## OPINION/ FORUM

## CHRONICLE 37

ERNEST H. PITT

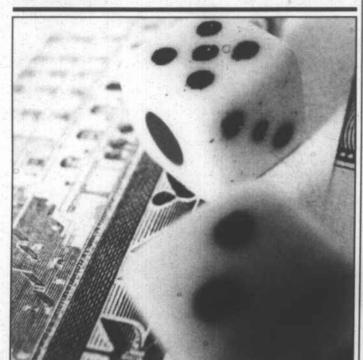
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## **GIVING THANKS** IN THE MIDST OF STRUGGLE



Marc Morial Guest Columnist

"'Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ve lands. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts With praise ..." - from Psalm 100

Many of you may be reading this column between the last bites of left over turkey. If so, that is reason enough for continued thanks.

My job as president of the National Urban League is to be a constant advocate for change that will better the lives of millions of our brothers and sisters who are struggling for a seat at the table in this land of plenty.

But this is the season for joining together and reflecting with thanks for all that we have and all that we have achieved together this past

I am not suggesting that we ignore the news about our flailing economy and record job losses. I simply ask that we pause to remember that a 6.5 percent unemployment rate means that 93.5 percent of us are still

Let us remember that just a few months ago, many of us were wondering how we were going to fill up the gas tank to get to grandmother's house this year. Today, gas prices in some places have fallen to under \$2.

And when this year anyone hardly began, expected that a young African American Senator named Barack Obama would become the 44th President of the United States. Record turnout on November 4th was symptomatic of a resurgence of optimism and empowerment among "We the People" all across this country.

National Urban League and its affiliates also have much to be thankful for today. Our programs, poli-

cies and publications are touching the lives of more than 80 million men, women and children. The work we have done just this year has helped more than 1.3 million people find jobs, save their homes from foreclosure, expand businesses or begin college. As an organization, we are structurally and financially strong and poised to be an even greater force for good in the coming year.

Finally, as we have enjoyed the long Thanksgiving holiday weekend and now look forward to the entire holiday season, I ask you to consider the words of our 16th president, Abraham Lincoln, who in the midst of the Civil War and in the same year of his Emancipation Proclamation, decreed national a Thanksgiving Day to be celebrated on the final Thursday of November,

"The year that is drawing towards its close, has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties...others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature, that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever watchful providence of Almighty God...No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God..

It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and voice by the whole American people. I do therefore invite my fellow citizens...to set apart observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens."

Let us adopt this proclamation for all year through.

Marc H. Morial is president and CEO of the National Urban League.



**Shopping Your Blessing** 



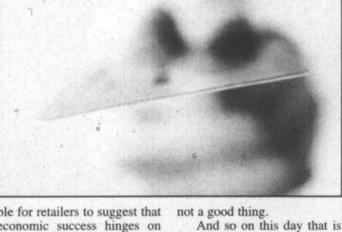
Julianne Malveaux Guest

When my Thanksgiving Day paper came, it was as thick as a Sunday paper. There were just four sections - a scant 65 pages or so - of news and features combined into sections described as News, Local, Life and Sports. These sections, excellently rendered, by the way, were dwarfed by the hundreds of pages of advertising from every department store in the universe and in the immediate vicinity. The message was buy, buy, buy.

To be sure, there were sales, stuff that had been reduced by as much as 75 percent in price. There were opportunities, but there was also a sense of being overwhelmed by the ways that one could save. Is this genuflection to consumerism really a sav-

Here's the deal. We know that people in these United States are stressed up and tapped out. That people can't pay their rent or their mortgages. That people are getting laid off and disconnected from the labor market. That the sluggish economy is faltering because people aren't spending. But what are they to

It is profoundly irresponsi-



ble for retailers to suggest that economic success hinges on the ability of broke people continue their indebtedness. Yet it seems that retailers, in their own self-interest, are barraging people with the message that buying is flying, that spending is mending our fractured economy. Give me a

Instead of engaging people in the fine art of spending money, we ought to be engaged in the act of encouraging fiscal responsibility.

Instead of burying people with circulars that suggest that 40 50 or 60 percent off is a good deal, there ought to be a responsible retail community that says that the best deal is responsible spending.

Instead, there has been a scary connection between the Thanksgiving holiday and the call to spend. It is almost as if people are being asked to shop their blessings, to connect the act of giving thanks with the act of spending money. This is called "Black Friday," people are standing outside stores at 5 a.m. attempting to get their blessing. They are looking for the good deals, waiting for the breaks, when their best break might be to stay at home and save their money. We will get past this "Black Friday" (not racial, just an indication that companies finish the year in the black because of post-Thanksgiving spending), people will be encouraged to spend, both for their own enhancement and because the economy needs it. What if we all stay home?

There is a special message for the African American community, a community of over spenders. We can't spend our way into self-esteem, spend our way into equality. We can't spend to make up for pain and hurt. Our spending in the present hurts us in the future. We have to be clear about the consequences of shopping or spending our way into

But there is a messa all of the spenders wh hostage to the circulars, messages that say spe make it better. There i enough spending to fit economy. We are standin foundation of shifting sa foundation of broken pr es, crippled dreams, and tured ideals. We really spend our way out of mess. So we need to be about the mixed message come from our thought ers, who preach frugali one hand and ask us to fools of ourselves on and

The best gift we m able to give young peo the gift of frugal thir There is no blessing w shop for, only a blessir can live. We can't sho way into giving thanks, a can't save our econon being crazy with our sper When the newspaper, with ads, hits our doorste have to understand the cannot shop ourselves freedom, only into a si known as debt. We can't up a blessing, just the i that consumer goods at measure of our per

Integrity demands th reject shopping as econ

Economist Malveaux is Presiden Bennett College for W She can be reached at pre nett@bennett.edu.

## World AIDS Day and Obama



Phill Wilson

Guest Columnist

Dec. 1 was World AIDS day, and I'm thinking about President-elect Barack Obama.

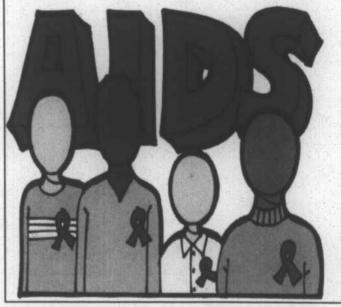
As a 52-year-old Black gay man with HIV, I have many reasons to welcome the inauguration of Barack Obama. A big one is that an Obama administration has enormous potential to reinvigorate a struggle that has been allowed to flag over the last eight years: our national fight against HIV/AIDS.

With our country facing so many national challenges - two wars, a financial meltdown, and the growing threat of environmental devastation - it may be tempting to relegate the AIDS epidemic to the lower rung of national

Yet, that would be a grave mistake. Every year, more than 56,000 people in this country contract HIV.

The devastation is worst among Black Americans, who represent nearly half of all new HIV infections, including two-thirds of the new cases among women and 70 percent of the new cases among adolescents.

AIDS clearly has affected



Black folks more than others. But as Senator Obama said in 2006: "We are all sick because of AIDS - and we are all tested by this crisis. It is a test not only of our willingness to respond, but of our ability to look past the artificial divisions and debates that have often shaped that response.'

AIDS, in short, is a sickness at the very heart of the American family. Like any America respond to the sickness in its midst by displaying both solidarity for those who are living with HIV and a determination to make sure no one else gets infected.

We cannot relegate the AIDS fight to the government alone, not even with President Obama at the helm. So, here are several high-priority actions that Americans and our new government, together, should immediately take to reinvigorate our fight against HIV/AIDS:

· Support efforts to develop a National AIDS Strategy.

The U.S. government requires all foreign countries that receive assistance from the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEP-FAR) to have a national strategy to respond to HIV/AIDS. Shockingly, America has no national strategy for its own epidem-

· Partner with the Obama administration to strengthen HIV prevention.

HIV prevention acc for a paltry 4 percent of spending by the federal ernment on HIV/AIDS programs. an outrage.

· Make knowleds HIV status a universal munity norm.

The CDC estimates more than one in five p living with HIV don't they are infected. Such ple are often diagnose in the course of dis which significantly re life expectancy.

· Deliver treatmer those who need them.

We need to insist Congressional appropr deliver the funding tl urgently needed to ac this national priority.

· Build comm capacity on AIDS

Throughout much HIV/AIDS epidemic, stream Black organiza stayed on the sidelines.

The new administ offers enormous promia new day in our na struggle HIV/AIDS. President Obama and team won't be able to vigorate the national response on their own. roll up our sleeves and

Yes, we can!

Phill Wilson is exec director and CEO o Black AIDS Institute.