

**J. Buford's Column**  
**May 2006**

For the second year in a row, the National Urban League Equality Index remains at .73, for black Americans to 1.0 for white Americans. This means that in the areas of economics, health, education, social justice and civic engagement, blacks are still unequal to whites in this nation. It is a sad fact for many African Americans because it feels like we have been spinning our wheels in place for the last 40 years.

In black America, we are facing a crisis of biblical proportions. The largest disparity that African Americans have to beat is in the area of wealth: blacks' net worth is 10 times less than whites. African Americans are less healthy, less educated and more likely to be pulled over by the police, imprisoned and put to death. Despite reports of the recent creation of 100,000 new jobs in this country, nearly 40% of young African American males remain unemployed. A recent report even highlighted the glaring racism in America's workplace by stating that black men without a criminal record are less likely to find a job than white men with criminal records. Where is the justice?

As African Americans, the time has come for us to stop fighting amongst ourselves and to start fighting our real enemy: racism. The time has come for us to start demanding things that will truly change for the better the lives of our people. Hurricane Katrina was a wake-up call for African Americans about our real status in America. It has been said that the Civil Rights Movement for African Americans is no longer stagnant, but is regressing. In regression, I mean that our hard-won gains from the bygone era are now being slowly returned to mainstream white America. Because blacks are no longer the largest minority in this country our needs are being ignored.

There are many events that have caused this lack of action in the black community. Apathy, lack of a clear agenda and disunity are to blame for mainstream America leaving blacks behind. Hurricane Katrina was a wake up call to the black community but we have yet to wake up from this American dream that has become a nightmare. Yes, the Voting Rights Act is up for reauthorization in Congress, but will African Americans exercise

their right to vote in record numbers? When will we decide to unify for the greater good of the African American community? When will we stop dividing ourselves between the haves and the have-nots and get a real agenda that benefits all?

During slavery, African Americans were divided based on the complexion of their skin. Light-skinned blacks worked in the master's house as "house slaves" and dark-skinned blacks worked as "field slaves." Thus, the house slaves and the field slaves did not get along. Today, you have middle income blacks and poor blacks working against each other. How of many of you know that it doesn't matter whether you work in the house or in the field, a slave is a slave. It also doesn't matter if you are a middle class black or a poor black, you are still being discriminated against. Each year in the country, African Americans are being discriminated against, regardless of your socioeconomic status.

Family, what I am saying to you today is that it is time for us to unify, organize and create one agenda before we lose the few rights that we have left. There are many statistics in the National Urban League's "*State of Black America*" that backs the claim that we are in trouble. There are also many stories that we hear and experience everyday that backs the claim that blacks in this country are becoming relegated to a permanently ignored underclass. We must not let that happen.