

Los Angeles

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last week to work diligently on building a diverse coalition to address the issue of equality and will endorse such measures as establishing "livable wage" jobs, promoting educational and job training programs in prisons, developing affordable options for small businesses to provide health care for employees and creating more park land.

They pledged also to work on building quality grocery stores to help Blacks live healthier lives, fostering more economic development along the Crenshaw Corridor, advocating for college preparatory courses for all students, promoting more after-school programs, holding judges accountable for harsh sentences and increasing home ownership through a Crenshaw Housing Trust Fund.

The goals seem out of reach considering not much has improved in the last 40 years, and there are those who are skeptical about the report's future impact and effectiveness in mobilizing people to go out into the community and make change.

"My concern is, these things are always released in privileged environments, corporate America with folks who are affluent and not affected by this. So, in truth, we have to make sure this piece is more widespread," said Anthony Samad, a local author, professor and moderator of the Black Issues Forum.

Those with the power to make change said they will not let the report fade away, but instead will use it as a tool to monitor their progress over the next five years.

"This is a city with a very diverse population but also very divergent in terms of economics," Villaraigosa said, comparing the state of Los Angeles to Charles Dickens' novel "A Tale of Two Cities," which spoke of the harsh living conditions of the lower class in France that helped spark the bloody French Revolution.

"I see this [report] as a call to action, and I accept the challenge that I have been given, because we are all in this boat together."

Villaraigosa said he hopes to promote a fair, inclusive zoning ordinance to create more affordable housing, as well as promoting more green technologies and creating jobs in the inner city, while using his bully pulpit

to help reform education and raise graduation rates.

The overall California High School Exit Exam passing rate in 2002 was 28 percent for Blacks, compared to 30 percent for Latinos, 65 percent for Whites and 70 percent for Asians. Nearly 60 percent of African-Americans fail to graduate from high school.

One of the more sobering statistics contained in the report stated that 32 percent of Black males born in Los Angeles in 2001 are likely to spend some time in prison, compared to 17 percent of Latinos and 6 percent of White men.

Blacks here are also twice as likely as other groups to be victims of violent crime and hate crimes.

"That is often a wedge issue that is used by the right wing to argue in favor of more harsh sentences and severe punishment for Blacks," said Jody Armour, law professor at USC, who has studied race bias in the courts as well as disproportionate sentencing for Blacks and Latinos.

"Those advocating harsher sentences say it is good for the Black community to support these sentences because they are more than likely the victims of these crimes. But what is breeding higher criminal activity is nothing genetic or innate, but rather poverty and bad education and poor health care — all of the blights that face urban America.

"People trapped in desperate situations will inevitably turn to desperate measures and will turn to those who are closest at hand and to those who are most vulnerable, meaning those in their neighborhoods. Simply locking people up will not do the trick. There can be no Band-Aid solution to the problem. Poverty breeds crime, so we need to start there," Armour added.

Bratton said he is committed to increasing the number of African-Americans in law enforcement.

Blacks currently represent 13.7 percent of sworn officers in the LAPD and 10.2 percent in the county Sheriff's Department. Blacks represent about 10 percent of the general population here.

"Police officers must be of the community," said Bratton.

"You cannot have housing of value without security," he added.

"You cannot have good

health with thousands being murdered on the streets. You cannot have an education if you are afraid to go to school. Public safety is first and foremost so all of these other things can occur. But in saying that, we must have a partnership with the community and make sure that officers do not break the law to enforce the law."

Another statistic that caught the attention of those reviewing the report was one dealing with "driving while Black."

According to the study, Black drivers are stopped by officers here at a rate almost double the national average. Blacks and Latinos are searched by the LAPD four times more often than Whites or Asians; yet only 38 percent of African-Americans are found to have illegal items, compared to 65 percent of Latinos, 55 percent of Whites, and 54 percent of Asians.

The report states that African-Americans have the lowest score on the "Equality Index," a measurement scale based on 150 elements in six categories: economics, housing, health, education, criminal justice and civic engagement.

Blacks have a score of 69, with Latinos not far ahead at 71. Asians and Whites are at the top of the index with scores of 98 and 100, respectively.

The index was created by analyzing data — ranging from preschool enrollment to

mortgage rates — and interviews with thousands of Angelenos.

In the area of health, Blacks have the highest overall death rate and are three times more likely to suffer from homicide and HIV/AIDS.

Child obesity is also higher for Blacks and Latinos, which corresponds to higher diabetes rates.

"One in every three Black babies born today is destined to become a diabetic," said Dr. Robert Ross with the California Endowment.

"To reverse the trend, we must transform neighborhoods into places where our children have safe places to play and exercise and have access to more than just fast food."

John Mack, recently retired president of the Los Angeles Urban League, said the organization has already established groups that are working with the report to identify strategies that are attainable and will continue to do so throughout the year.

While the report dealt specifically with African-Americans, the authors said it is important for every one to become involved.

Quoting civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., the authors wrote, "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

Kevin Herrera writes for the Wave Newspapers

Racist

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hate crimes. So-called "witness," Frank Agostini, 20, the son of a detective, surrendered to police.

Moore receives disability benefits from the U.S. Army. The press reported that exactly two years ago, he was indicted on charges of the unauthorized use of a vehicle, wherein he pled guilty to a misdemeanor charge of possessing stolen property.

Minucci, labeled by the mainstream *New York Press* as "Fat Nick," was once prosecuted when he was 15, for beating a Sikh man at a temple on Sept. 11, 2001. A year later, he was sentenced to five years probation after stabbing a 16-year-old boy, who died before the case could go to trial.

In 1986, after the Howard Beach beating, Rev. Sharpton and others marched through the neighborhood; they were heckled, but undaunted. Once again, as he held a July 1 press conference, he endured a few demonstrators flashing "Free Fat Nick" signs. Yet, Rev. Sharpton, accompanied by Rev. Herbert Daughtry and Councilman Charles Barron, was undeterred. They met with several White Howard Beach community leaders.

"Last time, they threw watermelons at us and nobody said anything," Rev. Sharpton said. "We were met with mobs and hordes of hate. Today, the mobs are much smaller, but the difference is, good people are standing up defending us."

Nevertheless, racial tension is still a distinct possibility, since 19 years later, the Black community clearly remembers the 1986 Howard Beach incident, when after their car broke down, three Black men were attacked and chased by a group of Whites. Michael Griffiths, 23, died after being hit by a car while trying to get away from the mob. One of the Black men was beaten with a baseball bat. The other got away.

Surrounded by racial tension, then-Mayor Ed Koch likened it to a lynching. Eight Whites pled guilty to, or were convicted of, manslaughter, assault, conspiracy and rioting. For certain, the disputed issue of race and racism is as American as apple pie, and Gotham may be about to serve up another slice in terms of debate and analysis.

One question asked by a Black *New Yorker* was, "Why were they in Howard Beach anyway?" The reply from another was, "They have a right to go where they want. You've got White people running up and through our neighborhoods, plotting how to steal land and houses — we don't go around beating them up!"

Due back in Criminal Court this week, Minucci and Ench face up to 25 years in prison if convicted.

Nayaba Arinde writes for The Final Call.

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