



**National
Urban League**

To Be Equal #29

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National Urban League Conference to Feature Diverse Points of View

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"As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison." Nelson Mandela

Earlier this month, we announced a diverse list of speakers taking the stage at this week's National Urban League Annual Conference in Cincinnati. They include Vice President Joe Biden; Senator Rand Paul; Democratic National Committee Chair, Debbie Wasserman Schultz; Republican National Committee Chair, Reince Priebus; and eight dynamic mayors from across the country. Today, in response to those who question the wisdom of offering a forum to people whose views may depart from ours, I want to share my thoughts on why inclusion is not only the right thing, but the smart thing to do. We cannot preach it without also practicing it.

At the root of recent tragic events unfolding across the globe, as well as the persistent gridlock in our own Congress and even violent confrontations on the streets of our cities, is a lack of respect for other people and for different points of view. From our beginnings 104 years ago, the National Urban League has always believed that the best way to solve problems and get things done is through building bridges of cooperation that cross all boundaries of race, class, culture and ideology. That is how Lincoln succeeded in ending slavery and passing the 13th Amendment. It is how Dr. King, John Lewis and Lyndon Johnson led the fight for the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act. It is how Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress finally defeated apartheid in South Africa. It is also how Congress and the White House were recently able to come to agreement to pass the first real jobs bill in the last 10 years, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Nonviolent protest, civil discourse and political negotiation may be difficult and slow at times, but they lead to real and lasting success.

The point is, we don't have to agree with someone's views to have a meaningful dialogue with them. In fact, it is only by talking, listening and reasoning together, that we build trust, end stalemates and transform conflicts into solutions. That is why we are convening such a diverse line-up of speakers in Cincinnati. These include young people, women of power,

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business executives, educators and political leaders who represent progressive, conservative and other points of view. We are also expanding our search for solutions beyond Washington by inviting mayors from seven cities to share their unique perspectives on jobs, education, gun violence, business development and other issues affecting urban America.

No solution or compromise is ever reached in silence. As Dr. King and Nelson Mandela reminded us, those who are motivated by hate and bitterness only imprison themselves in endless cycles of pain and conflict. We hope our Annual Conference will serve as an example of the kind of civil discourse and diversity of ideas that is essential to ending conflict and solving problems in our country and in our world. We don't have to adopt every view that is presented to us, but we should never devolve to a place where we stop listening to – or worse – respecting each other.

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