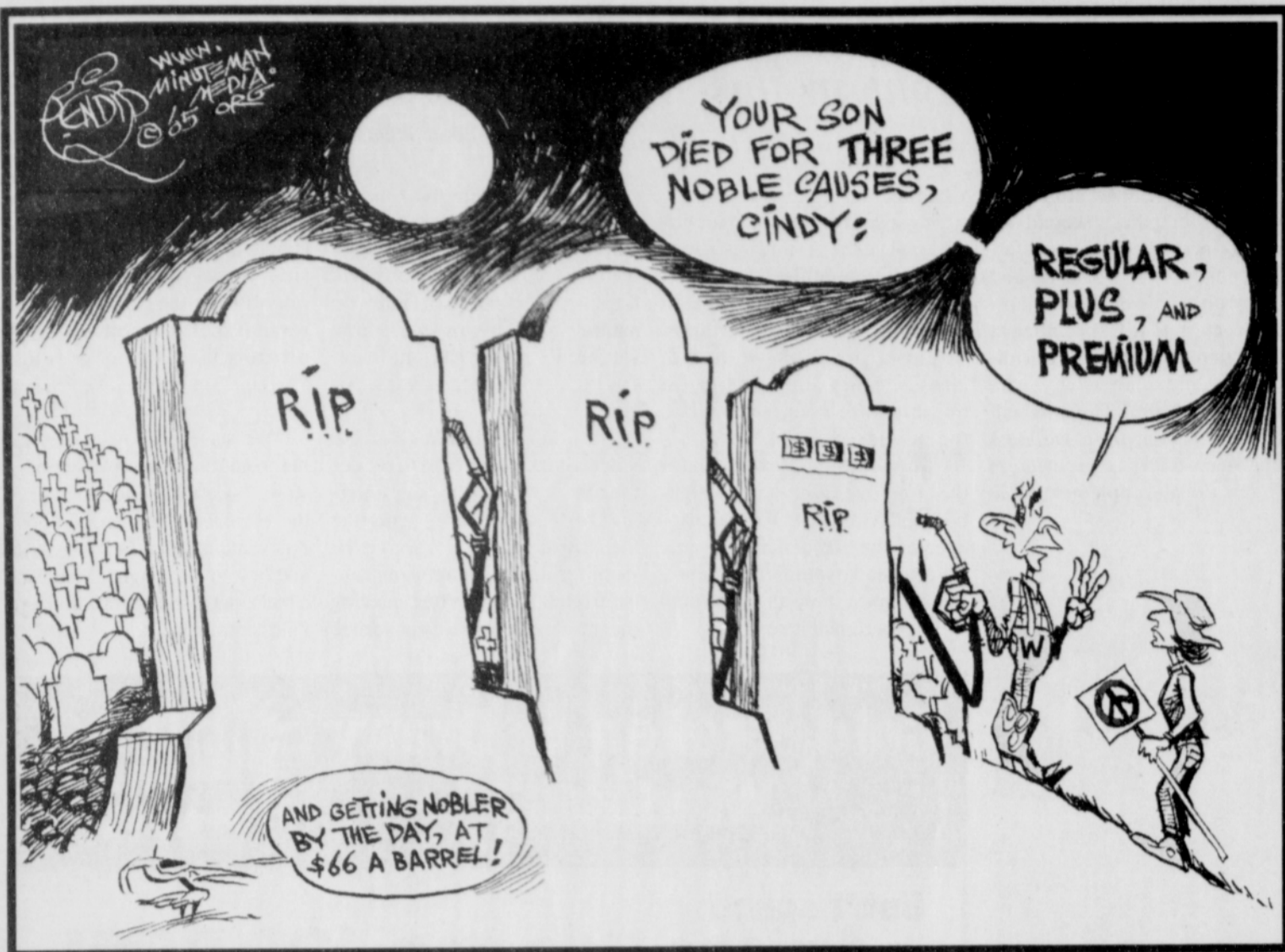


OPINION

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Reward, Don't Demote Official Shedding light on racial profiling

BY BRUCE S. GORDON

The Justice Department should support, not demote, the Bureau of Justice Statistics director who refused to downplay data that confirms racial profiling of African American and Latino drivers.

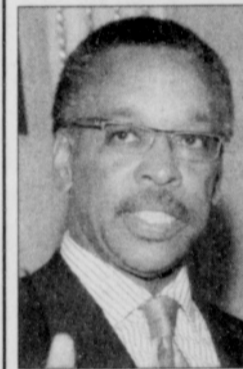
Attorney General Alberto Gonzales should investigate and intervene in this case. Here is a public official who attempted to shed light on important statistics that support earlier NAACP findings which show black and Latino drivers are searched by law enforcement nearly four times as often as white drivers.

forcement agencies that continue to use racial profiling accountable.

This legislation is needed to stop this insidious practice and to help begin to restore the confidence of communities of color in law enforcement.

The April study by the Justice Department showed that white, black and Latino drivers were stopped at about the same rate, nearly nine percent. What happened once they were stopped was dramatically different depending on race and ethnicity.

Police searched black drivers or their vehicles 10.2 per-



Here is a public official who attempted to shed light on important statistics that support earlier NAACP findings. —Bruce S. Gordon

The Justice Department study was ordered by Congress, but its findings were buried. According to the New York Times, Lawrence A. Greenfield, former director of the Bureau of Justice Statistics, was demoted after he refused to delete data that showed racial profiling in traffic stops. The statistics were from 80,000 interviews conducted in 2002.

The NAACP is calling on Congress to pass the End Racial Profiling Act of 2005 to be introduced by Rep. John Conyers Jr., D-Mich. and Senators Russell D. Feingold, D-Wisc.; Arlen Specter, R-Penn.; Hillary Clinton, D-N.Y. and Jon Corzine, D-N.J.

The Act would prohibit racial profiling; provide funding for the retraining of police officers and hold law en-

forcement agencies that continue to use racial profiling accountable. This legislation is needed to stop this insidious practice and to help begin to restore the confidence of communities of color in law enforcement.

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Bruce S. Gordon is the president and chief executive officer of the NAACP.

American Dream Turning to Fantasy

High prices put houses out of reach for many

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

A new report by the Center for Housing Policy finds most Americans don't make enough money to achieve the American dream of owning their own home.

In the past 18 months, the median home price rose 20-percent to \$225,000. However, during that same period, salaries for some of our most important professions stayed the same or rose only slightly, falling short of the \$71,000 annual income needed to qualify to purchase a \$225,000 home; this number is based on a down payment of 10 percent.

At an early age, most Americans are taught that hard work will eventually pay off in the form of a secure career, stable income and an all around comfortable life style. There is a huge gap between this forced dream and the reality of living in a society that is pricing out many of its workers.

Affordable housing is key to the strength of America's communities. Where there is none, local governments fight to manage overcrowding, employers struggle to recruit and retain personnel, low-to

mid-income workers put in longer hours, deal with long commutes or cut down on basic necessities so they can afford housing.

According to the Center for Economic and Policy Research, even those that live in what is considered a moderately priced community pay a disproportionate portion of their income for housing, more than the recommended 30-percent.

homeownership over the last several decades. This growth in homeownership has proven beneficial for millions of Americans, and provides a way to secure quality housing and a method to accumulate wealth for retirement and beyond.

A few years ago, President Bush committed his Administration to ensuring no American is left out in the cold when it comes to home

Foundations can play a role by funding housing developments specifically created for the low- to moderate-income worker and by researching the effects these developments have on the community at large. With this data, legislators can identify best practices and create even more housing options.

Creativity and a commitment to the working class are necessary to



Creativity and a commitment to the working class are necessary to close the gap between the American dream and the reality of flat-lining salaries and skyrocketing home prices.

One goal of public policy has long been to increase the national rate of homeownership. Any legislator worth their salt knows that a resident that owns their home has a vested interest in the community. As such, policies such as tax-deductible mortgage interest and the creation of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, organizations that provide alternative mortgage options for buyers, have expanded

ownership. If he and the presidents that follow him are serious about making sure the American dream is more than just a fantasy special steps must be taken to slow the growth of new home prices in low- and mid-income neighborhoods across the country.

Additionally, the federal government must work with state and local governments to create affordable, mixed income neighborhoods.

close the gap between the American dream and the reality of flat-lining salaries and skyrocketing home prices. Until home ownership is a real possibility for all citizens, America is offering no more than a pipe dream.

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

System Rigged Against Democracy

BY MARC H. MORIAL

Two recent developments on the impact of incarceration in America dramatized the steady, if still far too slow, turning of the wheel away from this country's foolish addiction to prisons.

In Iowa, Gov. Tom Vilsack issued executive order to restore voting rights to all Iowans who've been convicted of a felony and have completed their sentences.

"When you've paid your debt to society, you need to be re-connected and re-engaged to society," the governor said.

Earlier this year, Iowa's Great Plains neighbor, Nebraska, repealed its law imposing a lifetime voting ban on ex-felons, replacing it with a two-year waiting period after release.

The states' actions exemplify the revamping of these laws throughout the country which, by depriving ex-felons of their right to vote after they've served their sentences violates two fundamental notions of American society: the ideas that the right to vote belongs to all law-abiding citizens, and that once persons convicted of crime have served their sentences, they've paid their

debts to society.

Given the hugely disproportionate number of incarcerated African- and Latino-Americans, there is not surprisingly a stunning and worrisome racial element to the felony disenfranchisement issue.

Nationally, of the 4.7 million people ineligible to vote because of felony convictions, 1.4 million are black men. In Iowa, where blacks constitute just two percent of the total population, blacks make up 19 percent of ex-felons denied the right to vote. Similar disparities can be found in most states.

The second incarceration-related development is equally important. A study of ex-offenders' job prospects in New York City found that white men with prison records got far more job offers than black men with prison records-and more even than black men who'd never been arrested.

Both New York City's corrections commissioner and the chairwoman of its Commission on Human Rights labeled the report a call for action and pledged to explore ways to eliminate the racial opportunity

gap for ex-offenders.

These two developments underscore the importance of the National Urban League's plan to launch a national commission examining the successes and challenges facing black boys and men. The five-year effort, to begin next year, will recommend solutions to problems afflicting black males in numerous fields.

Certainly, a primary area of concentration will be black males' negative involvement with the criminal justice system (while not ignoring the fact that the negative involvement of women, particularly black women, has become increasingly serious as well) and the extraordinary burden that imposes on African-American families and communities.

That burden and the growing movement to reform felony-disenfranchisement laws is dramatic evidence that if we ignore the need to equip ex-offenders with two fundamental rights of a democracy-the vote and a job- it's at their peril and ours.

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

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