Bush asked to seek racial equality

By KAREN KEENEY
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John Jacob, president of the National Urban League, called on president-elect George Bush Monday to endorse the goal of achieving parity between blacks and whites by the year 2000.

Jacob was the keynote speaker at Penn State’s convocation at Eisenhower Auditorium to honor Martin Luther King Jr.

Most late afternoon classes were canceled, and staff members were excused early to allow students and faculty to attend the program and a reception.

The program was telecast to Penn State’s branch campuses by satellite, and was carried by WPSX-TV.

Other Penn State activities in honor of the slain civil rights leader included a special dinner for on-campus students, and memorial concert presented by the Glee Club and Women’s Chorus at Schwab Auditorium.

Jacob told the students, staff and townspeople that the new administration must provide the moral, financial and political leadership necessary to achieve true equality of the races.

“The gap between the races is too large to be acceptable in a democratic society,” he said.

Despite the achievements of the civil rights movement led by King, Jacob said, blacks continue to lag behind whites in access to jobs, education and health care. In such areas, blacks are worse off than they were in the mid-1970s, he said.

But, if America is to remain economically competitive, all of its people must be encouraged to develop their skills and abilities, he said.

“Black progress is not a zero sum game that necessarily causes white losses,” he said.

“We compete against nations whose economy is more vibrant than our own,” Jacob said. “We can’t compete economically unless all Americans have the education and skill to create the new products and in this new information world.”

Although groups such as the Urban League have launched a number of programs to help blacks, these private efforts must be complemented by government efforts, he said.

Bush’s administration should commit itself to reversing “the slide back to a ‘separate-but-equal’ society,” Jacob said.

During the past eight years, the Ronald Reagan administration’s legal challenge of affirmative action encouraged the revival of long-dormant feelings of racism, Jacob said.

Recently, Reagan said in an interview with CBS newsmen Mike Wallace that some black leaders benefit from encouraging blacks to believe that they are victims of discrimination. In a news conference before the speech, Jacob said Reagan’s statements showed that he does not understand the country’s pluralistic society.

The lack of Reagan administration support for opportunities for blacks has diminished the gains achieved by the efforts of King and his followers, Jacob said.

“Those gains are eroded today because of the national mood of greed and selfishness,” Jacob said.

The new administration, Jacob said, “should declare that its overriding obligation is to develop public policies that will lead to parity.”

The attitudes and actions of people like the Penn State students attending the convocation will help to influence such policies, according to Jacob.

“I am hopeful that America will rise to the great challenge,” he said.