

OPINION

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Criminal Justice Changes Long Overdue

Lawyers' right to join equity fight

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS
Hats off to American Bar Association President Dennis Archer for his efforts in rallying lawyers to advocate change in our criminal justice system. As the first African American to head the largest lawyers' association in America, Archer has rightly sought to tackle one of the most pressing issues for black



Americans. The unfair criminal justice system and the high incarceration rate of black men have increasingly become the number one destroyers of black families. Over one million African-American men are imprisoned and unavailable to support and help raise the children they have left behind in the outside world.

Consequently, most of our women are trying to raise chil-

dren by themselves, many in poverty, trying to teach manhood to a youngster growing up without a father. Many of our sisters are succeeding in carrying the load alone, but children need the financial support and guidance of their fathers. That's why changes in the criminal justice system are so important to our families and our community. Indeed African-American men represent nearly 60 percent of America's prison population, but only 5 percent of American society.

The American Bar Association has now weighed in on this issue

with proposals to overhaul mandatory sentencing laws, combat racial profiling and assist with societal re-entry programs for prisoners. Their efforts are not designed to free the guilty, but to provide balance and fairness to a system that has been unfair and unbalanced towards African-Americans for far too long.

Mandatory minimum sentencing laws have reduced judges to clerks by taking away their sentencing discretion, leading to long prison sentences for nonviolent petty criminals and higher prison costs for taxpayers who must foot the bill. Once imprisoned, the con-

vict receives little rehabilitation and is returned to society with little ability to become productive so they can victimize again...until they are returned to the revolving door of the prison warehouse.

Something must be done and I believe that American Bar Association, a majority white organization comprised of nearly all of America's lawyers, is in a unique position to influence mainstream America on this issue. Subsequent to approving the proposals at their organizations convention in August, the group plans

to use their considerable influence to lobby state and federal legislators to enact their proposals into law.

We can do our part by calling our legislators and voicing our support for the American Bar Associations' proposed changes to the criminal justice system. Indeed, it would be criminal for us not to rally around this cause. The future of our community depends on it.

Judge Greg Mathis is chairman of the Rainbow PUSH-Excel Board and a national board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Remember the Long March July marks anniversaries in freedom struggle

BY MARC H. MORIAL

America has just turned again to its most treasured moment of spiritual refreshment—the celebration of the Fourth of July, literally the birthday of the United States.

That the Declaration of Independence was signed on that day in 1776 makes the month the one most historically resonant for most Americans. But I've been reminded that July is also a month full of powerful historical anniversaries of African Americans' long march to freedom as well.

Forexample, this July 2 we marked

the 40th anniversary of the signing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the most sweeping civil rights legislation enacted by Congress since the Reconstruction Era a century before.

In the famous photographs of President Lyndon Johnson signing the Act in the East Room of the White House we scan the smiling faces of those present as the president distributes the signing pens to the senators and representatives who shepherded the legislation through the Congress, and to one other man, an outsider to the fratern-

ity of politicians present.

That man was the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.—the chief spokesman of the civil rights movement and the principal representative of the people whose struggle and sacrifice and indomitable will had brought that moment into being.

Sixteen years earlier, on July 26, 1948, President Harry S. Truman had affixed his name to another important document of freedom: Executive Order 9981, which ended the longstanding official bigotry within the military against African Americans that had persisted right until the end of World War II.

Truman was responding both to the moral imperative of history and the momentous new determination that coursed through black America in the postwar years.

Powered by the decades-long black migrations out of the South to the urban North and West, which had given them a measure of free-

dom and opportunity, and by their contributions to the American effort to "make the world safe for democracy," African Americans well understood they had once more proved their fitness for citizenship; and this time they would take their share of it.

So, in the immediate aftermath of the war would come welling up from ordinary black people in ordinary black communities in South Carolina, Delaware, and Kansas the challenges to official school segregation at the local level that led to the Supreme Court's decision in Brown v Board of Education.

And a year after that landmark decision came the first flashpoint of the modern civil rights movement, the Montgomery Bus Boy-

cott, whose leaders drafted as its chief spokesman a newly-minted minister who had just arrived in town: Martin Luther King Jr.

But July's specific importance to African-American history goes

back even farther, back at least to July 5, 1852. For on that day Frederick Douglass, who had been born into slavery and escaped his bondage to become the most famous crusader for the rights of African Americans of his time, spoke before the Rochester (New York) Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society.

Douglass' speech, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July," was both a paean to the ideals set forth in the Declaration and the Constitution, and a scathing indictment of white America's failure to extend

them across the color line. Speaking at a time when slavery itself seemed a permanent fixture of American society, Douglass thundered, "Whether we turn to the declarations of the past, or to the professions of the present... America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future."

One hundred and twelve Julys would pass before it could be said that those words were no longer true.

Thus, July's importance to African-American history underscores the fullness of the history of African Americans in and of itself, and also how profoundly intertwined it is with the forces and ideals which led to and flowed from the actions of the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.



Marc H. Morial

Letter to the Editor Documentary Strikes a Chord

These days, a lot of hype surrounds media events like the movie Fahrenheit 9/11. It's easy to dismiss that kind of hoopla, but this movie clearly transcends the usual frenzy associated with blockbuster releases. The reason this movie was so anticipated is because Moore steadfastly addresses the biggest threat to our nation, Bush's response to terrorism.

While it may appear that it's just a Bush-bash for liberals, in reality Fahrenheit 9/11 is more broad based than that. Moore shows ordinary Americans doing extraordinary things in service to this nation of ours. In response to Bush's raising more questions than answers, more feeling of despair than leadership, we are presented an alternate, more hopeful view of what is possible for our nation.

Despite the mess we find ourselves in domestically, the lack of adequate healthcare and a sluggish economy, and internationally, Iraq and our recent laughable credibility, it is events like Fahrenheit 9/11 that rally all of us to determine for ourselves what kind of nation we are.

This movie's success would not be possible without so many citizens of all stripes being fed up with Bush's misdirection on so many fronts. To dismiss Moore's movie as simple diatribe is to dismiss the groundswell of countless Americans across this land who demand and will only accept a just and truly democratic nation.

Chris Gates, Southwest Portland

Shortchanged on Homeland Security

Cities don't have the tools necessary to keep us secure

BY WELLINGTON E. WEBB

It's every mayor's worst nightmare: getting a call that their city has been hit by a terrorist attack. After talking to my former colleagues at the annual meeting of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, I've concluded what really keeps them up at night is knowing that they do not have the resources to prepare for or respond adequately to such an attack, especially one using biological, chemical, or radiological weapons.

It's been two-and-a-half years since the attacks of Sept. 11 and

almost just as long since anthrax spores sent through the mail killed five people and terrorized the nation. Since then, we have created a whole new federal department to handle homeland security, yet we have not given our nation's mayors and local governments the tools necessary to keep our homeland secure.

First, there's not enough money to get the job done and further cuts threaten the ability of mayors to hire and equip the necessary firefighters, police officers, and emergency health personnel. According to a report done by the Council on Foreign Relations, fire departments nationwide have only enough radios to equip half of those on a shift, and

breathing apparatus for only one-third. In addition, the study found that three-quarters of state public health laboratories are overwhelmed by testing requests.

To this, the Bush Administration has proposed cutting the state and local bio-preparedness program by 11 percent or \$105 million for next year. And the Administration has nearly eliminated the COPS program—which has put 114,000 more police officers on the street—by gutting its budget by another 80 percent.

Even more frustrating to mayors is that the money sent by the federal government to local communities is being disbursed inefficiently through state governments.

As the Mayor of Denver for more than a decade and former head of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, I know that the federal government can allocate money directly to cities since the Department of Housing and Urban Development already does so. If we can do it for affordable homes, we can surely do it for homeland security.

Unfortunately, the challenge of keeping our cities ready to respond to a terrorist attack is one that may never go away. But if the federal government makes smart investments and empowers mayors with the funding to do what's best to protect their neighborhoods, it is a challenge that we can be prepared to meet.

Wellington E. Webb was mayor of Denver, Colorado from 1991 to 2003.



Wellington E. Webb

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Adams High Awaits Wrecking Ball
The Portland School District has proclaimed that there will be a new Whitaker Middle School to replace the empty and former Adams High School at 5700 N.E. 38th Ave. Of course the new building will look very different and will bring new housing with it — something that makes nearby existing neighbors a little nervous.

Keeping a Close Eye On Crime
Despite program cuts and budget shortfalls, returning Northeast Police Precinct Commander Bruce Frunk is positive the community he calls home will continue to make strides.

Spraying Makes Progress in Mosquito Fight
Take a sigh of relief: Multnomah County health officers are reporting success in the fight to rid your backyard of mosquitoes.

From border to border, from coast to coast, here are some of the top stories making news across the United States and from around the world.