

# Dropout crisis needs our undivided attention

By Marc H. Morial  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

"Invest in the human soul. Who knows, it might be a diamond in the rough." Mary McLeod Bethune 1875-1955.

I participated in a conference organized by General Colin Powell in Washington, D.C., earlier this month and learned that every 26 seconds, one American high school student drops out of school — that's over 3,000 youth per day; nearly 10,000 youth each month; or 1.1 million young people a year. And unfortunately, the crisis has hit minority communities particularly hard.

Today, in the nation's 50 largest cities, only 52 percent of public high school students graduate, compared with a national average of 70 percent. Even more startling is the disparity in graduation rates between many urban areas and their more affluent suburbs.

In New York, the graduation rate is 47.4 percent for the city and 82.9 percent for the suburbs. In Philadelphia, the split is 49.2 vs.

82.4 percent and in Los Angeles, it is 57.1 vs. 77.9 percent.

The fact is, almost half of African-American and Latino teens do not graduate on time. High school dropouts are more likely to be unemployed, live in poverty and wind up in prison. Because the financial implications of dropping out of high school are directly related to a person's level of education, the financial stability of Black families, Black communities and the nation at large are impacted by the African American high school dropout rate.

Effects of high school dropout rates on the global economy are just as devastating. At a time when Asian giants like China and India are winning the competition for technology and jobs, America simply can't afford to leave millions of largely Black and Brown young diamonds languishing in the rough. We are



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literally throwing away our future. Also, it is estimated that if the graduation rates for minority and White students actually reached parity by 2020, the potential increase in income across the nation would add more than \$310 billion to the U.S. economy.

The current dropout rate is a crisis, more vital to our future than the war in Iraq or the current economic recession. It's time we treated it as such. We have both a national and a moral obligation to make sure that all of our children get the education they need to succeed.

I'm not talking about throwing money at the problem — I'm talking about investing in human capital. I'm talking about making certain that all Black children have access to a quality education.

And, research has shown that the achievement gap between White and minority stu-

dents is due in large part to inequities in income and funding. We must provide adequate resources, not only for public education, but for health programs and mentoring and after-school programs so our children are given every opportunity to graduate, go on to college and make a good living.

The great American educator, Mary McLeod Bethune once said she would never rest while "there is a single [African-American] boy or girl without a chance to prove his worth." And, in 1954, when the Supreme Court ended school segregation in the landmark *Brown v Board of Education* case, there was the exuberant hope that a quality education would at last be the guarantee for every child in America.

But 54 years after *Brown*, we seem to be falling further behind. It's time we — American citizens, the Bush Administration, local and state governments and all presidential candidates — do something about it.

Marc Morial is President and CEO of the National Urban League.

# Rising food costs hit most vulnerable Americans

By Nicole Lee  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Last week in the *Washington Post*, on the front page, there was an article about the devastating effects of rising food prices. Officials stated they cannot afford to provide basic nutrition to children.

Rising costs of corn, wheat, fruit, and milk are "really hitting us," one official said, while lamenting that the situation "is not sustainable."

This is not a government official from a country in Sub-Saharan Africa. Or Haiti. This is a quote from an official in the New York City school system. Schools from New York to Florida are struggling to keep up with rising food costs in order to provide nutritious school lunches.

Last year, the New York City school system paid over \$3 million for milk alone. The article stated that sharp rises in the cost of milk, grain and fresh fruits and vegetables are hitting cafeterias across the country, forcing cash-strapped schools to raise prices or pinch pennies.

For some time in the U.S., we have taken for granted that an abundance of food is our divine right. Yet, this myth has begun to meet actual reality. We can no longer afford food for our families.

With the ravages of rising oil prices, coupled with genetic bio-markets and a food subsidy system not prepared to feed all the world's people, Americans may just be seeing the first wave of concern. We now live within a world economic system, of our own making, that Americans may not be able to navigate.

Recent weeks have seen food-related protests in Niger, Haiti, Cameroon, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Morocco, Mauritania, Ivory Coast and Egypt. A NPR story on Haiti's food crisis referred to Haiti as the "canary in the mine" and that the rest of us must heed the warning.

Ironically, but not surprisingly, leaders from international financial institutions who have created and supported the very trade policies which led to food insecurity are now expressing concern with the current food shortages. IMF Managing Director Dominique Strauss-Kahn concluded that if food prices continue to rise, "Hundreds of thousands of people will be starving ... [leading] to disruption of the economic environment."

If we consider the already vulnerable economic environments of many countries



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throughout Africa and the Diaspora, any small increase in food prices furthers these ominous circumstances.

Though stable and secure access to food and potable water are basic human rights, the U.S. has consistently shown its apathy and ineptitude towards addressing domestic and international food insecurity. At the 2002 World

Food Summit, the U.S. stood alone in opposition to inclusion of "food as a human right" within a declaration to be signed by all governments. The U.S. additionally promoted the importance of genetically modified crops as key to eliminating poverty and ensuring food security. Genetically modified crops decrease food diversity, force small farmers to use this technology at an increased expense, and ignore alternative, organic and indigenous agricultural development plans.

The recent release of the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and

Technology for Development Report, commissioned by the World Bank and the UN Food and Agricultural Organization, determined that the crisis of rising food prices cannot be compared to those in recent history. The report concludes that "the mounting crisis in food security is of a different complexity and potentially different magnitude than the one of the 1960s."

Food insecurity requires our immediate attention. First, we must accept that current U.S. and international economic policies have led to this current state of riots, violence, malnutrition, and death. We must accept that food insecurity is a national security priority that will not be addressed by a few quick fixes or more free trade, but that our economic structure requires systemic change. If not, given the reality of global warming, the effects of agribusiness and the decreasing options for sustainable livelihoods, U.S. Americans must face the real possibility of being on the losing end of the impending resource wars.

Nicole C. Lee is the Executive Director of TransAfrica Forum.

## Report

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and global expansion. They are vital to America's economic success."

The MBDA is the only federal agency created specifically to foster the establishment and growth of minority-owned businesses. MBDA "actively promotes the strategic growth and competitiveness of large, medium and small minority business enterprises by offering management and technical assistance through a network of local business centers throughout the U.S."

MBDA publications say the nation's minority-owned firms are growing. They show that the nation has 4.1 million minority business firms with \$670 billion in total gross receipts that have been responsible for the creation of 4.7 million jobs. The MBDA report said: "Access to adequate capital remains a problem for most minority-owned firms. These firms were more likely to use credit cards and less likely to use bank loans to start or acquire their businesses compared to non-minority-owned firms."

The MBDA officials say it is using its national network of centers to facilitate tradi-

tional commercial loans, government guaranteed loans and in some instances, private equity for minority firms. In fiscal year 2006, MBDA produced \$407 million in financial transactions and nearly \$1.2 billion in procurement opportunities for its minority business clients.

Langston said, "Our programs and services are assisting thousands of minority business clients with securing the capital they need to realize their business potential."

MBDA's long term goal is "achieving entrepreneurial parity for minority business enterprises." MBDA conducts studies on the state of minority business enterprises, trends impacting these firms, their performances, and challenges and opportunities for their growth.

MBDA shares its research with academia and government agencies to expand the knowledge of MBEs and to provide information that can shape programs in support of MBEs. A full copy of the new MBDA report can be found at [www.mbda.gov](http://www.mbda.gov).

William Reed writes for the *Washington Informer*.

## Clingman

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category and at the top of every bad category in this country; we cannot afford to sit back, mired in ignorance and apathy, waiting for the arrogant to save us. Newsflash! They ain't comin', y'all.

After 400 years in this country, after suffering under the worst treatment, pushed to the end of the line in every stage of progress, and relegated to second-class citizens, Black Americans remain the most vulnerable of any group.

We must stop volunteering to be ignorant of the things that matter; we must open our minds to the real conditions of this country and the world; we must spend more time critiquing, analyzing, and appropriately responding to the power of the arrogant; and we must design and execute economic initiatives that benefit our people and our chil-

dren, the way others are doing, without apology.

The arrogance of the powerful leads to the ignorance of the weak, and that leads to the perpetuation of the status quo in this country. They will continue to treat us like mushrooms by keeping us in the dark and feeding us cow manure. We will continue to think we are players while we are really being pimped. We must wake up; there's more to life than sports and entertainment.

Power corrupts, but Amos Wilson taught us that powerlessness also corrupts. Powerlessness is derived from ignorance, and we do not have to be ignorant if we don't want to be. Information is too plentiful and too accessible. Get it! Act upon it!

James Clingman is an educator and authors a Black economic empowerment book series.