



**National  
Urban League**

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**The State of Black Men – Part One**

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*“As of 2004, more black men were denied the right to vote because of a criminal record than in 1870, when the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified, giving blacks the right to vote.”* Joshua Dubois, former director of President Obama’s Office of Faith-Based Initiatives

As the Trayvon Martin trial and record high summer temperatures both begin to add their heat to the unemployment and economic woes plaguing Black America, we thought it would be a good time to take stock of the one group that more than most continues to be locked up, shut out and left behind -- African American men. This topic is too big and too complicated to cover in one essay. But it is not too big or complicated to solve with the necessary resources, commitment and partnerships. So we will continue our discussion of the issues, along with the creation of solutions, in future columns.

Today, we simply want to provide an overview and begin to point to some answers. A good place to start is the recent Newsweek cover story, “The Fight for Black Men,” by former Obama White House advisor Joshua Dubois.

Like the National Urban League, Dubois understands that the solution to the under-employment and over-incarceration of African American men must begin with changing our perception of who they are and investing in their potential through job opportunities, quality education and economic development. These have been the building blocks of the great American middle class and represent the surest path to responsible adulthood and stronger communities. So why haven’t we done this for African American men?

The reasons are many but one stands out. As described by Michelle Alexander in her best-selling 2010 book, *The New Jim Crow*, the intentional mass incarceration of young Black men has created what she calls a “permanent under-caste” that may never be able to escape the past and compete on equal footing with the rest of us. Disproportionate arrests and unequal sentencing have had a devastating impact in Black communities. African American

men are six times more likely to be incarcerated than whites. More African Americans are in prison or on probation today than were enslaved in 1850.

The economic consequences have been just as bad. This year's Urban League State of Black America report found that the average unemployment rate for Black men in 2012 was 15% compared with just 7.4% for white men. Black men earn only 72 cents for every dollar earned by white men. Because of the civil rights advances of the past 50 years and the election of Barack Obama as President, in the words of Michelle Alexander, we may have been "lulled to sleep by the rhetoric of color blindness and the appearance of great racial progress" and thus have "closed our eyes to the millions who have been locked up, locked out and relegated to second-class citizen status."

But our focus must extend beyond talking about the problems.

That is why the National Urban League has been a leading voice in challenging Washington to develop a comprehensive urban agenda. It is also why we recently announced our \$100 million Jobs Rebuild America campaign designed to address the nation's employment and education crisis. This effort includes our Urban Youth Empowerment Program, which offers job training, education and other wrap-around services to prepare out-of-school and adjudicated youth for the world of work, as well as our Training for Work-Adult Re-entry program, which targets convicted adults in Work Release Programs and provides them with supportive services, education and training opportunities, mentoring, and job readiness and placement support.

We must create more opportunities for Black men who have been locked up or left out. As we celebrate the momentous anniversaries of our civil rights struggle, let's remember – there can be no celebration without continuation. We cannot afford to stop now.

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