



**National
Urban League**

To Be Equal #34

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National Urban League Social Networking for Civil Rights

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"When you give everyone a voice and give people power, the system usually ends up in a really good place." Mark Zuckerberg, CEO & Founder of Facebook

African Americans and major civil rights organization may have been slow to get on the social media bandwagon, but in recent years we have been catching up big time. On the first day of the National Urban League's recent 2012 conference in New Orleans we attracted so many Twitter followers that we "trended" nationally. More people were talking about the National Urban League on Twitter than "Real Housewives."

Social media is no longer just for creating instant buzz for celebrities or boosting sales for corporations. As part of our commitment to ensuring that the benefits of broadband are shared equally throughout society, the National Urban League is harnessing the power of the Internet to better organize, galvanize and connect with our constituents. Not so long ago, the only way to talk to our members and supporters was through a letter in the mail. Now, we can reach thousands with the touch of a mouse. And millions of Americans can access the latest news, campaigns, events and commentary on the full range of National Urban League priorities, including jobs, voting rights, housing, education and healthcare by visiting www.iamempowered.org.

One of the most exciting developments in our use of broadband has been the establishment of a National Urban League presence on Facebook and Twitter. These are bottom-up communications vehicles that allow our constituents to generate and control the conversation. These sites also give people the chance to offer "real-time" feedback and ideas about our programs, policies and activities. Recent studies reveal that more than half of all Americans are now connected to one or more social networking sites. And while African Americans are still under-represented on Facebook, they make up a sizable portion of Twitter users. Even people without a computer at home are able to join the conversation. Social networking is now as mobile and as ubiquitous as the Smartphone and the iPad. In just the last

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few years, the National Urban League has attracted 12,786 “fans” to its Facebook page and 13,254 “followers” on Twitter.

While we are pleased that more people are social networking for civil rights, we are still working hard to close the “digital divide” that finds too many communities of color lacking in the broadband literacy or access that has become essential to finding a job, getting a good education or connecting to critical community services. That is why we are proud of our “Digital Connections” program, a collaboration with the Department of Commerce and One Economy to increase digital literacy across the nation. Since 2010, sixteen Urban League affiliates have engaged nearly 480 students in conducting nearly 35,000 broadband trainings for youth and adults in urban communities.

The World Wide Web and Social Networking are here to stay. Our challenge is to make sure that the power and the voice of these new ways of communicating are used for good and are shared equally with all Americans.

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