

A profile photograph of Barack Obama, facing left, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and patterned tie. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue and red gradient. The background of the entire page is a solid red color.

OBAMA

ADMINISTRATION SCORECARD

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National
Urban League

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Publication



Throughout our history, the National Urban League has taken seriously our responsibility to hold the president of the United States accountable to the needs of urban America and communities of color. During the Great Depression, Executive Secretary Eugene Kinkle Jones served on President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "Black Cabinet." Lester Granger, who headed the National Urban League during World War II, is among those credited with persuading President Harry Truman to desegregate the Armed Forces. Whitney M. Young advised Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, and was instrumental in the passage of the landmark Civil Rights Act. National Urban League Presidents Vernon Jordan, John Jacob and Hugh Price continued our engagement with the presidents with whom they served to further the work of civil rights and secure support for the National Urban League's programs.

The National Urban League has regarded the first African-American presidency with special significance, not simply because of its trailblazing status, but also because of the unique conditions under which President Barack Obama took office and served his two terms. He inherited the worst economy since the Great Depression, and was faced with congressional opposition unprecedented in both its intensity and sinister nature. Therefore, his accomplishments, and failures, must be evaluated against those conditions.

In creating this scorecard, the National Urban League harkened back to the famous question Ronald Reagan asked the nation during his sole debate against President Jimmy Carter: "Are you better off than you were four years ago?" In this instance, the question is, "Is the nation better off than it was eight years ago?" And, "Is Black America better off than it was eight years ago?" The answer to both questions is, unequivocally: yes.

President Obama is leaving office with an approval rating even higher than President Reagan's, exceeded only by Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower and Bill Clinton. During Obama's presidency, the economy added 15 million new jobs. The national jobless rate dropped from 7.6% to 4.7%. For African Americans, the jobless rate fell from 12.7% to 7.8%. The high school graduation rate for African Americans increased from 66.1% to 85%. There were 614,000 fewer long-term unemployed. Wages climbed by 3.4%. More than 16 million Americans who were uninsured now have health care coverage, with the uninsured rate for African Americans cut by more than half. President Obama's passion and steady hand made a huge difference in charting a progressive course and positively impacted the lives of ordinary Americans. Black Americans felt both the pride of his accomplishments, and the pain, when it was clear his opponents sought to diminish a great American. I am confident the long arc of history will judge him favorably.

While we scored many of the administration's achievements "Superior," our highest rating, President Obama's tenure as a whole had shortcomings due to some notable missed opportunities and outright failures, such as the economic development of urban centers, gun violence, and the foreclosure and bank closure rates in communities of color and low-income neighborhoods. On these, and other issues, we rated the Obama administration "Fair" or "Poor." Our evaluation springs from a consideration of his accomplishments balanced against the conditions under which he served. **The National Urban League has given the Obama Administration an overall rating of "Excellent," our second-highest rating.**

Sincerely,

Marc H. Morial
President and CEO
National Urban League

Successes

Economic Growth

SUPERIOR

In eight years, America has gone from losing hundreds of thousands of jobs per month to an unprecedented 80+ consecutive months of job growth.

During President Obama's term, the private sector added 15 million new jobs, and the Economic Recovery and Reinvestment Act is widely credited with protecting the nation from a second Great Depression.

The overall unemployment rate is below 5% for the first time in eight years.

In January 2009, the Black unemployment rate was 12.7% versus a white unemployment rate of 7.1%. As of December 2016, the Black jobless rate stands at 7.8% versus a white jobless rate of 4.3%.

Reductions in African American Poverty Rate

EXCELLENT

The poverty rate for African Americans fell faster in 2015 than in any year since 1999.

While the poverty rate fell across all racial and ethnic groups this year, it fell 2.1 percentage points for African Americans, resulting in 700,000 fewer African Americans in poverty.

African American children also made large gains in 2015, with the poverty rate falling 4.2 percentage points and 400,000 fewer children in poverty.

In the first effort in 40 years to bring Labor Department regulations on overtime in line with inflation, President Obama doubled the salary level at which hourly workers must be paid extra for overtime pay, increasing it from \$23,660 to \$47,476.

Support for Youth and Mature Workers

SUPERIOR

Since 2011, President Obama's administration has provided vital support to transform the National Urban League's education and employment program for out-of-school youth, the Urban Youth Empowerment Program (UYEP), from a demonstration program begun under the previous administration, to a signature program for court-involved youth and young adults ages 14 to 24.

Under the UYEP model, the National Urban League and its partnering affiliates serve about 2,000 youths living in high-poverty, high-crime urban areas across the nation, and have placed the vast majority of these youths into jobs that pay a living wage.

The administration was also supportive of the National Urban League's more than 30 years of expertise in serving the needs of unemployed older citizens through its support for our signature Urban Seniors Job Program (Mature Workers Program) that provides subsidized service-based training for low-income persons 55 years of age or older, who are unemployed and committed to finding employment opportunities.

Failures

Economic Development of Urban Centers **FAIR**

The Obama administration did not advance a comprehensive urban policy to strategically target federal resources to address urban economic distress, which is most often reflected in inequality in employment, income, wealth, housing and most other measures of social well-being.

With the advocacy of the National Urban League and the Congressional Black Caucus, the initial American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (otherwise known as “the stimulus”), included a limited set of targeted initiatives aimed at urban communities hardest hit by the Great Recession. At our urging and assistance, the president introduced the American Jobs Act in 2011, which would have extended and expanded those targeted initiatives, but he did not aggressively advocate for its passage after introducing it as part of a joint session of Congress. *[Note: The president did have many initiatives that did target urban and low-income populations, such as My Brother’s Keeper, expanding apprenticeships, private sector summer jobs and Promise Zones, but they were fragmented and were not supported by federal funding, which the president could have included in his budget requests.]*

Missed Opportunities

Rep. Jim Clyburn’s 10-20-30 Plan for Rural Development **FAIR**

While initially applying Rep. Clyburn’s 10-20-30 plan to three rural development investment programs in the Recovery Act in 2009, the president missed a key opportunity to take advantage of bipartisan support for this concept to improve upon the plan, so that it would target more federal resources to communities grappling with persistent poverty in urban, as well as rural communities, rather than only in counties.

SUPERIOR	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
5	4	3	2	1

CIVIL RIGHTS AND JUDICIAL AND EXECUTIVE APPOINTMENTS

Successes

Protection of Civil Rights

SUPERIOR

Appointments of the first and second African-American U.S. attorney generals.

The Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division has protected the civil rights of individuals in housing, lending, employment, voting and education, including the defense of disability rights, and through hate crimes and law enforcement misconduct prosecutions and law enforcement pattern and practice cases. The Office for Civil Rights at the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Education also pursued the protection of the civil rights of individuals in an assertive and systematic fashion.

Enactment of the Lilly Ledbetter Act to restore protections against pay discrimination.

Diversifying the Federal Bench and Cabinet

SUPERIOR

President Obama has made 62 lifetime appointments of African Americans to serve on the federal bench. This includes nine African American circuit court judges. It also includes the appointment of 53 African American district court judges—including 26 African American women appointed to the federal court, which is more African-American women appointed by any President in history. President Obama's second-term cabinet was more diverse than any in American history.

President Obama's second-term cabinet was more diverse than any in American history.

Relationship with the Civil Rights Community

SUPERIOR

President Obama and his team established an ongoing, direct relationship and dialogue with leaders of the African-American civil rights community and often consulted these groups on public policy.

These leaders included Marc H. Morial of the National Urban League, Ben Jealous and Cornell William Brooks of the NAACP, the Rev. Al Sharpton of the National Action Network, Melanie Campbell of the National Coalition for Black Civic Participation and Black Women's Roundtable, Wade Henderson of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, Sherrilyn Ifill of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, and Kristen Clarke Of the National Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law.

Restoration of the Voting Rights Act

GOOD

The administration filed lawsuits against Texas and North Carolina to invalidate voter suppression laws passed by those states' legislatures and aggressively pursued enforcement of the remaining provisions of the act after the Supreme Court's *Shelby v. Holder* decision. We do believe the president and his administration should have deployed the power and prestige of the bully pulpit to speak more forcefully against voter suppression and in support of restoring the Voting Rights Act.

Failures

Appointment of an African American to U.S. Supreme Court

POOR

The president had three opportunities to nominate the first African-American woman to the U.S. Supreme Court, but failed to do so for each vacancy.

SUPERIOR	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
5	4	3	2	1

Successes

**Policing and
Community Relations****SUPERIOR**

The Department of Justice Civil Rights Division responded to the calls of urban communities by launching investigations into police departments following the shootings of unarmed African Americans.

The Justice Department also mandated department-wide training for all of its law enforcement agents and prosecutors to recognize and address implicit bias as part of its regular training curricula.

Since taking office, the administration has worked to enhance fairness and efficiency at many levels of the criminal justice system, including the president signing the Fair Sentencing Act, the Department of Justice launching the Smart on Crime Initiative, and the creation of the Task Force on 21st Century Policing.

Clemency and Pardons**SUPERIOR**

The president has granted a historic number of pardons and commutations to individuals imprisoned under harsh and outdated sentencing laws. Of the acts of clemency, 1,176 were commutations (including 395 life sentences) and 148 were pardons. This is more than the previous 11 presidents combined.

**Criminal Justice
Reform****GOOD**

The president worked closely with the civil rights community on efforts to pass a bipartisan sentencing reform bill that would have significantly reduced mandatory minimums and reversed the policies of mass incarceration. While the legislation did not pass, it provides an important starting point for the next administration and Congress, if they are serious about addressing the acute need for criminal justice reform.

Missed Opportunities

**Addressing Urban Gun
Violence****FAIR**

During an impassioned national address on January 5, 2016, the president announced executive actions to reduce gun violence, but did not advance a federal response to the fatal gun violence in Chicago. It was a missed opportunity to use his platform on this most critical issue that has implications for all urban communities.

SUPERIOR	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
5	4	3	2	1

Successes

Education Reform **EXCELLENT**

The agenda infused millions of needed dollars into the public education system via the Race to the Top program, which encouraged states to adopt Common Core and share the same high-level education standards.

This focus drove high school graduation rates to their highest levels at 83.2%, which included increasing graduation rates for African-American students from 66.1% in 2009 to 85% in 2016.

Investment in Pell Grants Scholarships and Total Pell Funding **EXCELLENT**

Under the Obama administration, Pell Grants were increased by more than \$1,000 on average per student and total aid available under the Pell Grant program was increased by 70%. Additionally, Pell Grant funding for Historically Black College and University students increased significantly between 2007 and 2014, growing from \$523 million to \$824 million.

Investments in Equity and Student Rights **SUPERIOR**

The Department of Education Office for Civil Rights issued guidance and regulations to protect the civil rights and safety of students.

Investments in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) **EXCELLENT**

Over the past seven years, the Obama administration has invested more than \$4 billion in HBCUs.

Federal funding to HBCUs has grown every year since 2009. Through the Higher Education Act, HBCUs received a \$17 million funding increase in 2016—the largest increase for the federal government’s Strengthening Historically Black Colleges and Universities program in six years.

SUPERIOR	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
5	4	3	2	1

Failures

Management of Parent Plus Loans

FAIR

The administration poorly managed Parent Plus Loans and failed to work with HBCUs to ensure that students who depended on these loans had other funding options to continue their higher education.

Missed Opportunities

Expansion of a Higher Education Agenda

FAIR

The administration missed opportunities to drive a more expansive higher education agenda that creates a wholistic approach to college access, affordability and completion for both traditional and non-traditional students.

Support for Youth Programs Managed by African American Organizations

FAIR

While the administration opened the door for the participation of African-American organizations in the Department of Justice's youth mentoring programs for the first time, its efforts in this regard could have, and should have, been more aggressive and assertive given the challenges of violence and poverty among American youth.

SUPERIOR	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
5	4	3	2	1

Successes

Passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA)

EXCELLENT

The Affordable Care Act now provides 29.8 million Americans, who were either uninsured or underinsured, with health coverage and increased quality of care.

This has resulted in measurable changes for the African-American community, including more than 2.3 million African Americans ages 18 to 64 gaining health insurance coverage, which lowered the uninsured rate among African Americans by 6.8 percentage points.

The ACA helped to reduce health disparities by providing access to preventive services like mammograms or flu shots with no co-pay or deductible.

The president deserves credit for doing what many presidents have tried since Theodore Roosevelt first proposed a national health corps in the early 1900s. It required political courage in the midst of a raging recession to advance the ACA. While the National Urban League's agenda for health reform may have gone further than the ACA, we can never make perfect the enemy of good.

Failure

Rollout of ACA

FAIR

The rollout and subsequent messaging for the ACA hobbled its ability to be even more impactful. Most Americans still do not understand the key reforms of the health care bill and how it benefits them.

Missed Opportunities

Funding Community Health Workers and Health Navigators

FAIR

Within the ACA, the administration missed an opportunity to pursue a more aggressive strategy to increase funding to community health workers and health navigators, thereby improving health equity at a faster rate.

SUPERIOR	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
5	4	3	2	1

Successes

Issuance of a First-time Homebuyers Tax Credit**SUPERIOR**

From 2008-2010, first-time homebuyers received a tax credit ranging from \$7,500 - \$8,000 towards the purchase of their homes.

The credit encouraged and incentivized prospective borrowers to become first-time homebuyers.

Housing Counseling Services and Financial Reforms**EXCELLENT**

President Obama increased funding for housing counseling, and supported numerous rounds of foreclosure mitigation funding. As a result, the National Urban League and our local affiliates dramatically expanded housing counseling services to hundreds of thousands across the nation.

The White House worked closely with advocates on housing finance reform including the National Urban League--convening meetings with senior staff from the Department of Treasury, Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the White House National Economic Council.

As a result, the National Urban League and affiliates dramatically expanded its work to provide housing counseling and foreclosure mitigation counseling to hundreds of thousands across the nation.

Growth in Number of Minority-Owned Small Businesses**SUPERIOR**

The number of African-American small businesses increased from 1.9 million to 2.6 million between 2007 and 2012.

This is important because African-American small business owners are more likely to hire African Americans than other employers.

Diversifying the Financial Services Industry**SUPERIOR**

The passage of Section 342 of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act mandated that each covered governmental agency establish an Office of Minority and Women Inclusion (OMWI) to increase diversity throughout the financial services industry.

President Obama made diverse appointments, selecting Mel Watt as director of the Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA), Julian Castro as secretary of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and Janet Yellen as chairwoman of the Federal Reserve Board.

Failures

Rate of Foreclosures and Underwater Homes in Communities of Color

FAIR

African Americans were more likely to foreclose on their homes than any other race. African Americans accounted for approximately 80% of the foreclosures that occurred during the foreclosure crisis. A 2014 study illustrated that the top five cities for underwater homes were cities where at least 80% or more of the residents were people of color.

The African-American homeownership rate has declined from nearly 50% a decade ago to around 40%. The decline represents an extreme loss of wealth that has accumulated over a 40-year period.

Rate of Bank Closures in Low Income Neighborhoods

FAIR

More than 98% of the banks that closed during the foreclosure crisis were in low-income neighborhoods.

Missed Opportunities

Relief for Underwater and Seriously Delinquent Homeowners

POOR

Underwater and seriously delinquent homeowners were not given opportunities for principal forgiveness.

Over five million homeowners lost their homes during the foreclosure crisis. That number would have been much lower if distressed homeowners had the opportunity for principal forgiveness.

Number of Small Business Administration (SBA) backed Loans and Minority Business Inclusion

POOR

African-American small business owners only received less than 2% of the loans backed by SBA since fiscal year 2013.

Further, the president and his administration did not use the power and prestige of the presidency to advocate for minority business inclusion in a systematic manner.

SUPERIOR	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
5	4	3	2	1

TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Successes

Expanded Science, Technology, and Innovation Capacity **SUPERIOR**

Through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), the administration promoted the development and adoption of broadband throughout the United States, particularly in unserved and underserved areas, through the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP).

The Recovery Act also included \$18.3 billion in research and development funding, which was part of the largest annual increase in research and development funding in America's history.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) reformed the Lifeline program, a \$1.5 billion per year Reagan-era phone subsidy program, and transformed it into a 21st century, national broadband subsidy to help low-income Americans get online.

Boosted Science, Technology, and Innovation Talent Across the Administration **SUPERIOR**

More than 450 engineers, designers, data scientists, and product managers have signed on for a tour of duty to serve in over 25 agencies through the U.S. Digital Service, 18F at the General Services Administration (GSA), and the Presidential Innovation Fellows program. The administration launched the first-ever Social and Behavioral Sciences Team (SBST) by executive order in September 2015 to help federal government programs better serve the nation, while saving taxpayer dollars.

Investments in STEM Education and Equity **SUPERIOR**

The president's Educate to Innovate campaign, launched in November 2009, has resulted in more than \$1 billion in private investment for improving K-12 STEM education.

The K-12 STEM teacher corps was strengthened. The nation is on track to meet the president's January 2011 State of the Union goal to put 100,000 additional teachers in classrooms.

Millions of students were supported with ConnectED. The nation is on track to meet the president's June 2013 commitment to connect 99% of students to high-speed internet through schools and libraries by 2018.

SUPERIOR	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
5	4	3	2	1

Failures

Expansion of Affordable, Robust Broadband Service	FAIR
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Ten percent of all Americans, roughly 34 million people, still lack access to broadband speeds of 25 Mbps, speeds necessary for households to stream high-quality video, use multiple devices over the connection, and generally enjoy the full value the internet has to offer.

Missed Opportunities

Launch of ConnectALL	POOR
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This initiative to help Americans at every income level get online and have the tools to take full advantage of the internet was done without insight from organizations that work with the communities most affected by the digital divide.

Creation of a Pipeline for Well-Paying Tech Jobs	FAIR
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The president launched the TechHire Initiative in March 2015 to equip people from all backgrounds with the skills they need to fill the more than 600,000 open tech jobs. Minorities, particularly African Americans and Latinos, remain woefully underrepresented in the tech industry.

SUPERIOR	EXCELLENT	GOOD	FAIR	POOR
5	4	3	2	1

**Civil Liberties And
Human Rights**

Reversed the military's "Don't Ask Don't Tell" ban;

Successfully litigated the unconstitutionality of the Defense of Marriage Act; and

Supported and advocated for marriage equality, which led to the Supreme Court's Obergefell v. Hodges decision.

Historic Achievements

Made history by becoming the first African-American president and commander in chief; and

Presided over a scandal-free administration.

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