



**National
Urban League**

**To Be Equal #52
December 31, 2013
Top 10 News Events of 2013**

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"Facing the rising sun of our new day begun, let us march on till victory is won." James Weldon Johnson

As the sun sets over a tumultuous 2013 and rises over the promise of a brighter new year, we have put together a list of the top 10 events that have particularly affected African Americans and communities of color over the past 12 months. Presented in no particular order, this list is a mix of triumphs and tragedies that mark the progress we've made, highlight the problems that still plague us, and point the way forward in 2014. There is no doubt that all of our lives were touched in some way by these headline events of the past year.

- 1. Voting Rights/Voter Suppression:** Despite an unprecedented outbreak of voter suppression efforts across the nation and the Supreme Court's appalling ruling in June that Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act was unconstitutional, African Americans are going to the polls in record numbers. In fact, Black voters were decisive in ensuring the second inauguration of Barack Obama on January 20th. African American voter turnout in the presidential election surpassed white voter turnout for the first time in history. As voter suppression efforts grow more intense, African Americans must continue the fight where it matters most - at the polls.
- 2. George Zimmerman Acquittal:** African Americans and people of goodwill throughout the nation were stunned by the July 13 not-guilty verdict in the trial of George Zimmerman, the man who shot and killed Trayvon Martin, an unarmed 17-year-old high school student on February 26, 2012. The killing of Trayvon Martin reminded us of the persistent gap in racial attitudes in America and generated new calls for an end to racial profiling.
- 3. March on Washington Anniversary:** 2013 marked the 50th anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s historic "I Have a Dream" speech. On August 24th, the National Urban League joined thousands of citizens in a return pilgrimage to the Lincoln Memorial and the new King Memorial to commemorate that historic moment in a march for Economic Power and Justice - and to call for a continuation of the work that remains undone.

4. **Affordable Care Act:** While start-up problems have plagued the roll-out, the new law expands access to affordable health care to more than 30 million people, including 6.8 million African Americans who make up the largest share of the uninsured. This isn't about politics. It's about people.

5. **Stop-and-Frisk/Shop-and-Frisk:** On August 12th, a New York District Court Judge ruled that the New York City police department's stop-and-frisk program, which disproportionately targets African Americans and Latinos, was unconstitutional. An appeals court subsequently overturned that ruling. Mayor-elect Bill de Blasio has pledged to make changes in the policy - which is practiced in communities across the country - and has appointed a new police commissioner. African American shoppers in stores across the country have also been unfairly profiled. The New York State Attorney General has launched an investigation into security practices at a few retailers after at least four customers claimed they were unfairly targeted for police action while shopping in the stores. The National Urban League, National Action Network and other civil rights organizations were instrumental in working with several national retailers on the release of a "Customers' Bill of Rights" aimed at protecting customers from profiling practices. We will continue to work with the retailers on recommendations towards high standard, best-in-industry store security protocols and cultural sensitivity efforts that can be adopted by retailers across the country.

6. **Government Shutdown/Effects of Sequestration:** The across-the-board "sequestration" budget cuts that went into effect this year slashed funding for Head Start, youth job training, long-term unemployment benefits and other critical human service and safety net programs. With the nation's highest unemployment rate at 12.5 percent, these cuts fell especially hard on African Americans, who still have double-digit unemployment. The 17-day Government Shutdown in October also had an out-sized impact on African Americans who make up a large share of the Federal workforce. Thankfully, Congress has taken necessary steps to avoid a repeat in January 2014. However, while "governing by crisis" has ended for now and there is partial relief from sequestration cuts, a major flaw of the budget deal is its failure to include a crucial extension of federal jobless aid where more than 1.3 million workers will immediately lose unemployment benefits - a vital source of income that covers basic family needs.

7. **African American Leaders Convening (AALC)/Release of the 21st Century Agenda for Jobs and Freedom:** On August 23, 2013 at the National Urban League's "Redeem the Dream" Summit during the 50th Anniversary March on Washington celebration, national civil rights leaders joined together - for the first time - for an historic release of a policy agenda addressing five urgent domestic goals for the nation - the 21st Century Agenda for Jobs and Freedom. It covers critical areas including jobs and the economy, healthcare, education, voting rights and criminal justice system reform. The document was the result of months of joint meetings convened by me, along with Rev. Al Sharpton/National Action Network; Benjamin Jealous/NAACP; and Melanie Campbell/National Coalition on Black Civic Participation with nearly 60 of America's leading civil rights, social justice, business and community leaders.

8. **Rise of Economic Inequality:** While the richest one-percent have seen their incomes rise astronomically over the past 20 years, millions of middle class and low-wage workers are falling into poverty and struggling to make ends meet. This phenomenon worsened in the wake of

the recession - and has only widened through the recovery. This growing inequality is not only unjust; it is unsustainable for our economy. This year, Pope Francis, President Obama and a growing number of economists sounded the alarm.

9. **The Death of Nelson Mandela:** On December 5th, the world lost one of the greatest champions for freedom, justice and peace ever to walk this Earth. After 27 years of political imprisonment as a leader in the fight against apartheid, Mandela was released from prison in 1990. In 1994, he became South Africa's first democratically elected president. His leadership was marked by his constant reliance on forgiveness, reconciliation and unity in the building of a new South Africa. His life and legacy will forever inspire the world.

10. **Banner Year for Black Films:** This year was a notable one for Black films ranging from the true event-inspired stories of the "The Butler," "12 Years a Slave," "Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom," and "Fruitvale Station" to the highly anticipated "Best Man Holiday" and holiday classic "Black Nativity."

From the National Urban League family to yours - we wish you a blessed holiday and a Happy New Year. In the words of Oprah Winfrey, "Cheers to a New Year and another chance for us to get it right."

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