Activist Says Reagan Did Little For Blacks

By Susan Wortman
Post-Dispatch Special Correspondent

COLUMBIA, Mo. — Black Americans have made some extraordinary gains in recent years despite getting little help from President Ronald Reagan, says John E. Jacob, president of the National Urban League.

Jacob, who is also a syndicated newspaper columnist and radio commentator, was at the University of Missouri-Columbia last week to help conclude activities of Black History Month.

In an address Thursday, Jacob said, "Black people are in places of power they never dreamed of before."

A black quarterback led the Washington Redskins to a Super Bowl victory. Black businessmen are holding higher positions in more companies. Black movie stars and singers are as popular as their white counterparts.

"Some would say the work of the civil rights movement is accomplished," Jacob said. "They would say the work is done, the goals have been achieved, the dreams fulfilled.

"But parity is far from being reached."

He placed much of the blame on Reagan and his policies.

About half of black children are growing up in poverty, he said. And the income of an average black family is about 58 percent of the income for an average white family.

"Government programs directed at helping the poor have been slashed without mercy," Jacob said.

No matter who wins the presidential election ". . it can't get any worse than who we've had," he said. "We're finally in a position where we can't go any direction but up."

Jacob said he saw reasons for optimism. More blacks, including those involved with the National Urban League, are working to solve their own problems instead of waiting for government help. Black political influence has helped keep Judge Robert Bork off the U.S. Supreme Court.

"Education is the No. 1 thing" on the National Urban League's agenda, Jacob said. "One-fourth of black students drop out of school in some cities. Those who do graduate can barely read the diploma."

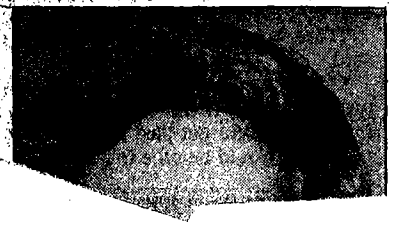
The college entrance examination scores of black students are looking slightly better, Jacob said. But experts say they won't be on par with white students for another 45 years.

Problems in education are even more apparent at the college level. Fewer blacks are going to college.

"The major reason is money," Jacob said. Money that was once given away as grants is now being loaned. "And families with a $12,000 income can't take the responsibility of that kind of a loan."



John E. Jacob
Education No. 1 thing



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