

Perspective

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Concrete Advice for Police Reform: An Interview with Marc Morial

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On January 20, 2017, James D. Ward, co-guest editor for the Policing and Race Symposium in *Public Administration Review*, interviewed Mr. Marc Morial, president and CEO of the National Urban League. The National Urban League has established itself as the nation's largest civil rights organization, with Mr. Morial leading its efforts since 2003.

Ward: Going forward, what advice would you give to the incoming presidential administration of Donald J. Trump, for reducing racial disparities in police use of force, the role of the Black Lives Matter Movement, and improving overall relations between law enforcement and the African American community?

Morial: The National Urban League has issued a 10-point Plan for Police Reform and Accountability, which we suggest the administration use as a blueprint. These reforms include a national comprehensive anti-racial profiling law, widespread use of body cameras and dashboard cameras, comprehensive retraining of all police officers, and strengthening of police hiring standards.

Ward: Public officials have called for the hiring of more black police officers to reduce racial disparities in police use of force. However, research by Nicholson-Crotty et al., and as reported in the Washington Post, suggests that it takes a critical mass of black police officers to show noticeable signs of explicit representation toward black citizens, and that black officers in some instances may be more willing to abuse power, as they acquiesce toward acceptable norms of the organization. Are you surprised by this finding? What advice would you give to black police officers in departments where they make up less than 40 percent of the police force?

Morial: Introducing police officers of color into a dysfunctional culture will have little to no effect on changing the culture. The burden of change cannot be placed upon individual officers, particularly when they make up a minority of the police force.

The diversification of police departments must be accompanied by a comprehensive program of culture reform. Recruitment alone will not solve the problem.

Ward: Critics argue that pretextual stops, where a motorist (or pedestrian) is stopped on the pretext of a minor traffic violation (or suspicion), but the true motivating factor is the race of the person stopped, has contributed to the proliferation of racial profiling. Epp et al. found that African-Americans are 2.7 times more likely to be stopped than white drivers, while young black men were the most likely to be stopped. Yet, only the state of Washington has declared pretextual stops illegal. Do you believe this institutionalized practice by law enforcement should be revisited and/or discontinued?

Morial: Yes.

Ward: Please explain.

Morial: There is no question that pretextual stops primarily target African-Americans and Latinos. The basis for detaining a motorist or pedestrian should and must be probable cause or a primary offense. That is why the National Urban League has advocated for a national anti-racial profiling law, and the issue of probable cause must be addressed in any such law.

Ward: Research by Jennings and Rubado found that one policy—the requirement that officers file a report when they point their gun at people but do not fire—may significantly reduce the rate of gun deaths, as officers build habits of caution in displaying their weapons, even if it is to avoid the completion of onerous paper work. Are you surprised by this finding? Do you believe such a policy, if adopted nationally, would also help to reduce police shootings of unarmed black men and boys?

Morial: I believe such a policy should go even further—incident reports should be mandatory any time an officer unholsters his or her gun. While it is true that avoidance of annoying paperwork may be a

factor in the potential reduction of gun deaths, I believe that such a requirement actually would alter officers' attitudes toward use of force. The outcome of an incident begins to be determined the moment an officer reaches for his or her gun, not the moment of the decision to pull the trigger.

Ward: In response to the release of the 2015 State of Black America report, you were quoted by CBS News as saying that "Black America is in a crisis – a jobs crisis, an education crisis, and a justice crisis." And, that a large-scale discussion is needed on "police-community relations and police accountability and the criminal justice system." Do you believe that we as a nation are on a path to have such a discussion?

Morial: Yes.

Ward: Please explain.

Morial: I believe such a discussion already has begun and played a significant factor in the outcome of the Presidential election. The high-profile killings of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Walter Scott in North Carolina, Freddie Gray in Baltimore, Sandra Bland in Prairie View—and so many others around the country promoted communities of color to

coalesce around a national movement. It is clear this movement provoked a backlash among some who misinterpreted its motives and goals. The next few years will be critical in resolving these misunderstandings.

Ward: Included in the 10-point plan: National Urban League Police Reform and Accountability Recommendations, is the call for a national comprehensive anti-racial profiling law. What steps are being taken by the National Urban League to bring about such a law, along with the other points in the plan?

Morial: The National Urban League is engaged in active and effectual federal advocacy around the anti-racial profiling issue. We introduced our plan as part of the testimony before the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, and the adoption and enforcement of anti-profiling policies as part of the Task Force's report. A few months after our testimony, U.S. Senator Ben Cardin (D-Md.) and House Judiciary Committee Ranking Member John Conyers, Jr. (D-Mich.) introduced legislation in both the Senate and the House that would prohibit discriminatory racial profiling by law enforcement at all levels, nationwide. We expect the legislation to be reintroduced in the new Congress and will aggressively advocate for its passage.

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