

Economic analysts: America must 'keep moving'

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — Over the past 40 years since the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., extensive advancements have been made in the Black community.

For example, the African-American high school graduation rate has increased by more than 214 percent and the college graduation rate for African-Americans has increased by more than 400 percent, according to the Institute for Policy Studies in a special report released last week.

However, at the rate of the advancements over the past 40 years, in most instances, it would take more than another decade for Blacks to catch up with the current graduation rate of Whites, states the IPS policy briefing.

It further states:

—With the high school graduation rate having increased by 214 percent since 1968, it would take until 2018 to reach equality.

—With the college graduation rate increase of 400 percent since 1968, it would take until 2087 to reach equality.

—Furthermore, it will take more than 537 years to reach income equality with Whites if the income gap continues to close at the same rate it has since 1968.

—If the racial wealth divide continues to close as slowly as it has, since 1983, it will take 634 years for Blacks to reach wealth equality with Whites.

—Today, a third of the Black workforce earns a gross income of less than \$385 a week and a gross income of less than \$20,000 annually.

These are just some of the economic and educational atrocities pointed out in a report,

The report, titled, "The Unrealized American Dream," was compiled by Dedrick Muhammad, a senior organizer for the IPS's Program on Inequality and the Common Good. Responding to King's question, "Where do we go from here?," the report's introduction asks the question, "Where are We'?"

It was distributed in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the King assassination, April 4.

"Dr. Martin Luther King recognized that the next phase in African-Americans' quest for civil rights and

equality was one that would focus on the economic divide between the wealthiest Americans, the working class, and those left to suffer in poverty," the report states. "During this time where 10 percent of the wealthiest Americans control 70 percent of the country's wealth and African-Americans have only 10 percent of the wealth of White Americans, King's analysis of economic inequality as the foundation of racial inequality remains as valid today as it was 40 years ago."

The IPS analysis is just one of a string of impacting reports and observations expressed last week. Across the country, marches, rallies, and special church services were held at which orators gave voice to the atrocities that still exist. Also, written documentation of where America stands in relation to African-American advancement was distributed broadly with hopes that conscientious hands will advance a speedy and progressive agenda.

"Today, 40 years after Dr. King's mountaintop vision, we seem to be paralyzed outside the gates of our promised city. True, we have made amazing progress to get where we are," states a report, "Beyond the Mountaintop: King's Prescription for Poverty," a policy brief by labor specialist Steven Pitts and economics professor Bill Spriggs.

"Our out-of-wedlock birthrate has fallen by half. And countless positions of authority — from school boards to political offices to the boardrooms of Fortune 500 corporations — are now filled by Black women and men. All of this is testament to Black competence, the evidence of which had been stifled for centuries under the weight of racial oppression."

The recognition of progress, coupled with the vision for "the promised land" of equality appears to be a consistent and unified theme during this season of commemoration.

Even U.S. Sen. Barack Obama, himself an iconic representation of progress as the leading Democratic contender for president, referred to racial barriers as being "problems that confront us all" even as many right-wing advocates think Blacks should be satisfied.

A statement by more than a dozen Black economists released last week, also seeks

to push past perceptions that African-Americans have come so far that the anniversary was a week to applaud rather than plan.

Dr. King died in Memphis as he planned a march in support of Black sanitation workers that would further an escalated vision for economic empowerment and justice. But, in his final days, he often exhorted listeners to "keep moving," as he did in his speech, "Transforming a Neighborhood into a Brotherhood."

Reports released last week also encouraged

Americans to dislodge themselves from immobility.

"The Promised Land that Dr. King saw during his last days is still more of a hope than a reality for many in this country," declares the statement from the Black economists which includes Pitts of UCLA at Berkeley, Spriggs of Howard University, Julianne Malveaux, president of Bennett College for Women, and Gregory Price of Morehouse College.

"In order to reduce poverty and improve the fate of low-wage workers in the labor market, we believe that

public policies must be enacted that attack racial discrimination and increase the prospects for workers who do not earn a living wage."

A synopsis of policy and action suggestions from the three states, "The Unrealized Dream," "Beyond the Mountaintop" and the "Black Economists Statement" are as follows:

—Ensure a debt-free higher education to first-generation and low-income college students. (IPS)

—Expand homeownership through various first-time homeowner mecha-

nisms, such as soft-second mortgages and subsidized interest rates. (IPS)

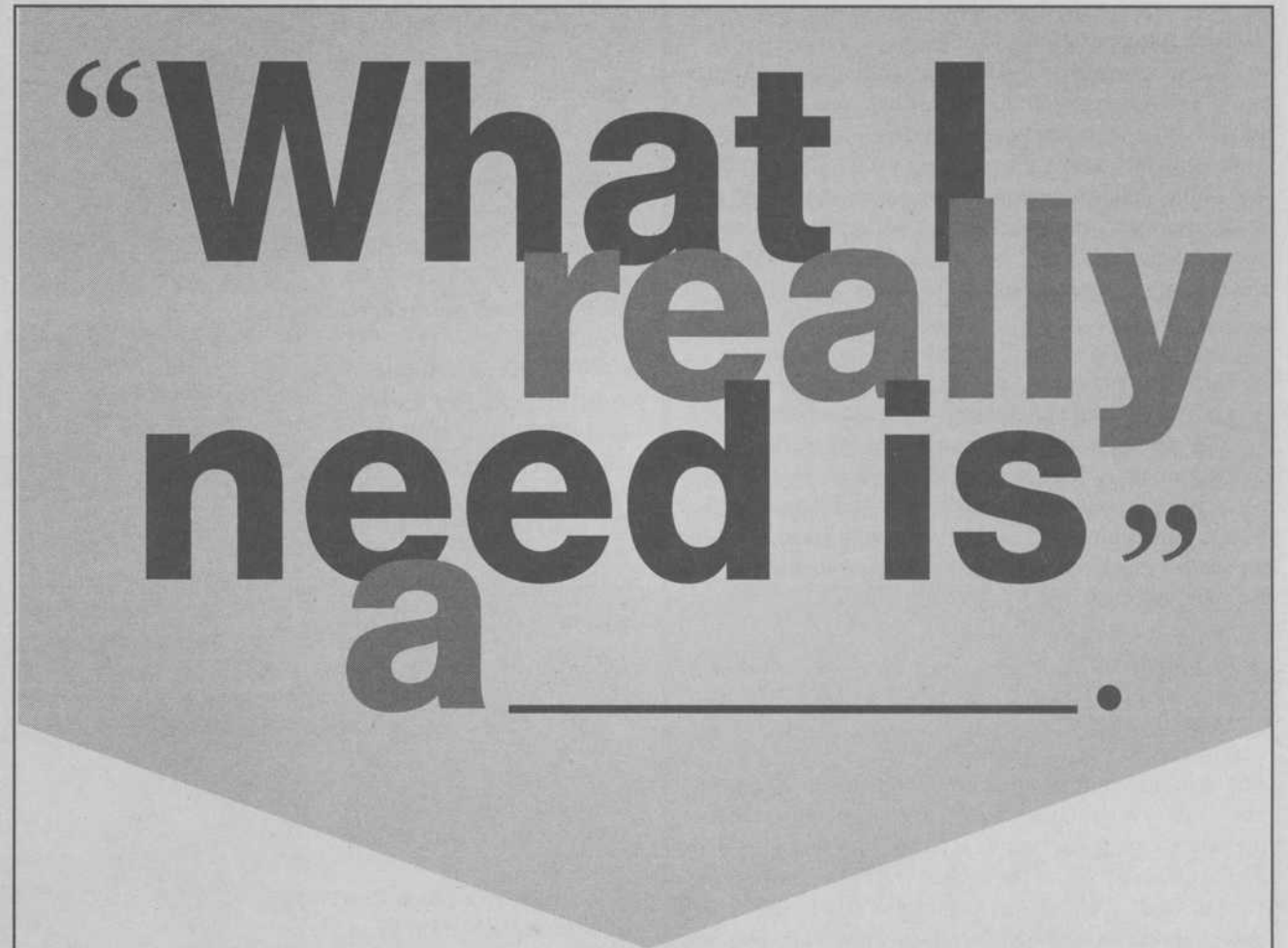
—Strengthen federal investment in wealth development for asset-poor Americans. (IPS)

—Create a "green" urban infrastructure and job development fund. (IPS)

—Provide and a universal and more comprehensive health care plan for all Americans. (IPS)

—Generate full employment, even focusing on the 'unemployable.' (Beyond...)

—Fight discrimination by (See Analysis, Page 9)



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