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Civil Rights Groups Call for Mortgage Industry Reform, End to Predatory Lending

Last month, the nation’s largest civil rights organizations, along with several community-based and consumer advocacy groups, came together for the “*Save Our Homes: Restructure Loans, Not Repossess Homes*” rally held in New York’s Financial District (Wall Street). The alliance offered strategies to end the mortgage crisis as well as predatory, discriminatory practices that plague the lending industry and have resulted in a record number of home foreclosures.

The broad coalition called for reforming current mortgage lending practices and a moratorium on active foreclosures. The NAACP and its partners demanded that the mortgage



NAACP Interim President/CEO Dennis C. Hayes speaks at the “Save Our Homes” rally on Wall Street in December 2007.

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lending industry—all of whom have ties to Wall Street’s investment firms—and policy makers at all levels act now.

“The sub-prime loan is firmly implicated in the severity of the mortgage crisis,” said Interim NAACP President & CEO Dennis Courtland Hayes. “Data shows us that African Americans disproportionately hold more than half of these higher priced loans that stymie families’ attempts at keeping good credit, retaining their homes and amassing wealth. The home loans that have been offered to African Americans were built on

financial quick sand and we are demanding that a solid foundation be laid to replace the damage that has been done and reduce the risk that stands to decimate whole communities.”

The coalition supports a seven point Homebuyer’s Bill of Rights developed by the National Urban League that includes saving for homeownership, affordable housing opportunities, fairness in lending, fairness in case of loan default and aggressive enforcement of fair housing laws. The complete details of the Homebuyer’s Bill

See Save Our Homes—p. 2

The NAACP Advocate

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Housing

FDIC Head, Diverse Groups Tackle Housing Affordability

As Congress and federal financial regulators pursue measures to prevent a recurrence of the problems besetting the secondary mortgage market, steps also need to be taken to ensure that homeownership opportunities remain for subprime borrowers, according to Sheila Bair, chairman of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.

“Homeownership should be a vehicle for accumulating wealth, not stripping it,” Bair said in an address before the 2007 Housing Affordability Symposium. Co-hosted by NAHB, the NAACP and the National Education Association, the symposium took place on the campus of the George Washington University in Washington, D.C. October 5-6, 2007.

“Housing affordability is one of America’s greatest social issues,” Bair said, and a specific goal of her agency is “keeping people in homes they can afford.” Making that job difficult in the current housing downturn are hybrid adjustable-rate loans that are readjusting at significantly higher interest rates after the second or third year of the loan.

Many subprime borrowers did not

understand what their mortgages would cost once they were reset, she said, and lending standards were lacking.

Offering opening remarks at the symposium, NAACP interim president and CEO, Dennis C. Hayes, noted that “the NAACP is very much interested in fostering policies and partnering with like-minded organizations and companies to advocate for policies that make the American dream possible – more than just a dream, but something very reachable.”

“It’s about coming together and getting government to understand what people want,” Hayes said. “We think we can encourage smart people to do the right thing for America, to make sure that there is housing that is accessible and available to all people regardless of income and regardless of race, and in the end that’s going to make America stronger.”

The goal of the symposium was to develop a broad national coalition that understands and voices support for housing issues at the local level, and to compile a toolbox of techniques and programs to help a local coalition improve housing affordability.

Save Our Homes continued from p. 1

of Rights can be found online at:
www.naacp.org, www.nul.org or
www.rainbowpush.org.

In July the NAACP filed suit in federal court against 14 of the country’s largest lenders, alleging systematic, institutionalized racism in sub-prime home mortgage lending. This is the first known lawsuit that challenges such lending practices on a broad scale. Those proceedings

continue.

The NAACP, National Urban League, RainbowPUSH and its partners vow to keep up the fight for economic equality on all fronts, including in court and in Congress. The coalition encourages Congress to pass a comprehensive bill regulating the sub-prime loan industry to eradicate the current patchwork of 50 state laws.

NAACP Hosts Second Civil Rights School at Howard University

The NAACP hosted “Artists and Activists” — *Birth of a Nation* and the Harlem Renaissance to *The Cosby Show* and *Hot Ghetto Mess*, a town hall meeting, at Howard University in Washington, D.C. in November. The town hall meeting was part of the NAACP’s second Civil Rights School (CRS) being held to support and launch the NAACP centennial celebration. A special free screening of the movie adaptation of “A Raisin in the Sun” starring Sean Combs, Phylicia Rashad, Audra McDonald, Sanaa Lathan and John Stamos was also a part of the event.

“The town hall meeting was a unique opportunity for attendees to spend an evening examining the cultural impact of entertainment and the arts on our world,” said NAACP National Board of Directors Chairman Julian Bond, who was in attendance as a panelist. Other panelists included rap mogul Master P, former NAACP General Counsel Judge Nathaniel Jones and Professor Emeritus Thomas Cripps.

The CRS was a two-day event bringing together renowned historians, scholars and social scientists to discuss the NAACP past, present and future. The Howard CRS session focused on the Roy Wilkins years and student movement period of the NAACP’s history. “As the NAACP prepares to celebrate its 100th anniversary, it is important that we look back and celebrate how far we’ve come yet not lose sight of where we need to go,” Bond added.

The NAACP Civil Rights Schools

are part of a Starbucks multi-year commitment to collaborate with the NAACP on community initiatives. “Starbucks alliance with the NAACP to support the Civil Rights Schools reflects both our organizations’ on-going commitment to social and economic equality,” said Jim Donald, Starbucks president and chief executive officer. “We are pleased to work with the NAACP on bringing its rich and important history to life for

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university students and communities around the country.”

The NAACP Civil Rights Schools will insure the intellectual integrity of the NAACP centennial media projects. The projects include a documentary and a major mini-series, which will be broadcast in 2009 as part of the NAACP’s centennial celebration. The NAACP will hold the remaining civil rights schools at Harvard University and New York University. Additional supporters of the NAACP Civil Rights Schools include the Game Show Network,

ABC, CBS and FOX.

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University of VA Offers Civil Rights South Bus Tour

University of Virginia history professor and civil rights icon Julian Bond will lead the second annual “Civil Rights South” tour through Georgia and Alabama March 1-7, 2008. The tour will begin and end in Atlanta, the birthplace of Martin Luther King Jr. From there, the tour will visit historic landmarks like the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church in Montgomery, Ala., museums such as the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, and organizations including the Southern Poverty Law Center that continue today to carry on the work of the Civil Rights Movement.

“The route has the advantage of following the movement’s development chronologically,” said Bond,

current chairman of the NAACP and co-founder in 1960 of the influential Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The route runs from Atlanta to Tuskegee, Ala., where the voting rights movement began in the early 1950s; to Montgomery, Ala., where Rosa Parks led the watershed bus boycott (1955-56); to Selma, Ala., where civil rights activists in 1963 began an influential effort to register black voters; and on to Birmingham, the site of the historic 1963 Children’s March and home to the Civil Rights Museum.

Registration for the seven-day Travel & Learn program, offered by the University of Virginia’s School of Continuing and Professional Studies, is

open to anyone. Prices range between \$1995 and \$2845 per person, depending on accommodation choices, and include all site fees, program materials, and all meals except one dinner and lunch. (Price doesn’t include airfare to Atlanta, where the tour begins and ends.) Participants will be lodged at centrally located hotels in Atlanta, Montgomery and Birmingham. Registration will remain open until the trip is filled.

To register or learn more about the tour visit www.virginia.edu/travelandlearn/2008_civilrights.html or contact the School of Continuing and Professional Studies at (434) 982-5252.

NAACP Declares ‘State of Emergency’

The increase in reports of violence and overly aggressive prosecution against African American youth by law enforcement officials symbolized by the boot camp beating death of Martin Lee Anderson, the assault of Shelwanda Riley by a police officer and countless other recent dehumanizing attacks led the NAACP to declare a ‘State of Emergency.’

“The NAACP denounces overly aggressive handling of black youth by law enforcement entities, a blatant disregard toward investigating hate crimes and racially discriminatory utilization of prosecutorial discretion,” said Interim NAACP President & CEO Dennis Courtland Hayes. “We demand that the American criminal justice system live up to its Constitutional obligations to serve and protect all Americans with dignity and fairness irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, religious faith and other differences. Violence and intimidation of our young people is not acceptable, is against the law and must end now.”

National reports and statistical data also clearly illustrate the criminal justice system’s disparate treatment of

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African American and other racial and ethnic minority young people.

According to a report on racial disparities in the juvenile system commissioned by the Building Blocks for Youth initiative and prepared by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, although minority youth are

one-third of the adolescent population in the U.S., minority youth comprise two-thirds of the more than 100,000 young people confined in local detention and state correctional systems.

When white youth and minority youth were charged with the same offenses, African-American youth with no prior admissions were six times more likely to be incarcerated than white youth with the same background. Latino youth were three times more likely than white youth to be incarcerated.

“The problem of racially disparate treatment in our criminal justice system against must be address at every level of governance, from our towns, counties and hamlets to our major metropolitan cities,” said NAACP Washington Bureau Director Hilary Shelton.

The NAACP has called for hearings not only in Congress but also in every community around the nation in order to clearly understand the scope of this problem, and most importantly, craft viable solutions.

UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA
TRAVEL & LEARN *Programs for Adults*

CIVIL RIGHTS SOUTH: IN THE FOOTSTEPS *of the* MOVEMENT

With Julian Bond

U.Va. Professor of History and NAACP Chairman
March 1-7, 2008 • Georgia and Alabama



March on Washington for
Jobs and Freedom,
August 28, 1963,
Washington, DC



Julian Bond at the
Southern Poverty
Law Center in
Montgomery,
Alabama

Join Julian Bond's bus route through civil rights history. Live, first hand, the struggle for Civil Rights in America by visiting sites and hearing directly from the people - famous and everyday people - whose courage was demonstrated daily as we travel in their footsteps through the American South.

For information, contact the U.Va. School of Continuing and Professional Studies.

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U.S. Sentencing Commission Follows NAACP Recommendation on Crack Cocaine Sentencing

On December 11, 2007, the United States Sentencing Commission (USSC) issued a ruling that people convicted of crack cocaine possession prior to November 1 of this year could petition to have their sentences reduced. This is in line with the recommendation made by Washington Bureau Director Hilary Shelton in testimony before the USSC just a month earlier.

Due to actions taken by the U.S. Sentencing Commission (USSC) last May, as of November 1, 2007, the mandatory minimum penalties for crack cocaine conviction have been lowered, which may impact as many as 3,500 federal defendants a year. On average, this change will reduce the penalty on defendants' sentences by 15 months. The USSC decision in December means that the decision will be applied retroactively to those who were sentenced prior to November 1.

As a result of federal law passed in 1986, there is a huge (100 to 1) disparity between the penalty for possession of crack cocaine and powder cocaine. Specifically, a person has to possess *500 grams* of powder cocaine before they are subject to the same mandatory prison sentence (5 years) as an individual who is convicted of possessing just *5 grams* of crack cocaine (despite the fact that pharmacologically, these two drugs are identical). One of the effects of the 1986 law is that small-scale crack cocaine users are punished much more severely than powder cocaine users and their suppliers.

Everyone seems to agree that crack cocaine use is higher among Caucasians than any other group: most authorities estimate that more than 66% of those who use crack cocaine

are white. Yet in 2006, 82% of those sentenced under federal crack cocaine laws were African American. When you add in Hispanics, the percentage climbs to above 96%. Since 1986 the 100 to 1 ratio has had a devastating and disproportionate impact on the African American and Hispanic communities.

While the USSC decision does not impact the 100-to-1 crack / powder cocaine sentencing disparity, it does ensure that people convicted of crack cocaine possession under federal law are not sentenced even more harshly. It is also, in the eyes of the NAACP, a positive step forward. The NAACP also supports legislation that has been introduced in both the House and the Senate to eliminate the crack / powder disparity. The NAACP also celebrated the decision by the United States Supreme Court the day before the USSC announcement that federal judges are not bound by federal guidelines for those who sell crack rather than powder cocaine. In their opinion the Justices stated that the federal guidelines, which had been considered mandatory, were advisory. The NAACP will continue to advocate for a change in the underlying 100-1 sentencing disparity.

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Change Starts with Me! The Move to Empower African Americans Financially

Did you know the African American community has reached a point of crisis as it relates to financial security? Although African Americans comprise 13% of the nation's population, they hold only 1.2% of the nation's wealth. In recent decades, Black income has been 55-70% of White income; Black wealth is less than 20% of White wealth. Today, White Americans have a median net worth of \$88,651, while African Americans have a median net worth of only \$5,998; nearly one-third of African Americans have a zero or negative net worth.

The NAACP recognizes that the disparity in wealth among races is a result of several factors: including savings, financial literacy, credit management, homeownership, entre-

preneurship and retirement savings. In 2006, the nationwide savings rate was *negative 1%*. This number is extremely unsettling and must be addressed in the African American community. In terms of basic financial literacy, 46% of African Americans are considered "unbanked," meaning they lack a transactional bank account.

Through the NAACP Financial Empowerment Initiative, the association remains committed to promoting community wealth building by providing education that will help to change the way people of color understand their personal finances. To be empowered financially requires a lifestyle change that will produce strong credit records, increased savings and lifetime financial planning.

No matter what your current

financial situation is, you can improve it. The first steps to improving your personal finances is to (1) set a savings goal, (2) open a savings account, (3) make monthly deposits and (4) take advantage of your workplace retirement plan. As simple as those steps may sound, it takes a real commitment to the process to experience the success it brings. Many people believe that they cannot afford to save and build wealth. Yet research shows that there are "savers" and "spenders" in all income classes. While those with modest incomes cannot save as much as the affluent, almost all have the ability to build wealth over time.

Start today, your future depends on it—SAVE!

Economic Reciprocity as a Means of Giving Back

When a group of investors pool their resources to acquire a corporation, it's called a leveraged buyout. When a community with over \$700 billion in spending power pools its consumer clout to demand better jobs and services from the companies it does business with, it will be called an economic force to be reckoned with.¹

Simply put, economic reciprocity is a form of giving back.

As the NAACP prepares for its 2008 Economic Reciprocity Initiative (ERI), we are mindful that African Americans spend billions of dollars a year buying goods and services. Unfortunately, our hard-earned dollars pass through our communities instead of growing our communities. To that end, the annual ERI survey, which has been in place for over ten years, measures corporate America's financial relationship with the African American community by asking

companies questions ask about their diversity practices and the opportunities created for African Americans.

How responsive have corporations been to our communities? Have there been opportunities for African Americans to advance to senior levels within those corporations? Have these corporations tried to do business with black businesses? Do these corporations view the African-American community as a valuable market?

In order for the power of reciprocity to really be effective we must all make informed choices about where we spend our dollars. We must look for fairness in the marketplace just as we do in other areas of our lives. As the NAACP continues to educate consumers on the value of their dollar, it is our hope that consumers will make more prudent spending decisions, ultimately holding businesses accountable for their practices, good or bad.

This year the association launched a campaign against Target Corporation for its failure to respond to the ERI survey for three consecutive years. We must demand economic diversity and transparency from corporate giants like Target. To date, we have thousands of signatures from consumers who, like us, want Target to clarify its position on economic opportunity for African Americans by completing the survey.

For more information about the ERI or to sign the Target petition log onto the NAACP web page at <http://www.naacp.org>.

Make Informed Choices!

¹ Kweisi Mfume, "Investing in Our Own Economic Empowerment," *Crisis Magazine* (April/May 1998).

NAACP Works to Stop the Genocide in Darfur

Since the conflict in Darfur began in 2003, as many as 400,000 Darfuris have been killed and up to 2.5 million Darfuris have been forced to leave their homes. These individuals now live in camps for internally displaced persons throughout Darfur, or in refugee camps in neighboring Chad and the Central African Republic. In fact, the situation is currently so dire that there is no more room for new arrivals in most camps.

Time is running out for the people of Darfur. After four years of genocidal violence, rape, starvation, pillaging and other atrocities, millions of innocent Darfuri men, women, and children have been killed or are struggling to survive. These atrocities must be stopped and the NAACP is committed to help end the genocide. To this aim, the NAACP Board of Directors passed two resolutions on Darfur. The first condemns the atrocities inflicted on the people of Darfur and the second, supports divestment of public pension funds and other investments of companies doing business in Sudan. These resolutions are important statements regarding the organizations commitment to human rights and pave the way for NAACP action.

The NAACP also urged all Members of Congress to pass the Sudan Accountability and Divestment Act, S.2271. This legislation would protect the right of states to divest from companies that help fund the Sudanese government's actions in Darfur, would prohibit U.S. government contracts with such companies, and would allow states to ban contracts with them. Ending support for regimes like the Sudanese government is not a new approach for the NAACP. Divestment was a major contributor to bringing down the racist apartheid regime in South Africa in the 1980's.

As part of our advocacy strategy,

the NAACP engaged in the following:

- Distributed a number of *Action Alert* and *Issue Updates* regarding Darfur and S.2271 via the NAACP National website and an email Action Alert list of approximately 130,000 activists;
- Started a successful letter writing campaign at the NAACP 98th Annual National Convention in Detroit, Michigan really helped make a difference. Hundreds of letters were signed, each address to the signatory's respective the Members of Congress, urging them to pass this vital piece of legislation;
- Distributed Save Darfur action packets were distributed to NAACP Units across the nation. These action packets were distributed at State Conference Conventions that would be pivotal to the passage of the legislation such as Alabama, Illinois, Texas, Georgia, Indiana, New York and Washington State;
- The NAACP worked in coalition with Save Darfur Coalition's *Voices from Darfur* project to bring Darfuri speakers to the Alabama, Illinois and Texas NAACP State Conference conventions in October, 2007 to show first hand accounts of the atrocities;
- The NAACP worked with the Save Darfur Coalition's *Dream for Darfur* project to help organize the Olympic Torch Run culmination event on December 10, 2007 in Washington, DC. Hundreds of demonstrators turned out for the event and were inspired to action by the powerful words of speakers such as, Actress Mia Farrow,



Olympic Medalist Joey Cheek, Hilary O. Shelton, NAACP Washington Bureau Director, Darfuri Refugees, and others.

The NAACP's hard work to enact S.2271 has paid off, as the bill passed both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. At this writing, the legislation is on its way to President Bush for his signature. This critical legislation puts us one step forward to ending the genocide in Darfur. However, more needs to be done to stem the tide of violence in Darfur. Please contact the NAACP International Affairs Department in the Washington Bureau to find out how you can help.

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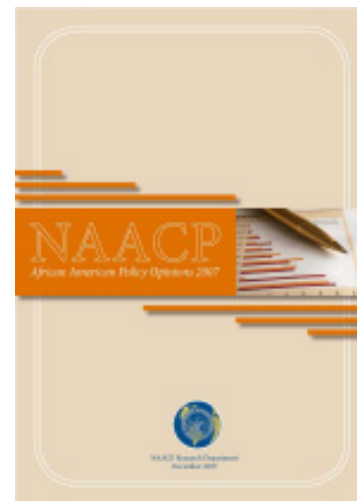
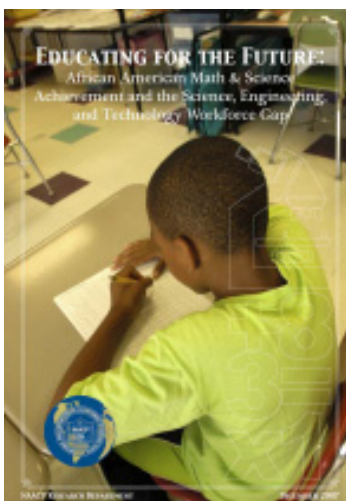
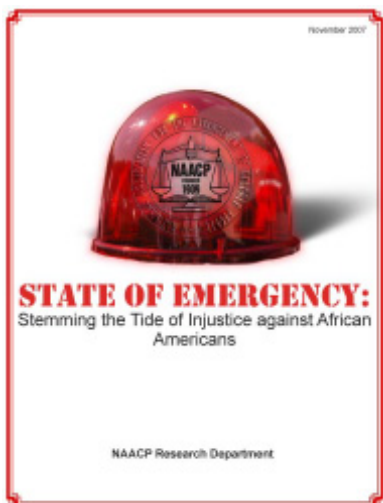
States Supreme Court the day before the USSC announcement that federal judges are not bound by federal guidelines for those who sell crack rather than powder cocaine. In their opinion the Justices stated that the federal guidelines, which had been considered mandatory, were advisory. The NAACP will continue to advocate for a change in the underlying 100-1 sentencing disparity.

The NAACP Research Department Has Released Three New Reports:

State of Emergency: Stemming the Tide of Injustice against African Americans – a report on recent police brutality, prosecutorial discretion, and noose hangings, which serves as an accompaniment to the State of Emergency campaign;

Educating for the Future: African American Math & Science Achievement and the Science, Engineering, and Technology Workforce Gap – a report on math and science achievement of African Americans students and their participation in the science, technology and engineering workforce;

African American Policy Opinions 2007 – a report detailing the results from the 2007 NAACP Policy Opinion Survey, which examined African American opinions in the areas of school vouchers, affirmative action, immigration, and police misconduct.



To download these reports or read online, visit <http://www.naacp.org/advocacy/research/index.htm>.

NAACP 39th Image Awards

Don't forget the Image Awards ballot deadline!

You can mail the ballots or save postage by voting online at www.naacpimageawards.net

All ballots must be postmarked by February 6, 2008.

Watch the results of your vote!

The NAACP 39th Image Awards airs Thursday, February 14, 2008 at 8:00pm LIVE on FOX

Dr. Benjamin L. Hooks Receives Presidential Medal of Freedom Award

The NAACP is proud of the latest accomplishment by one of its own. Rev. Dr. Benjamin Lawson Hooks was among eight who received the Medal of Freedom from President George W. Bush in November. The Presidential Medal of Freedom is the nation's highest civilian honor.

"This is a richly deserved honor," said National NAACP Chairman Julian Bond. "Benjamin Hooks has had a stellar career – civil rights advocate and leader, minister, businessman, public servant – there are few who are his equal."

The Presidential Medal of Freedom recognizes exceptional meritorious service. The medal was established by President Truman in 1945 to recognize notable service in war. In 1963, President John F. Kennedy reintroduced it as an honor for distinguished civilian service in peacetime.

"As a civil rights activist, public servant, and minister of the Gospel, Dr. Hooks has extended the hand of fellowship throughout his years," President Bush said in making the presentation. "It was not always an easy thing to do. Dr. Hooks was a calm yet forceful voice for fairness, opportunity, and personal responsibility.

He never tired or faltered in demanding that our nation live up to its founding ideals of liberty and equality."

Dr. Hooks served as executive director of the NAACP from 1977 to 1992 and throughout his career has been a vocal campaigner for civil rights in the United States. During his tenure the Memphis native is credited with implementing many NAACP programs that continue today. The NAACP ACT-SO (Academic, Cultural, Technological and Scientific Olympics) competitions, a major youth talent and skill initiative, and Women in the NAACP began under his administration.

In the late 1980s Dr. Hooks formed a relationship with Major League Baseball (MLB) that led to creation of a Sports Advisory Council and the expansion of employment opportunities for African Americans in MLB to include managers, coaches and positions in the executive suites of the franchises. He even threw the first pitch to open a World Series.



Former NAACP Executive Director and Presidential Medal of Freedom Award winner, Dr. Benjamin L. Hooks

Dr. Benjamin Hooks currently serves as an adjunct professor for the Political Science department of the University of Memphis. In 1996, the Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change was established at the University of Memphis. The institute works to advance understanding of the legacy of the American civil rights movement – and of

other movements for social justice – through teaching, research and community programs that emphasize social movements, race relations, strong communities, public education, effective public participation, and social and economic justice.

Dr. Hooks joins a growing list of NAACPers who are Presidential Medal of Freedom awardees. Long-time NAACP Executive Director Roy Wilkins, Montgomery bus boycott catalyst Rosa Parks and former NAACP Washington Bureau Director Clarence M. Mitchell, Jr. all hold the distinguished honor.

2008 NAACP Centennial Legacy Calendar

“Celebrating 99: Years People and Moments in the History of the NAACP”

As part of the second installment of a three-year Commemoration of the NAACP's upcoming Centennial, the NAACP is offering the Centennial Legacy Calendar. This edition of the calendar will highlight historical events in American history such as: the 1954 Brown v Board of Education Supreme Court Decision outlawing segregation in public education; the comprehensive 1964 Civil Rights Act signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson; 1965 Voting Rights Act, ensuring the right to vote for African American citizens, the tragic assassination in the summer of 1963 of NAACP Field Director Medgar W. Evers and in the fall, United States President John F. Kennedy; and the nomination of Thurgood Marshall, former NAACP Legal Counsel as Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court in 1967.

Quantities are limited so order your calendar today! Log on to www.naacp.org or contact Paula Brown-Edme for more information. (212-344-7474/800-221-4277)

New Voter Empowerment Chief Sets Aggressive Tone for NAACP's Voter Registration & Education Efforts

The NAACP's voter empowerment efforts are under new direction. With a background heavy in political advocacy, Greg Moore has been selected to head the NAACP's comprehensive voter empowerment program across the U.S.

Moore will lead a multi-million dollar effort aimed at boosting voter registration, election protection, education, and awareness around the critical voter participation issues that will surely confront African Americans.

"When African Americans vote

they always help determine the direction of the country, so we have a major part to play," Moore said. "In addition to protecting the right to vote, we also need to reach out to displaced and recently purged voters who will need our assistance in getting their voting rights restored. No one who has registered to vote in the past should have their right to vote denied due to administrative procedures."

Moore will also lead efforts to recruit and train hundreds of NAACP

activists on the very latest techniques in voter mobilization efforts including more effective voter registration tracking, enhanced election protection services, and the development of strong partnerships with allied organizations for more effective work in reaching out to disenfranchised voters.

In conjunction with his new responsibilities, Moore will continue to serve as the Executive Director of the NAACP National Voter Fund, Inc.

Local Highlights

Rally Focuses Attention on Prosecutorial Misconduct in North Carolina

A rally in support of James Johnson was held last month in Raleigh, N.C. Johnson spent more than three years in a North Carolina jail awaiting trial in connection with the death of a white, female classmate following their graduation from a high school in Wilson. No physical evidence ties Johnson to the crime and two DNA tests cleared him in the death. He provided information to the police to help identify the killer and locate the victim, yet he was penalized. The man who implicated Johnson in the death has since recanted and is serving a life sentence for the murder.

The NAACP North Carolina State Conference worked diligently to get Johnson released on bond and the case reassigned to the Administrative Office of Courts, supervised by Chief Justice Sarah Parker of the state's Supreme Court.

The NAACP stands firm in its belief that James Johnson, now 21, should never have been arrested, charged with murder and incarcerated. The recent appointment of a special prosecutor to review the troubling circumstances of the case is the beginning of a movement to ensure that prosecutors at all levels do not shirk the public's trust and abuse the authority given them.

The NAACP Advocate

"James Johnson's release is just the first step," said NAACP North Carolina State Conference President Rev. William Barber II. "We are determined to stop this disparate treatment in our criminal justice system."

An online petition is available on the Association's website at www.naacp.org or www.ncprosecutorialmisconduct.com to let North Carolina's Governor and Attorney General know clearly that the public expects justice and full redemption in this case.

NAACP State Conference President Calls for Investigation of Florida's Juvenile Justice System

NAACP National Board of Directors member and Florida State Conference President Adora Obi Nweze was joined by a state assemblywoman and a college professor on Capitol Hill last month to testify before a subcommittee focused on the oversight of state-run juvenile correctional facilities, commonly known as youth boot camps. Nweze detailed some of the past abuses that occurred and cited the disparate number of black Florida youth currently in the custody of Florida's Department of Juvenile Justice.

Since 2000, seven young black men have died while in custody at youth correctional facilities in Florida. Although last year's death of 14-year

old Martin Lee Anderson led Florida to close its youth boot camp operations, privately run, state-funded juvenile detention facilities are still plagued by abuse and neglect, Nweze said.

"Black Floridians are outraged that the state continues to neglect, harm and even kill our youth and appear to get away with it," Nweze told the committee. "I am here today to ask that you use your oversight powers to urge the United States Department of Justice to launch a thorough investigation of the State of Florida's juvenile justice system. It is incumbent upon the federal government to ensure that the rights of Florida's children are being protected, and from our viewpoint it does not appear that they are."

The Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security of the Judiciary Committee in the U.S. House of Representatives conducted the hearing to examine the effectiveness of boot camp programs and probe their lack of regulation that has led to serious abuses and deaths.

Anderson died while in custody at the Bay County Boot Camp last year. An all white jury acquitted seven deputies and a nurse who participated in the videotaped violent abuse of Anderson that resulted in his death hours later. The U.S. Department of Justice has agreed to review the case for civil rights violations.

In addition to Anderson, six other youths have died since 2000.

STATE POLICY UPDATES

Massachusetts will divest from Sudan

Governor Deval Patrick signed a bill which will divest Massachusetts's pension funds from companies that do business with the government of Sudan. S2255 targets only those companies which are considered the worst offenders of enabling the Sudanese government's continuing genocide in Darfur. Massachusetts is the twenty-first state to divest from Sudan.



know about the rule change and if they do, they must go through a lengthy process to have their rights restored. Furthermore, ex-offenders cannot have their rights, including the right to hold an occupational license, restored until they pay all court-ordered restitution. This provision creates a barrier to

employment which just makes it harder for the individual to pay restitution. Gov. Charlie Crist made ex-felon enfranchisement a priority when he assumed office.

Voting rights restoration moves slowly in Florida

Florida's decision to restore civil rights to many ex-felons is proving only a partial victory for ex-offenders. Until this year, Florida was one of 3 states that permanently disfranchised anyone convicted of a felony. The new law returns the right to vote, serve on a jury, hold public office, and apply for certain occupational licenses to ex-felons. Released prisoners convicted of nonviolent crimes can automatically have their rights restored, while those convicted of more serious offenses must still go through a lengthy clemency process. The system already faces a backlog of applications which could take years to get through, and the prison system estimates that nearly 300,000 ex-inmates are eligible to have their rights restored. Many may not even

States outlaw smoking in cars with kids

Gov. Schwarzenegger signed a bill that will protect children in cars from secondhand smoke. SB 7 fines drivers \$100 if they are pulled over for another offense and are then caught smoking while a minor is in the car. California is the third state to limit smoking in cars with children, although it is the only one to extend the ban to protect children up to age 17. Louisiana bans smoking in cars when children under age 14 are in the vehicle and Arkansas bans it when children under age seven are in the vehicle. Health experts have testified that "second-hand smoke in a car can be up to 10 times more dangerous than in a home."

SCHIP bill vetoed

President Bush vetoed a bill which would have reauthorized and expanded the popular State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). SCHIP gives children whose families are ineligible for Medicaid but cannot afford private health insurance access to insurance. The bill would have increased funding for the program by \$35 billion over the next 5 years and expand the program to cover 10 million children.

New Jersey ends use of the death penalty

In December, New Jersey Gov. Jon Corzine signed legislation abolishing the death penalty in the state. New Jersey's legislature is the first in the country to ban the use of the death penalty; New Jersey has not executed anyone since 1963.

For more information on these state policy updates and others, visit the Center for Policy Alternatives at <http://www.cfpa.org/blog/>.

