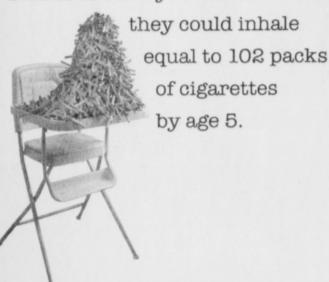
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# **OPINION**

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# Dirty Little Secret in History

#### Washington's slave tunnel illustrates important point

BY MARC H. MORIAL

Just steps away from the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall in Philadelphia, archaeologists recently unearthed remains of a secret pas-

Washington's slaves used to enter and exit from his presidential home in the late 1790s, when the city served as the nation's capital.

Not far from where the Declaration of Independence was signed, there stands evidence of the hypocrisy that shrouded the burgeoning nation at its birth.

"As you enter the heaven of liberty, you literally have to cross the hell of slavery," observed Michael Coard, leader of a group of Philadelphians working to have the slave tunnel recognized at the site, to the Associated Press. "That's the contrast. That's the contradiction. That's the hypocrisy. But that's also the truth.'

in Virginia.

-- over 300 slaves he had acquired emancipate them. This, however, play archaeological findings. But

through inheritance, marriage house, where there was a law

time. His personal servant, how- artifacts. ever, was freed following his death in 1799.

But as his president, it was different story. Washington conand transaction over the cealed his personal misgivings cover up evidence of a dirty little course of his life. When he over slavery from the public, secret in American history. became president, he had a which some historians consider a rotating cast of eight slaves tragic missed opportunity while ted to independence and freeliving in his Philadelphia others contend it averted the upset of a very delicate balance on the books making slaves in the fledgling republic over the on us, our children or our free after six months of resi- contentious issue. He signed into children's grandchildren. sageway that President George dence. Hence, the rotating cast, law the Fugitive Slave Act, which which he reportedly aimed to keep mandated the capture and release tions of African Americans, the secret from his staff and the public. of fugitive slaves, even in states fledgling nation would have re-

didn't occur until after his wife now the parties involved seem to died -- not during his own life- be serious about incorporating the

> As Mr. Coard noted to the AP: Nobody is saying, 'No, it shouldn't be done.' " This bodes well that they won't attempt to

The irony of a nation commitdom using slave labor to achieve those goals should never be lost

After all, without the contribu-

The irony of a nation committed to independence and freedom using slave labor to achieve those goals should never be lost on us, our children or our children's grandchildren.

Washington started out life as where slavery was outlawed. a typical slave holder. But in the The father of our country repre- 1770s, he began to soften his tunnel under his home has sented a contradiction in terms. On stance and express reservations one hand, Washington played an privately. The sign-up of hunimportant role in securing our dreds of free blacks to join his to just filling the passageway in. It America's independence from En- revolutionary army made him has caught National Park Service actly why officials in Philadelgland. On the other hand, he served view slavery in a harsher light at and city officials by complete suras king of his Mount Vernon estate least on a personal level. He prise, causing an indefinite poststopped selling slaves against ponement of the exhibit, originally Like King George III whose rule their will to prevent breaking up he fought to rid America of, Wash- families, and he was the only ington had his own set of subjects slave-owning founding father to the exhibit wasn't expected to dis-

The recent discovery of the slave Britain. prompted calls to incorporate the gratitude to the thousands of ruins into a new exhibit as opposed scheduled to open in 2009.

Before the tunnel was unveiled,

mained a fledgling colony of Great

Our nation owes a huge debt of slaves brought over here against their will from Africa. That is exphia should seek to incorporate these fascinating artifacts into their exhibit of the Washington presidential home.

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



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Part 14. Scoliosis Exam: The most important test your kids will take all year.

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## **Empowering Our Poorest Citizens**

#### Support antipoverty plan

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS Well over 30 million Americans live in pov-

Some are employed, but their jobs don't pay a living wage. They worry each month how they'll pay for basic necessities, like food and shelter. A

trip to a doctor is considered a of a \$90 billion plan designed to cut luxury. Others live in extreme pov- American poverty in half in the next erty. They have no income and often wonder where their next meals will come from.

In a country as rich in resources as the United States, there shouldn't be poverty of any kind. All of our citizens have a right to a decent

and access to healthcare are the million other low-income workers.

Realizing America's poor were growing in numbers and that there

was no comprehensive national plan to stop it, the Center for American brought together economists and other business and government leaders help to the poorest families. to discuss poverty in America. These discus-

sions led to the creation 10 years. It's an ambitious project, but one worth taking on. The coun-

try must get behind it. According to federal guidelines, a family of four is considered poor if the family's yearly income is below \$19,971. One in eight Ameri-

housing, an adequate food supply 5 million poor workers and nearly 10

Expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit is another key step. The EITC, a tax credit for working low-income families provides a tax refund, helping to boost the amount of money a Progress last year family brings home. The Child Tax Credit provides a tax credit of up to \$1,000 per child, but provides no

> The task force proposes tripling the EITC for childless workers and expanding help to larger working families. It also proposes making the Child Tax Credit available to all low-and moderate-income families. Doing so would move as many as 5 million people out of poverty.

The group also recommends guaranteeing child care assistance to low-income families and promoting early education for children. quality of life, where clean, safe cans currently lives in poverty. In Child care expansion would raise

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### In a country as rich in resources as the United States, there shouldn't be poverty of any kind.

lion and the gap between the haves and the have not has widened con-

highs. Consider: the richest one percent of Americans possess the largest share of the nation's income, while the poorest 20 percent of Americans possess only 3.4 percent of the nation's income.

It doesn't have to be this way. The plan to reduce poverty outlines concrete steps that this country can take now to uplift and empower our poorest citizens in the near future.

According to the task force that has proposed the plan, raising the minimum wage, which the country has done, is a critical step in helping to alleviate poverty in America. Doing so will eventually help nearly

the last six years the number of poor employment among low-income Americans has grown by five mil-parents and help nearly 3 million parents and children lift themselves out of poverty.

These steps seem simple Inequality has reached record enough, especially since they could potentially help alleviate poverty for millions of Americans, giving them the opportunity to reach their full potential, while also minimizing the burdens tax payers must bear to support those who are unable to support themselves. The United States government must find the funds - perhaps by calling an end to the war in Iraq - to fully fund these initiatives. Doing so would demonstrate that this country is willing to invest in all of its citizens.

> Judge Greg Mathis is a national vice president of Rainbow PUSH and a national board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.