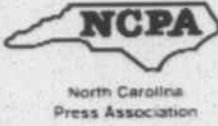


# OPINION/ FORUM

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## Notre Dame valedictorian is a terrific role model



**Marian Wright Edelman**

Guest Columnist

(NNPA) – As colleges and universities across the country celebrated their students' accomplishments this commencement season, the news about the top student at the University of Notre Dame was especially inspiring for me. Twenty-one-year-old Katie Washington from Gary, Indiana made history as Notre Dame's first Black valedictorian. Katie was a biological sciences major with a minor in Catholic social teaching who earned a perfect 4.0 grade point average. She is planning to pursue a joint M.D./Ph.D. next at Johns Hopkins University, and she said she was "humbled" and "in a mode of gratitude and thanksgiving" by being named valedictorian. In a culture filled with superficial celebrities, beautiful, brilliant, hardworking young women and men like Katie are real role models and ought to be on the cover of our magazines. They're who our children should aspire to be.

Katie's work ethic and passion for medicine were instilled in her by caring parents. Her father is a doctor and her mother is a nurse, and an older brother and sister have chosen medical careers too. In interviews, Katie remembered going to her father's office after school, where she would sit and do her homework and later had the chance to accompany him as he visited patients.

She also thanked teachers and other adult mentors who encouraged her over the years, saying, "I have had so much support, people who really wanted to see that I reached my full potential. They all had my best interest at heart." Meanwhile, her proud parents and teachers remembered how disciplined she was and how hard she always worked.

As an undergraduate, Katie conducted research on lung cancer and spent a year and a half studying the mosquito that carries dengue and yellow fever. She did some of her research in partnership with Notre Dame's Haiti program and helped show how human habits in Haiti contribute to infectious mosquitoes' spread. Her studies outside the lab included serving as student coordinator of the Center for



**Katie Washington**

Social Concerns' "Lives in the Balance: Youth Violence and Society" seminar. In her graduation speech she spoke of the shock that occurred when she visited a juvenile re-entry program as part of that seminar and met an old childhood friend who was trying to turn his life around after being involved in the juvenile justice system. Although they had grown up in the same neighborhood, she was moved by how differently their lives had turned out so far.

Katie also served as a student director of the school's gospel choir and a mentor and tutor for girls at a local high school where she was able to give back some of the support and encouragement she had received. In her graduation speech, Katie also spoke to fellow students about the importance of being able to move on "after the applause stops"—and of being self-motivated to keep moving forward to use their gifts and serve others. She is already living out this lesson with her own life. Too often, we read headlines about young people only when they have gotten into trouble.

But we all need to seek out and hold up young people like Katie who are working hard, doing the right thing, and excelling. Just as Katie was mentored by adults in her home, school, church, and community, we can all do our part to encourage young people in our circles. Who knows when we will be mentoring the next brilliant scientist or college valedictorian? And who knows how far Katie will go now and what medical breakthroughs or cures she will work on over her lifetime? Congratulations, Katie Washington! We are so proud of you.

Marian Wright Edelman is President of the Children's Defense Fund. For more information go to [www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org).



## Curses, Blessings and Hypocrisy



**Darrell DeBrew**

Guest Columnist

Unfortunately, the release of thousands of gallons of crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico was a necessary evil to gain the attention of politicians and make Earth a top priority. In the end, maybe BP's mistake may spark a global effort to save our planet.

Public officials have walked a fine line during this oil disaster. They must do a balancing act – working to please voters and Corporate America to get elected, stay in office and stay in good standing with their political party. Without voters, getting elected is impossible. Without campaign contributions, getting to voters is impossible. For voters and Corporate America, economic issues come first: money, money, money. Other political platform issues, such as crime fighting and education, are always secondary.

Our knights in shining armor will make themselves look good at all expense – even at the expense of Earth. It has taken a catastrophic event like this to get many



Official White House Photo by Chuck Kennedy  
 One of the Presidential helicopters flies over southern Louisiana as President Barack Obama returned to New Orleans after visiting Grand Isle on May 28.

public officials to pay attention to the environment.

Scientists and environmentalists have been talking about how human beings are destroying the planet for years. The fact that public servants pass a bill every few years to pacify environmentalists is not a viable solution. Sweeping changes are needed to save the planet. Now that environmentalists have the world's attention, they can push and shove public officials as hard as they like.

Many critics of BP have little concern for environment. Soil erosion, adequate fresh water supply, adequate

food production and excessive pollution are the bulk of our environmental problems. How much thought have the critics given to pesticides, herbicides and steroids in food? When they do think about these things, they diverge for fear that their lifestyles will have to be drastically changed. Since you critics want to holler about the leaves and branches, why not holler about the tree and its roots?

An example will enlighten. Reducing consumption of red meat by 50 percent would greatly benefit the Earth. Overgrazing and crop production are the greatest

contributors to soil erosion. Well, cattle have to graze or be fed soybeans or corn, which are massively cultivated. Cattle spend all day eating, getting fat for market. Great amounts of water are needed for corn, soybeans, and cattle. What is the actual damage to Earth for those steaks?

Darrell James "Da'Rel-Da'Rel" DeBrew ([www.myspace.com/officiallydebrew](http://www.myspace.com/officiallydebrew)) is the author of several novels. The Rocky Mount native is currently serving time in a North Carolina-based federal prison.

## Our Jobless Recovery



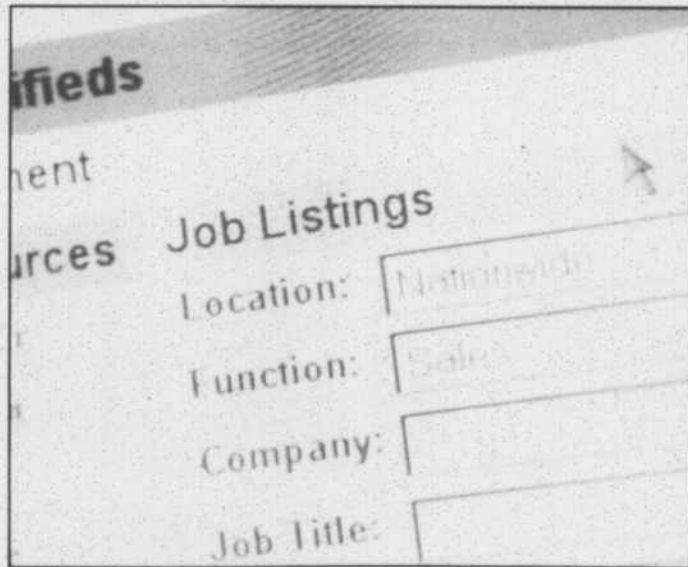
**Julianne Malveaux**

Guest Columnist

(NNPA) – Our economy generated about 431,000 jobs last month. Good news? Only if you don't count the fact that more than 400,000 of the jobs were temporary jobs connected to collecting data for the Census. Those jobs won't last for long, and when the dust clears, the current 9.7 percent unemployment rate, down from 9.9 percent a month ago, is likely to rise again.

Still, those who are desperate for good news are clinging to the fact that there are more jobs out there. What they don't understand is that people are looking for something more than a few months of work here and there. Nearly seven million Americans have been out of work for more than half a year. What has this done to their finances?

Of course, the situation is worse for African-Americans, even though Black unemployment dropped from 16.5 to 15.5 percent last month. The 15.5 percent is a modest estimate of what is really happening. The U6 number in the Bureau of Labor Statistics Employment Situation report includes discouraged workers, those working part time that really want full time work and others peripherally connected to the labor mar-



ket. That number dropped last month from 17.1 to 16.6 percent for the overall population. While the BLS does not report the number for African Americans, using the same relationships, the African-American U6 number is at least 25.6 percent. That means that one in four African Americans is jobless!

This jobless recovery means that some economists are willing and able to have conversations about the way the economy is turning around, even as only a few people feel the impact of the turnaround. Some of the numbers do look good, but the numbers that matter – the unemployment rate numbers, are stuck. How can the economy recover without generating jobs and what does this mean in the long run?

We should all be apprehensive about public policy that does not embrace job creation, because at the basis of economic viability is an

individual's ability to earn and spend. Without jobs, that just won't happen.

As an economist, my focus on the labor market is usually about work and pay. Several experiences in the last few months have forced me to focus, also, on the human consequences of high unemployment, including the mental health consequences of being jobless in a culture that says that what you do is who you are. I met a woman who had been downsized from her job at 61.

She told me, despondently, that she would probably never work again because of her age. Her aura was one of someone/battered and lifeless. She asked me, a stranger, why her company could have done that to her. Part of me wanted to ask if she ever read the headlines. Part of me wanted to give her a hug.

A young White man who is a 2009 graduate of a prestigious college delivered my

room service, just a few days ago. Personable and positive, he shared, as we talked, that he worked about 20 hours a week at the hotel. His major is communications, but after sending out more than 100 resumes and tapes, he has no job offers.

So he is waiting tables, delivering room service, keeping his chin up, and quietly dying. He said he could hardly bear to look at his dad, a man who had invested in his education.

"I'm still living at home," he told me. "I should be out doing things."

This crisis knows no race or gender, but African-Americans are being hit harder than most. Public policy has to address this. It is unconscionable that we should talk economic recovery while people are not working, while people are suffering. And we have to consider the many ways our society pains because of joblessness. There is a malaise that has infected our society because of this high unemployment. Our mental and emotional health has been affected by this unemployment. And we are all to quiet about it because we don't know what to do next. Here is what we must do – we must push our legislators to address high unemployment. And we must protect the long term unemployed by extending their long-term benefits. A jobless recovery is no recovery, but instead it is a joke.

Julianne Malveaux is president of Bennett College for Women.

Submit letters and columns to:

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