

FORUM

Why the Affordable Care Act matters to African-Americans



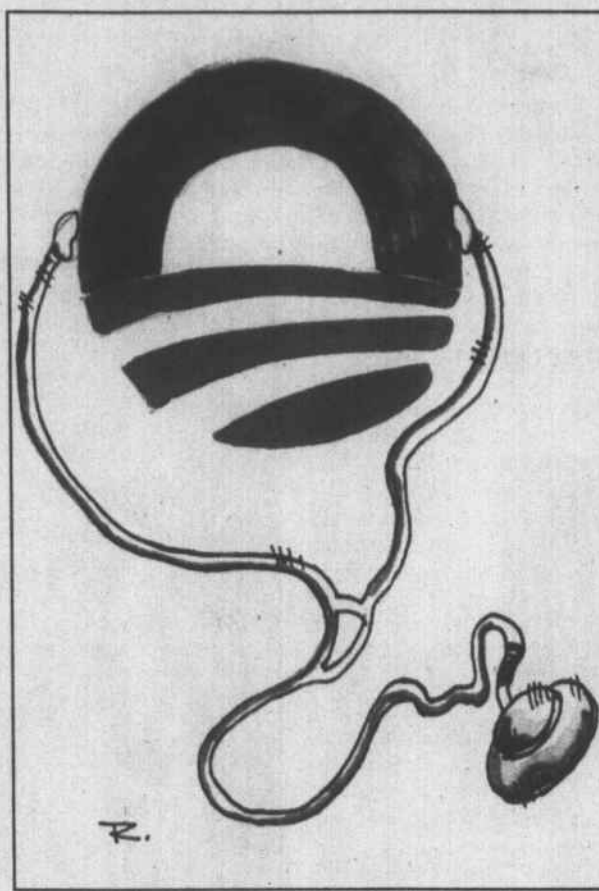
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Guest Columnist



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Guest Columnist



fellow Americans have the health insurance they need — and that those who are not covered visit HealthCare.gov to get covered right away.

Since the start of Affordable Care Act's first open enrollment period last year, the uninsured rate among non-elderly African-Americans has declined by 30 percent.

In just one year, 1.7 million uninsured African-Americans gained health coverage, and that doesn't include the 500,000

African-American young adults who now have coverage under their parents' health insurance plans.

And as more Americans take advantage of the current open enrollment period that ends Feb. 15, those numbers will continue to grow.

These strides are particularly important given the unique health challenges, and historic and structural barriers to care often faced in African-American communities.

African-Americans have the highest cancer mortality rate of any ethnic group, a lower average life expectancy than white Americans, along with higher rates of infant mortality and chronic disease.

The Affordable Care Act is helping to change the way many in African-American communities think about their health, the need for coverage, and for those who already had coverage — it has protected their investment.

But the Affordable Care Act is breaking down many of the health barriers this community has faced. An estimated 7.8 million African-Americans now have access to expanded

preventive services such as mammograms, well-child visits and flu shots with no out-of-pocket costs. And with the investment of \$11 billion in community health centers nationwide, the law is dramatically expanding access to quality care facilities in many African-American neighborhoods.

Still, for every story like Astrid's, there remain countless more Americans in need of insurance, in need of quality care, and perhaps still unaware that the coverage they need is just a few clicks or a phone call away.

So visit HealthCare.gov or call 1-800-318-2596 to find out more. This year's Open Enrollment period ends on Feb. 15, so if you or someone you care about is in need of health insurance, do not wait. Get covered today.

Valerie Jarrett is a Senior Advisor to the President and Chair of the White House Council on Women and Girls. Sylvia M. Burwell is the 22nd Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Act to end poverty now



Marian Wright Edelman

Guest Columnist

"There is nothing new about poverty. What is new, however, is that we now have the resources to get rid of it." Not too many years ago, Dr. Kirtley Mather, a Harvard geologist, wrote a book titled "Enough and to Spare." He set forth the basic theme that famine is wholly unnecessary in the modern world.

Today, therefore, the question on the agenda must read: Why should there be hunger and privation in any land, in any city, at any table, when man has the resources and the scientific know-how to provide all mankind with the basic necessities of life?"

In January 1967, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. took a very rare "sabbatical" at an isolated house in Jamaica far away from telephones and the constant pressures of his life as a very public civil rights leader to write what would become his last book: "Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?"

The excerpt above could have been written yesterday. Professor Mather's book arguing that mankind had achieved the ability to move beyond famine was published in 1944, yet in 2015, despite 70 more years of unparalleled advances in scientific and technological capability and global resources and wealth, hunger and want are still rampant — most shamefully in the United States with the world's largest economy.

When Dr. King died in 1968 calling for a Poor People's Campaign, there were 25.4 million poor Americans, including 11 million poor children. Today there are more than 45.3 million poor Americans, including 14.7 million poor children, living in our boastfully rich nation.

The question is why we allow poverty still to exist, especially among our children, who are the poorest age group of Americans, and the answer remains the same: The deficit in human will and genuine commitment to a fair

playing field for all by a critical mass of leaders and citizens in our morally anemic nation.

How can it be that the top one percent of Americans enjoy more of the nation's wealth than the bottom 90 percent combined and that millions of children are hungry and homeless and poorly educated?

If the qualification for individual and national greatness is genuine concern for the 'least of these' as those of us who are Christians say we believe, and if nations and our concurrent role as members of nations and not just as individuals are accountable, then too many of our political, corporate and faith leaders and citizens — all of us who live in America — are failing.

The national holiday celebrating Dr. King's birthday is over, but I hope we will heed and act on his 1967 declaration — "the time has come for an all-out world war against poverty" — and work to win the first victory right here at home in the biggest economy on earth and end the shame of 14.7 million children being the poorest Americans by ending child poverty now.

Reflecting on the direction the struggle for civil rights and social justice should take in "Where Do We Go from Here?" (Dr. King) shared a story about the need to commit to difficult struggles for the long haul and described a nine-and-a-half hour flight he had taken from New York to London in an older propeller airplane. On the way home, the crew announced the return flight from London to New York would take 12-and-a-half hours. When the pilot came out into the cabin, Dr. King asked him why. "You must understand about the winds," he said. "When we leave New York, a strong tail wind is in our favor, but when we return, a strong head wind is against us." But he added, "Don't worry. These four engines are capable of battling the winds."

Dr. King concluded: "In any social revolution there are times when the tail winds of triumph and fulfillment favor us, and other times when strong head winds of disappointment and setbacks beat against us relentlessly. We must not permit adverse

winds to overwhelm us as we journey across life's mighty Atlantic."

As I ponder the miraculous progress sparked by ordinary citizens and people of grace and courage who risked limb and life to crumble the seemingly impenetrable fortresses of Jim Crow and unjust racial segregation in our land during the Civil Rights Movement, portrayed movingly in the film "Selma," which I hope every American, especially young people, will see, let it inspire us to put on new shoes of courage and will now to ensure that never again will our children and grandchildren have to fight those same battles as the forces of regression seek to turn our nation's racial and social progress backward. African-American, Latino, Native American and Asian American youths need to be taught our history and remember that they can never take anything for granted in America — especially now as racial profiling, intolerance and poverty resurge over our land.

Some are as blatant as the disproportionate killing of Black males at the hands of law enforcement personnel entrusted to protect life, huge racial disparities in school discipline policies against Black males and children with special needs, unequal educational offerings for poor children of color and a mass incarceration system fueled by a Cradle to Prison Pipeline, which feeds 1 in 3 Black and 1 in 6 Latino boys born in 2001 into prison.

Incarceration has become the new American apartheid.

Other forms of racism are more subtle, technical, and very polite. Let's stay true to the course Dr. King set for us and take up his last campaign to end poverty in America, beginning with our children, especially those of color, whose minds, bodies and spirits are being formed today. They cannot wait.

Sign up to receive CDF's groundbreaking new report on Jan. 28, Ending Child Poverty Now, and learn about the concrete actions all of us urgently need to take.

Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund. For more information go to www.childrensdefense.org.

Sale of photos is like 'eating the seed corn'



Bill Turner

Guest Columnist

The recent news that Johnson Publications of Chicago — the parent company of Jet and Ebony magazines — in hopes of raising \$40 million, is selling off its photographic collection that contains more than five million of the most iconic images of African-American life and culture reminds me of a saying I first heard from my Georgia farm-raised grandfather: "Don't ever eat your seed corn."

The beginning of my mindful journey to know as much and as best I could about African-American history, life and culture started when I was 10 years old in the form of Jet magazine. It was September 1955 when my semi-literate grandfather, who migrated to Harlan County, Ken. in the early '20s to work in the coal mines, handed me the issue of Jet with the cover photo and story about Chicago teenager Emmett Till, who was brutally murdered for allegedly whistling at a white woman. For me and millions of others, young Till's inhumanly disfigured head became the milestone image of the world that Black Americans in my generation would see and live — and change — for a long time to come.

To really grasp how much Jet and Ebony came to mean to me as a small town black boy growing up in the '50s and '60s, you have to appreciate how much Mr. John Johnson — who, with his wife, Eunice, founded the company in 1942 — controlled the message of his magazines. In every issue, at all times, Jet and Ebony pressed the positive angle of any story, even to the point of the publications being accused by mainstream media of being little more than feel good channels for Black Americans. At the darkest times in segregated America, I could read any issue of Jet or Ebony and feel content that blacks — that I — could still excel in any human endeavor. Happy thoughts, cheer, and optimism filled the pages. These signature Johnson Publications, in addition to another — Negro, later renamed Black World — were, to the Civil Rights Movement, what Facebook and Twitter are to contemporary social movements.

Over the years, I put my faith in Jet and Ebony to inform me of things that I was taught intelligent Black Americans cared, or should, care about, always delivered with superb photographs framed inside an editorial perspective directed to the needs of America's black population, which was besieged by the special effects of racism. In my youth, I would deliberately look for these periodicals as essential fixtures on coffee tables in the homes of forward-thinking black people. I did so the same way my grandfather could judge the ripeness of a watermelon by thumping it with his middle finger. Jet and Ebony were to the growth of black social consciousness and political awareness what rain and sunshine were to a healthy farm. A black-owned barbershop without frayed aged copies of Jet and Ebony is a sign of an imitation black barbershop.

All that changed at the beginning of the 21st century. Johnson Publishing Company sold an equity stake in the company to JP Morgan Chase. Similarly, Time Inc. bought 49 percent of Essence Communications in 2000 and absorbed the rest in 2005. Viacom Inc. purchased BET a few years ago for \$2.3 billion.

It's to a point where "a black perspective" in "American media" can't fit in the same sentence. Ebony-hued diaphanous like me meet for coffee at the McDonald's and ruminate only to ourselves about the good old days. Farm-raised folk like my grandfather, those who used to say, "Don't eat your seed corn" are spinning in their gravesites, at least in the ones that have yet to fall victim to growth, development, integration, diversity, inclusion and progress.

Ebony and Jet are like cultural heritage seeds that came through black hands and minds in America for 70 years. We ate some of the corn and we kept some seeds to plant for the next generation to reap. Now the seed corn is being used up. Our grandchildren will have nothing to put in the ground. The farm will be lost. Blacks will be poorer for this cultural loss, soon broke altogether.

Dr. Bill Turner is a noted educator, writer and thinker who called Winston-Salem home for many years. Reach him at bill-turner@comcast.net.

