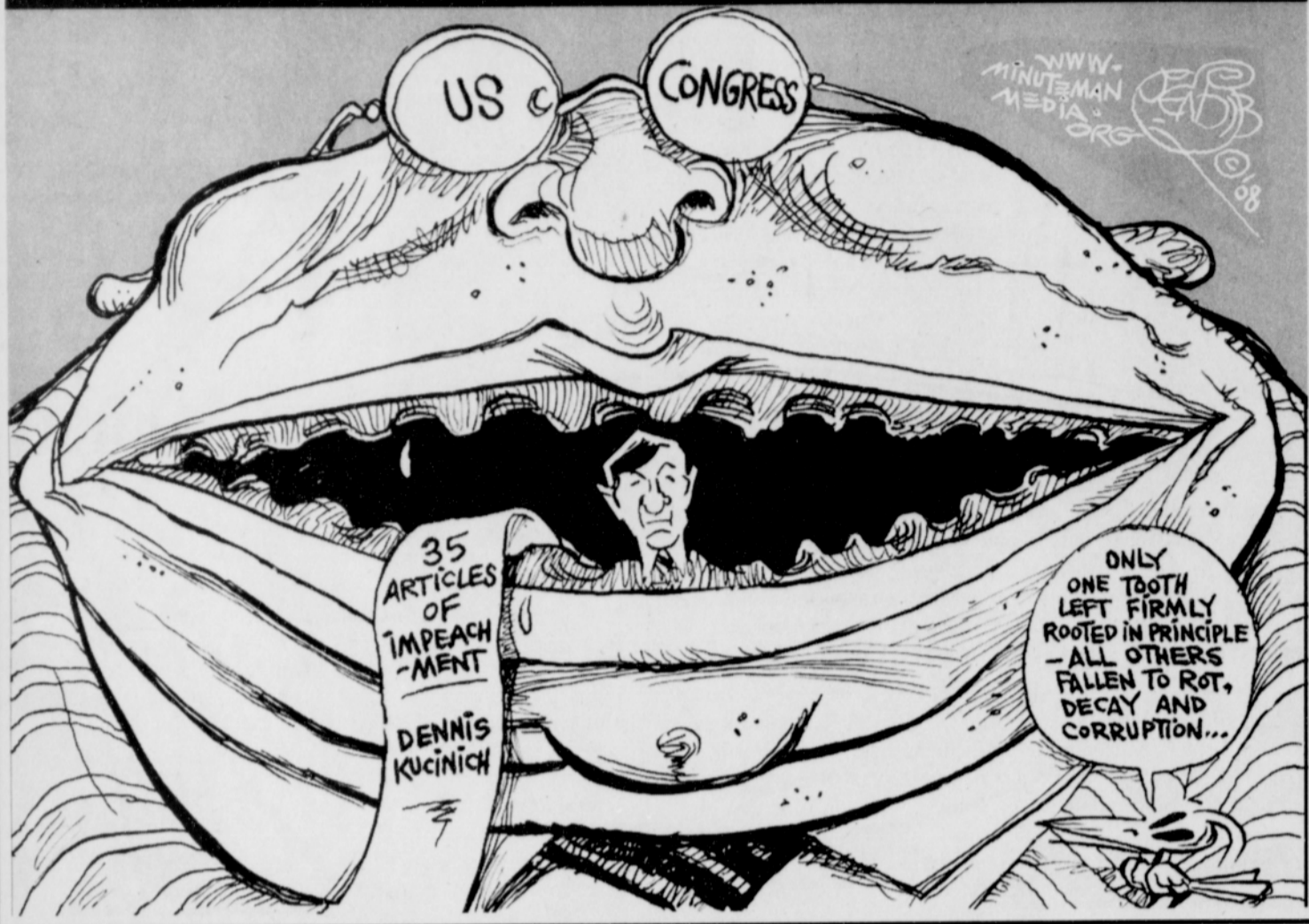


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# OPINION

## MISSING IN ACTION...



## Black Women Can't Remain Invisible

### Americans must treasure female achievement

BY MARC MORIAL

This year's State of Black America report shines a much-needed spotlight on the struggles and triumphs of black women.

Too often invisible in mainstream society or depicted by demeaning stereotypes in "popular" culture, African-American women are at once the most oppressed and most resilient group in America. Millions of them work harder, earn less and shoulder the burdens of breadwinner and caregiver in their families.

At the same time, many step up and stand out as leaders in their churches, schools, businesses and local communities. Lest we forget, it was Harriet Tubman who led us out of slavery and Rosa Parks who mortally wounded Jim Crow.

Dorothy Height has spent most of her 96 years on this earth standing on the front lines of freedom, not only for black women, but for us all.

Currently the Chair and President Emerita of the National Council of Negro Women, Height has been committed to equality and justice for all since 1933. As a young woman, she became a civil rights worker with the United Christian Youth Movement of North America.

Dorothy Height has been active in every stage of the modern civil rights and women's rights struggles. She has taken her mes-

sage of human rights and women's empowerment to places like India, Mexico and Africa. In 1947 she was elected National President of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority and for a decade, led the organization into a new era of activism.

She was one of a few women who stood with men like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Whitney M. Young, Jr. at the height of the civil rights movement and she was on the platform when Dr. King delivered his historic "I Have a Dream" speech. For her many outstanding achievements, Dorothy Height has been honored by presidents and peers. She is the recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the NAACP Springarn Medal and the Congressional Gold Medal, just to name a few.

At the tender age of 96, Dorothy Height is still a powerful voice for black women. As she writes in the foreword to the State of Black America 2008, "Who better than us understand and empathize with the very real challenges that our brothers, fathers, husbands and sons face...and who better than us can understand the very real boundaries that all women face in navigating a cultural dynamic that still assigns roles and oftentimes limitations based on gender...With no apologies, the time is now to finally focus on us."

Dorothy Height is an American treasure and I am proud to call her my friend.

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



## End Weight Discrimination Now

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

### Body-type bias dangerously on the rise

Nearly two thirds of Americans are overweight or obese. You wouldn't know this, however, by skimming through the pages of a fashion magazine or watching television on any given night.

Popular culture promotes a thin, sometimes dangerously so, body image that most Americans do not live up to. The "thin is in" mentality has made its way into the nation's workplaces and overweight individuals are experiencing discrimination now more than ever before.

Discrimination of any kind is unjust and intolerable. But weight discrimination in a nation that super sizes and automates everything is

just plain foolish and needs to end. Two recent studies report discrimination based on body size has increased more than 60 percent in the last ten years and has become as nearly as common as prejudice based on race or gender. The studies report that the dis-

crimination experienced is varied: Some overweight people say they are made to feel ashamed in healthcare settings or were fired or not promoted because of their weight. In their personal lives, they reported that they are subjected to insults and harassment from strangers and loved ones. For African Americans, this new inequity presents another obstacle

*America has far too many excluded classes; we do not need to create another one.*

to overcome, since 60 percent of our men and 78 percent of our women are overweight. Whether in a professional or social setting, blacks not only have to deal with the assumptions people make based on their race, but also because of their weight. Like other forms of discrimina-

tion, this type of bias is destructive. It may negatively affect an individual's self-esteem, causing them to eat more, do less and, possibly, gain weight. To be fair, being overweight is unhealthy and can lead to a host of health problems, including diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease. That aside, a person's physical size should have no bearing on whether or not they

get a job or a promotion and should not subject them to taunts and rude stares.

Currently, there is no federal law that protects overweight people from workplace discrimination. Additionally, healthcare providers should be held accountable for their rude treatment of heavier patients; sensitivity trainings are one way to address such behavior. The government should increase access to healthcare so the overweight can receive solid advice on diet and exercise plans; many of this country's obese people are poor.

Just like the battle against race and gender bias, the fight against weight discrimination cannot be won overnight. And legislation is only a tiny piece of the pie. As individuals, we have to take a look at our behavior. America has far too many excluded classes; we do not need to create another one.

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

## Voting Restrictions

### Laws don't target cheaters

BY TANYA CLAY HOUSE

On the heels of the Supreme Court's recent decision upholding Indiana's restrictive voter ID law, lawmakers in three states—Missouri, Kansas and Oklahoma—have wisely rejected similar voter ID legislation. But don't think this is the last word.

Let's be clear. This is not about election reform. This is a partisan fight about access to the ballot box—who gets in, and who does not—and the voting rights of hundreds of thousands of Americans are at stake.

On the surface, a voter ID law doesn't sound like a big deal to those of us who have a driver's license or a passport. Look deeper, and it's clear that voter ID laws pose a significant barrier to the ballot box for all kinds of people—and that discouraging those people from voting gives a clear partisan advantage to Republicans.

Who are the people who might find it difficult to comply with voter ID laws? Folks who don't drive or travel abroad, or who have lost their birth certificates. Senior citizens who haven't had a current driver's license in years, or disabled voters. Victims of natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina, who lose all their personal papers. Students who drive in one state, but vote in another. Low-income workers who can't afford the costs of

replacing lost documents.

What do all these people have in common? Senior citizens, the disabled, students and low-income workers all tend to vote for Democrats. And that fact makes voter ID legislation very attractive to Republican officeholders in state after state—just look at who is introducing the bills.

Advocates of voter ID bills would have you believe that they're fighting fraud. Nonsense. There is no evidence of widespread voter fraud in this country.

In fact, even with the record-shattering voter turnout in the presidential primaries, all across the nation this year, supporters of voter ID cannot point to any significant instances of voter impersonation fraud at the polls.

Dead people are not voting. Undocumented immigrants are not voting. But innocent, eligible voters are being caught up in the mess. During the primary election in Indiana this year, 12 nuns were turned away from the polls because they didn't have photo ID. Something tells me they weren't trying to pull a fast one.

Simply put, voter ID legislation is partisan politics at its worst—piling up barriers for people who have every right to vote, in order to gain political advantage. It's wrong.

We should be passing laws that make it easier for citizens to vote, not harder.

Tanya Clay House is the People For the American Way director of public policy.

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