

Written by Marc Morial
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In 1963, more than a quarter-million people gathered in Washington, D.C. for the historic Great March for Jobs and Freedom. This was a watershed moment in American history, giving unprecedented voice to the hardships facing Blacks as they sought a fair shot at an elusive dream. In 2013, America witnessed the second inauguration of our first Black president. Much has changed in 50 years.

We now see a fair number of successful Blacks hailed as examples of the progress and possibilities that define American democracy. Most of the legal impediments preventing African Americans from learning, earning and living where they want have been removed. Unfortunately, these apparent indicators of improvement cannot lead us to conclude that Blacks in America have overcome. A veneer of progress cannot remove the stains of inequality that still exist in our country. As we simultaneously commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation and the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington, we are still on the march for economic and social equality.

The battlefield may look different, but the most pressing demands of today mirror the ones faced by those gathered in Washington, D.C. on that August afternoon in 1963: economic equality, educational opportunity and parity, and civil rights. However, instead of fighting against employment discrimination or a \$2 minimum wage, we now fight for job training and wage equity. Instead of calling for school segregation to end, we now demand an end to disparities in educational investment. Instead of calling for meaningful civil rights legislation, we now fight to preserve voting rights and affirmative action — those very rights for which our ancestors fought and died.

This week, the National Urban League will release the 37th edition of the State of Black America report, which takes a 50-year retrospective look at economic and educational equality in America. I have seen the findings and studied them, and I am more convinced than ever that

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there remains much for us to do.

As I pointed out in a recent appearance on CNN, the so-called housing “recovery” clearly demonstrates that we are in “a tale of two Americas” — one where the rich are surging ahead while the average American is getting squeezed out — again. Further Blacks and Hispanics are faring even worse. The findings from the 2013 State of Black America, Redeem the Dream: Jobs Rebuild America make that painfully clear.

America is at a critical juncture. If we are to continue on the road to full economic recovery, every American needs access to jobs with a living wage and good benefits. Every child deserves access to the best schools, the best teachers and the best education in the world. Without that commitment, we will continue to see America, as the 1967 Kerner Commission put it, “moving towards two societies...separate and unequal.”

But persistent problems require sustainable solutions. This week, we will begin to move that conversation forward.

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