Black community. And while they will not have official standing, they will exist as the measuring rod for what is eventually passed by the parties. Second, the Black community must look beyond this season for the kind of attention to their specific needs that is presented on the national stage as a part of the formal political process and prepare to pursue these issues in the public policy arena regardless of who is elected.

It would be tempting to think that the hundreds of Black delegates to the Democratic Convention would demand attention to their specific needs. But they are a carefully chosen lot, under the discipline of the candidate and, of course, no fools.

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## Fletcher

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us with questions about the role of the Bush administration in the coup or the circumstances under which President Aristide was ousted should, to borrow from FOX Commentator Bill O'Reilly, shut up. We are asked to approve a situation that should be repudiated, and assume that the clock cannot be turned back.

Such a course of action is unacceptable. While President Aristide, presently living in exile in South Africa, does not seem to have taken steps to establish a government-in-exile, the issues at stake are far beyond Aristide-the-person, as I have said in previous columns. Democracy did not have to be restored in February 2004 via an armed insurrection.

Democracy needed to have been shored up with international assistance through both the elimination of the armed thugs who in-

vaded Haiti as well as the provision of promised assistance to President Aristide's government. That did not happen. Instead, the Bush administration was permitted to undermine the sovereignty of yet another country.

In essence, then, we cannot get over or get beyond what has taken place in Haiti.

In large part this is because the effects of the events of February 2004 in Haiti continue to unfold. It is also because the motivations behind Bush administration duplicity and destabilization in Haiti remain central to their approach to handling other international flash points. Unless the underlying approach is challenged and ultimately rejected, we will never be able to get over February 29th because that will be only one day in a terrible line of infamies.

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