

NUL: Blacks slip on the road to parity with whites

Written by Freddie Allen NNPA Washington Correspondent
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WASHINGTON (NNPA) – Blacks have fallen behind in their efforts to reach parity with whites in several key areas since 2010, according to the National Urban League's new "State of Black America" report.

Each year, the report computes an Equality Index for economics, health, education, social justice and civic engagement. Each category was assigned its own weight: economics receives 30 points, health and education each receive 25 points and social justice and civic engagement each receive 10 points.

When compared to whites, Blacks scored 71.7 percent on the equality index in 2013 down from the 72.1 percent mark in 2010. Compared to 2010 figures, Blacks lost ground in economics (56.3 percent in 2013 vs. 57.9 percent in 2010) social justice (57.1 percent compared to 57.8 percent in 2010) and civic engagement (99.9 vs. 102.2 percent in 2010).

Blacks also trailed Hispanics who scored 75.6 percent on the Equality Index. Hispanics scored higher than Blacks in health (101.2 percent) and economics (60.8 percent and social justice (61.9 percent).

Blacks made strides in education (79.6 percent vs. 78.3 percent in 2010) and health (76.9 percent vs. 76.7 percent in 2010).

"Educational attainment is where we see the biggest gains over the past half-century, thanks to affirmative action and early investments in educational programs such as Head Start," wrote Marc Morial, president and CEO of the National Urban League.

Since 1963, Blacks have narrowed the Black-white high school completion gap by 57 percent. Today, there more than three times as many Blacks attending college than there were 50 years ago and five times as many college graduates.

Despite these remarkable gains in education, economic disparities linger.

"While education dramatically improves one's chances of being employed—Black college graduates are 4.5 times less likely to be unemployed compared to Black high school dropouts—very little of the average difference between black and white unemployment rates can be explained by differences in education," wrote Valerie Rawlston Wilson, chief economist for the National Urban League Policy Institute.

In fact, Wilson said, after taking differences in education into account along with differences in age (or experience), occupation, industry and region of the country explains just one-fifth of the average difference between Black and white unemployment rates.

In an interview, Wilson said that even though Black college graduates have a much lower unemployment rate than those who didn't finish high school, the unemployment rate for Black college graduates is still twice the jobless rate for white college graduates.

"Despite the progress that we've made in terms of educational attainment and educational

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achievement we haven't seen that level of progress matched on the economic front in terms of employment opportunities and income growth," said Wilson.

The National Urban League's 2013 State of Black America report included a collection of essays written by Black luminaries that highlighted the key areas addressed by the National Urban League's Equality Index.

"Today, Americans are not being attacked by vicious canines or thrown up against brick walls with fire hoses," wrote Marcia Fudge [D-Ohio], chair of the Congressional Black Caucus. "Many of the injustices of today have a much more delicate face and are talked about under new, more subtle names."

Fudge continued: "One new name is 'debt and deficit reduction' at the expense of seniors' health and well being, and our children's education. Another is the fight against full implementation of the Affordable Healthcare Act that guarantees access to healthcare for all Americans."

Michael K. Fauntroy, an associate professor of public policy at George Mason University in Virginia and former analyst at the Congressional Research Service, wrote that even though the Black voter turnout rate exceeded whites in 2012, there is still plenty room for improvement.

"According to U.S. Census Bureau data, there are roughly 26.6 million voting-age eligible African Americans as of 2008; of that number 16.68 million (or 62.7 percent) cast ballots in 2012," wrote Fauntroy.

Fauntroy Black political clout can be expanded.

"With the white share of the electorate in continued decline, the Latino vote not yet solidified, and the Asian American vote still in growth-mode, African Americans are presented with an opportunity to apply political power, not just influence, in the years ahead by picking who wins elections," wrote Fauntroy.

According to Frederick S. Humphries Jr., vice president of U.S. Government Affairs for the Microsoft Corporation, in Washington, D.C. Blacks can also see gains in economic power by addressing the skills gap in the technology industry.

"Consider this: In the United States last year there were 1,603 new Ph.D.s in computer science—far too few," wrote Humphries. "Compounding this dearth is the fact that only 349 of those degrees went to women, 47 went to African Americans. Nearly 60% of these degree holders were foreign nationals."

Humphries recommended a two-pronged approach to closing the skills gap that includes strengthening Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) programs across the country as well as supporting immigration reform policies that will spur job growth in the United States.

Attorney General Eric Holder said that Justice Department found that some of the nation's largest mortgage lenders engaged in wholesale discrimination against Blacks and Hispanic

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borrowers during the housing crisis that contributed to the Great Recession.

"We discovered lenders that charged African American and Hispanic borrowers as much as tens of thousands of dollars more for their mortgages than they charged similarly-qualified white borrowers," Holder wrote. "Others steered these borrowers into expensive and risky subprime loans. The Department has vigorously rooted out these fair lending violations, securing record relief—more than \$660 million over the past four years—for victims and their communities, and sending a clear message to all lenders that all borrowers must be treated fairly."

Wilson said that the 2013 State of Black American report comes at time to reflect on the progress that has been made while acknowledging there still a lot of work to be done particularly in the area of economic equality.

She said, "For me and for a lot of us involved in this movement and in the civil rights community, we understand the role that race continues to play, we don't live in post-racial society."