

One Nation Working Together: Our Blueprint for Prosperity, Equality and Justice for All

Written by □By Hazel N. Dukes, NAACP New York State Conference President□
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In a recent op-ed, NAACP President and CEO Ben Jealous and I spelled out in great detail the importance of the upcoming "One Nation Working Together" march, a mobilization that will assemble in our nation's capital on October 2 for jobs, justice and education.□

On that wonderful day, we will forge our considerable will and determination with hundreds of other progressive organizations to declare our unequivocal unity with the communities, many of them underserved, who have joined us in the mobilization. We will revitalize those forces that in the past have been so formidable in their call for social and political equality. And we will ensure that those with access to decent jobs, a good education, and uncompromising justice are among the nation's majority.

Our march for jobs, justice and education is interrelated and vital to the health and well-being of a fully functioning democracy. Many of you who have been out of work for months and struggling vainly to be gainfully employed don't need a sermon from me about joblessness. And certainly those of you scuffling to get by on a part time job or making ends meet with meager unemployment benefits know first-hand how bad times are.□

I am glad to hear that President Obama has begun to emphasize the need to create jobs, push for more tax credits for small businessmen and women, and establish an infrastructure bank. Putting Americans to work - much in the same way Franklin Roosevelt did when America faced an unprecedented economic crisis in the 1930s - is a major step in repairing the nation, bringing it back together with all of our labor force meaningfully employed, working in harmony to regenerate the "beloved community" that Dr. King often envisioned.□

Dr. King also noted that an injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere, and that's why we are vigorously renewing our pursuit for justice - a pursuit that has always been at the top of the NAACP's agenda. We must boldly assert an end to racial profiling, police brutality, and the stop-and-frisk measures that disproportionately affect people of color. It is imperative that we insist on the termination of the sentencing disparity between crack and powder cocaine, and raise a resounding collective voice in defense of all of our civil and human rights guaranteed by the Constitution. Today, there is nothing more insidious and dangerous than the racist, rightwing elements that seem bent on abrogating the rights preserved by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Any attempt to undermine these touchstones of freedom must be met with fierce opposition. □

Quality education is another reason we march, and it is inextricably linked to our quest for jobs. Here in New York, we've had to pursue legal action because the Board of Education wanted to close down 19 schools. Meanwhile, education systems in several other cities are reporting high school graduation rates of less than fifty percent. A serious overhaul is more than necessary - it's urgent.□

Without a well-educated, highly trained workforce - particularly in the emerging areas of high technology and computer literacy - we will continue to lag far behind the rest of world's industrial nations. We have watched our once powerful manufacturing base slowly dissipate over the last several decades, a victim of automation and outsourcing. But this is not a lost cause - we must charge our government with the task of reclaiming this prestige with an unwavering impetus on

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a green economy and the creation of new jobs.□

Accomplishing goals and overcoming seemingly impossible obstacles is part of our tradition and legacy and because we have done it in the past, we know it can be done again. We must marshal the same indivisible fortitude that won us court victories from the Pink Franklin peonage case at the inception of the NAACP to Brown v. the Board of Education. It was no easy task to defeat the menace of Jim Crow and the nightriders, but we did. When restrictive covenants blocked our access to fair and decent housing, we marched without regard to safety and triumphed over price gouging landlords, real estate speculators, and predatory lenders. In cooperation with the labor movement, we scaled the barriers of discrimination in the workplace and made "a way out of no way."□

It is time for us to take to the ramparts again, to put some feet on the streets, some gumption in the corporate suites, and awaken and revitalize the sleeping giant of activism that has been dormant for too long.

Our mantra, our watchword as we go forward is "One Nation Working Together," forging an unbreakable bond and making October 2, 2010 a day that will join the other milestones in our pantheon of civil rights. Our quest for jobs, justice and education will resonate with the same urgency and intensity that carried us to victory in the great March on Washington in 1963.