



**National
Urban League**

To Be Equal #34

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March on Washington Highlights Gap Between American Dream and American Reality

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"We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation. And so we've come to cash this check..." Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at the 1963 March on Washington

This Saturday, August 24th, 50 years after Dr. Martin Luther King stirred the conscience of the nation with a dream "deeply rooted in the American Dream," the National Urban League will join thousands of citizens in a return pilgrimage to the Lincoln Memorial and the new King Memorial to commemorate that historic moment and to continue the unfinished business of turning the dream into reality. As we prepare for the week's activities, we must not forget that in addition to Dr. King's eloquent plea for racial reconciliation, he, along with 250,000 citizens and the other march organizers, including the National Urban League's Whitney Young, came to Washington in 1963 to demand "Jobs and Freedom" for people of all races who were locked out, left out, disenfranchised and discouraged. This week, when we mark the 50th anniversary, we will march again for Economic Empowerment and Justice. Our dream remains rooted in the American Dream. But just what does that mean?

The term "American Dream" has been used so glibly and often that it may have lost its significance to many of us. But the American Dream is not simply a slogan; it is a concept that is based, as Dr. King reminded us, on the bedrock principles of equal opportunity, shared responsibility and the dignity of all.

James Truslow Adams in his 1931 book, "The Epic of America," is said to have first coined the term. He wrote, "The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement...a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position."

For millions of African Americans and others who continue to be locked out and left behind, the realization of the American Dream, as Adams defined it, is as elusive today as it was 50 years ago. President Obama spoke about this recently in a major economics speech at Knox

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College in Illinois. He talked about “proud Maytag workers losing their jobs when the plant moved down to Mexico...teachers whose salaries weren't keeping up with the rising cost of groceries...young people who had the drive and the energy, but not the money to afford a college education... families who had worked hard, believed in the American Dream, but they felt like the odds were increasingly stacked against them. And they were right.”

The President added, “When the rungs on the ladder of opportunity grow farther and farther apart, it undermines the very essence of America -- that idea that if you work hard you can make it here.” This week, we are going to Washington to Redeem the Dream in a march for Economic Empowerment and Justice. The National Urban League will also join with a coalition of civil rights organizations to offer a strategic blueprint to address many of the problems that continue to plague our communities. We hope to see you in Washington. For more information, visit www.drummajorsforjustice.com or www.nul.org.

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