



**Smithsonian Institution**

*National Museum of African American History and Culture*

## **Delegate Magazine 1984**

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[[image - photograph of John E. Jacob]]  
John E. Jacob, President

National Urban League

NATIONAL CONVENTION,  
JULY 29-AUG. 1, 1984  
CONVENTION CENTER-CLEVELAND, OHIO

AN OVERVIEW OF BLACK AMERICA IN 1983  
BY JOHN E. JACOB  
PRESIDENT, NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE

The bald truth is that not only has movement toward narrowing the socio-economic gap that separates black and white Americans come to a dead halt, retrenchment has set in and blacks are actually retrogressing. Thus, while individual achievements by blacks quite rightfully attracted public attention and drew deserved commendation, the plight of black Americans remained strained throughout 1983 with no light apparent at the end of the tunnel.

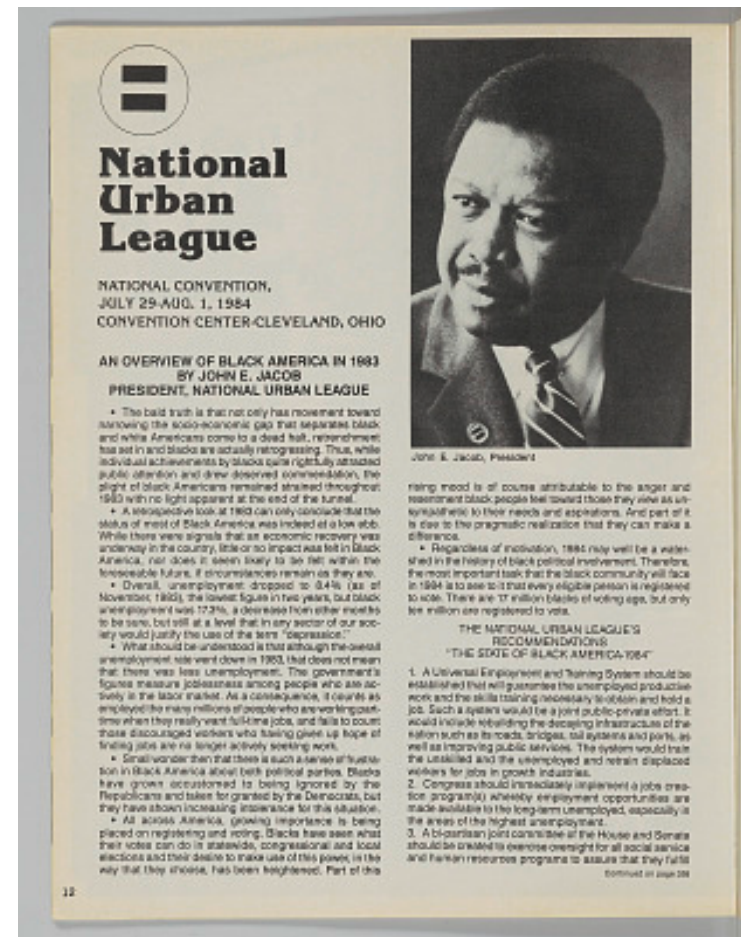
A retrospective look at 1983 can only conclude that the status of most of Black America was indeed at a low ebb. While there were signals that an economic recovery was underway in the country, little or no impact was felt in Black America, nor does it seem likely to be felt within the foreseeable future, if circumstances remain as they are.

Overall, unemployment dropped to 8.4% (as of November, 1983), the lowest figure in two years, but black unemployment was 17.3%, a decrease from other months to be sure, but still at a level that in any sector of our society would justify the use of the term "depression."

What should be understood is that although the overall unemployment rate went down in 1983, that does not mean that there was less unemployment. The government's figures measure joblessness among people who are actively in the labor market. As a consequence, it counts as employed the many millions of people who are working part-time when they really want full-time jobs, and fails to count those discouraged workers who having given up hope of finding jobs are no longer actively seeking work.

Small wonder then that there is such a sense of frustration in Black America about both political parties. Blacks have grown accustomed to being ignored by the Republicans and taken for granted by the Democrats, but they have shown increasing intolerance for this situation.

All across America, growing importance is being placed on registering and voting. Blacks have seen what their votes can do in statewide, congressional and local elections and their desire to make use of this power, in the way that they choose, has been heightened. Part of this rising mood is of course attributable to the anger and resentment black people feel toward those they view as unsympathetic to their needs and aspirations. And part of it is due to the pragmatic realization that they can make a difference.



Regardless of motivation, 1984 may well be a watershed in the history of black political involvement. Therefore, the most important task that the black community will face in 1984 is to see to it that every eligible person is registered to vote. There are 17 million blacks of voting age, but only ten million are registered to vote.

THE NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE'S RECOMMENDATIONS  
"THE STATE OF BLACK AMERICA-1984"

1. A Universal Employment and Training System should be established that will guarantee the unemployed productive work and the skills training necessary to obtain and hold a job. Such a system would be a joint public-private effort. It would include rebuilding the decaying infrastructure of the nation such as its roads, bridges, rail systems and ports, as well as improving public services. The system would train the unskilled and the unemployed and retrain displaced workers for jobs in growth industries.

2. Congress should immediately implement a jobs creation program(s) whereby employment opportunities are made available to the long-term unemployed, especailly in the areas of the highest unemployment.

3. A bi-partisan joint committee of the House and Senate should be created to exercise oversight for all social service and human resources programs to assure that they fulfill

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