



**National  
Urban League**

**To Be Equal #32**

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**Stevie Wonder: National Urban League Living Legend**

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*"Prejudice, hatred, starvation...I'm tired of praying for things we don't want to change."*  
Stevie Wonder

From start to finish, the 2012 National Urban League Conference in New Orleans was hotter than a New Orleans summer. It also may have been our most successful gathering ever. The Conference opened on July 25th with a major domestic policy speech by President Obama in which he announced a new initiative promoting educational excellence for African Americans. And it closed on July 28th, with words and songs of inspiration by American musical icon, Stevie Wonder, who, along with Attorney General Eric Holder, received a National Urban League "Living Legend" Award.

For more than 40 years, Stevie Wonder has gifted generations of Americans with his unequalled talents as a musician, songwriter and singer. From his days as the harmonica playing, hand clapping 12 year old "Little Stevie Wonder" in the early 1960's to his status as a multiple-Grammy-winning icon today, Stevie has amassed one of the most prolific and recognizable song-books in the history of American music. His repertoire is full of the lyrics of love and music meant to lift the spirit, challenge injustice, heal the soul, and promote peace. In the early 1980's, Stevie was a leader in the campaign to declare Martin Luther King's birthday a national holiday. The song he wrote and recorded about that effort, "Happy Birthday," became an anthem of the King Holiday movement and its chorus has since become a standard sing-a-long at African American birthday parties.

In recent years, Stevie has expanded his social activism even further beyond the stage and studio. He has lent his voice and some of the proceeds from his songs to ending South African apartheid, helping people with disabilities, fighting against hunger and homelessness and aiding the victims of Hurricane Katrina and the 2011 Japanese earthquake and tsunami. For 16 years, he has provided toys for children and families in need with his annual House Full of Toys benefit concert. In 2009, United Nations Secretary-General Ban ki-moon named Stevie Wonder a United Nations Messenger of Peace.

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Upon accepting his Living Legend award during our Whitney M. Young Awards gala, Stevie delivered a heartfelt appeal for people around the world to come together to end prejudice, hatred and starvation and to live up to the high ideals that are the focus of so much prayer and so little action. He said "It's time to get beyond those things that have crippled us for centuries." One of those crippling drawbacks is voter suppression which has once again reared its ugly head. Guaranteeing the right to vote for every American is the focus of the National Urban League's "Occupy the Vote" campaign. It was also the theme of our Conference.

At the conclusion of his remarks, Stevie could not resist sitting down at the piano and inviting the rapt audience to join him in a medley of some of his greatest hits, including "Don't you Worry 'Bout a Thing," and "Signed, Sealed, Delivered." It was a fitting way to end our Conference. The Living Legend award honors those who most exemplify the ideals of the Urban League movement. We could not have chosen two better recipients this year than U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder and the legendary Stevie Wonder.

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