

# Afghans: CIA 'ghost money' flows into Karzai's coffers

By Matthew Rosenberg  
New York Times

KABUL, AFGHANISTAN — For more than a decade, wads of U.S. dollars packed into suitcases, backpacks and, on occasion, plastic shopping bags have been dropped off every month or so at the offices of Afghanistan's president — courtesy of the Central Intelligence Agency.

All told, tens of millions of dollars have flowed from the CIA to the office of President

Hamid Karzai, according to current and former advisers to the Afghan leader.

"We called it 'ghost money,'" said Khalil Roman, who served as Karzai's chief of staff from 2002 until 2005. "It came in secret, and it left in secret."

The CIA, which declined to comment for this article, has long been known to support some relatives and close aides of Karzai. But the new accounts of off-the-books cash delivered directly to his office show payments on a vaster scale, and

with a far greater impact on everyday governing.

Moreover, there is little evidence that the payments bought the influence the CIA sought. Instead, some U.S. officials said, the cash has fueled corruption and empowered warlords, undermining Washington's exit strategy from Afghanistan.

"The biggest source of corruption in Afghanistan," one U.S. official said, "was the United States."

The United States was not

alone in delivering cash to the president. Karzai acknowledged a few years ago that Iran regularly gave bags of cash to one of his top aides.

U.S. and Afghan officials familiar with the payments said the agency's main goal in providing the cash has been to maintain access to Karzai and his inner circle and to guarantee the agency's influence at the presidential palace, which wields tremendous power in Afghanistan's highly centralized government.



# Unelected, unaccountable interests control Congress

From reports, the entrance was what one imagines of a drug lord who isn't used to waiting for a table in Guadalajara. Only this was in Washington.

Stepping out of the elevator, a wedge of bodyguards shoved people out of the way, one pinning a cameraman against the wall.

"You don't have jurisdiction here," the cameraman protested.

But of course, the National Rifle Association sets his own rules. Mr. Big had come to lecture Congress last January. Wherever he – and you – may be, you will get out of Wayne LaPierre's way.

Doesn't matter if a vast majority of Americans don't buy what he sells. He will meet his quota on Capitol Hill.

Of course, what he does is hardly unusual. The NRA is one of any number of entities that comport themselves as their own branches of government and whose officials govern their own protectorates. It's all about money.

Speaking of acronyms: More and more Americans are coming to know GEO, as in GEO Group Inc., the Florida company that runs more than 111 for-profit prisons and penal facilities.

Recently a GEO executive, Thomas Wierdsma, was found civilly liable for "outrageous behavior," including attempts to pressure U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement officials to deport his immigrant daughter-in-law when her marriage to his son soured.

You know: "Half of our prisoners are federal. I'll get ICE on the phone."

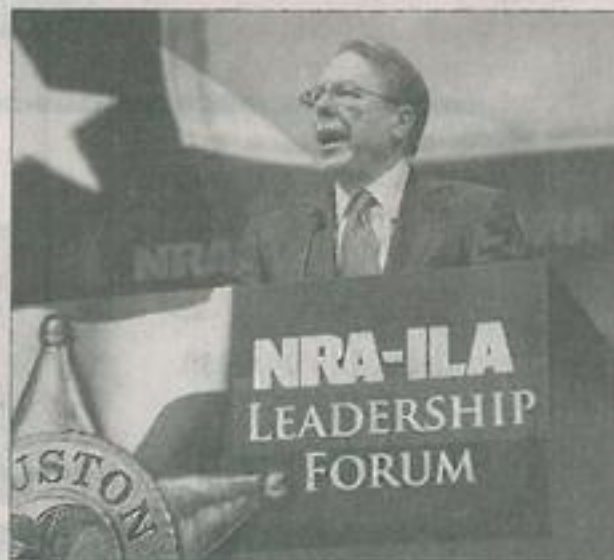
Don't expect these developments to hurt GEO's business. With \$1.48 billion in revenues last year, it has reached Halliburton-esque critical mass, profit- and power-wise.

So much liquidity has the company that it offered to plunk down \$6 million for naming rights to Florida Atlantic University's new football stadium.

That idea was nixed after a public backlash. Rest assured, GEO will find good ways to spend that money, possibly convincing state and federal lawmakers that prison cells are good for the economy.

Nobody elected GEO, but know that it has power beyond our Founders' imagining, even that of Thomas Jefferson, who warned about the "aristocracy of our monied corporations." Power? GEO has power over thousands of prisoners' every breath.

Maybe it makes sense to privatize trash hauling, or streetlight repair. It doesn't make sense to privatize life-or-death matters (See Hurricane Katrina). But where bigness is next to godliness,



Wayne LaPierre, CEO of the National Rifle Association, speaks during the NRA's annual meeting in Houston earlier this month. STEVE UECKERT / ASSOCIATED PRESS

too many policymakers simply bow to the GEOs of the world and proclaim, "At your service."

Big Oil, the pharmaceutical industry, Big Insurance, all have managed to engorge themselves while blunting the public interest when it comes to policy. For one, Americans would be paying less for over-the-counter drugs if pharmaceutical makers hadn't prevented the government from negotiating prices under Medicare reforms.

Each of these players serves much like Russia or China in the U.N. Security Council. Whatever a body might wish to achieve, they carry a one-vote veto.

Unelected. Unaccountable. Grover Norquist has the pledges of most Republican members of Congress, along with governors and state lawmakers, to do what he says, which is to never raise revenue for any purpose.

How did Norquist's Americans for Tax Reform gain its power? Silly question. As a lobbying arm funded by corporate interests like Big Tobacco and Big Oil, it spends millions to elect candidates who kiss Norquist's ring and to smite anyone who backs away from the no-new-revenue pledge. The group spent \$16 million on the last election.

"Conservatism, my foot," said Bill Moyers about Norquist's hold on politicians' souls. "It's all about the money."

And so we return to the unelected sheiks of the gun cartel, their flowing gowns, their gusher-style fiscal resources. As in the sand-blown Third World, politically they control whole provinces. They are the law, because they have the guns, and the money. And who will stand in their way?

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# Talking points

## ✿ 'Accidental Racist': A plea for tolerance

Brad Paisley can hold a tune, said Melissa Locker in *Time.com*, but the country singer's recent attempt to "heal the nation's continuing racial tensions" was way off-key. Paisley's new song "Accidental Racist" attempts to start a conversation about race relations—but has been widely denounced as ignorant and, yes, racist. In the song, Paisley argues that white Southerners should be allowed to celebrate their region's history—and that when he wears a Confederate flag, it's because he's a "proud rebel son," not a racist. "It ain't like you and me can rewrite history," he croons to a fictional black man in the song. "We're still paying for mistakes that a bunch of folks made long before we came."

Paisley wants us all to just get along, said Aisha Harris in *Slate.com*, implying that the country's racial issues are based solely on a 150-year-old grudge. But in the South, some high schools *still* hold separate proms for blacks and whites, while the jails are full of African-Americans. If he's going to take on a topic as complex as racism, Paisley shouldn't be so superficial—"and ultimately, so dismissive." Paisley's song might be a bit naïve, said Alan Scherstuhl



Paisley: Naïve?

in *VillageVoice.com*, but give the guy a break. Why not cheer when America's top male country star challenges his many fans to put themselves in black people's shoes?

Clumsy as the song is, at least it's an honest attempt to reconcile Southern pride with white guilt. "Its heart is in the right, complex place."

I have no problem with Southern pride, said Touré in *Time.com*. But Paisley's defense of the Confederate flag only underscores his ignorance. The flag of the Confederacy is not just a relic of history, but a "symbol of slavery and white supremacy"—and black America will always recognize it as such. Paisley also gives himself a pass when he sings "it ain't like I can walk a mile in someone else's skin," said Leonard Pitts Jr. in

*The Miami Herald*. Is it really so impossible for a white man to understand what, say, a Confederate flag means to the descendents of slaves, or to empathize with anyone—black, Hispanic, Muslim—who suffers prejudice? To understand others, just open your mind, your heart, and your ears. Arguing that whites are locked into their own perspectives—and are only racist by accident—is "a cop-out, and a disappointment."



# Taking Aim

**MICHAEL "BLUE" WILLIAMS** knows the power of music. The entertainment vet, who's managed such artists as Cee Lo, recently launched Guns 4 Greatness, a mentoring program that encourages youths to exchange firearms for rewards like concert tickets. After recovering 115 weapons during a recent Brooklyn, NY event, Williams explains his overall mission. —by *Lakeia Brown*



## What led you to start this program?

✦ I was inspired by listening to NYC's Police Commissioner Ray Kelly talk about his stop-and-frisk policy. He basically challenged those of us who didn't agree with it to figure out a better way to help make the streets safer. I'd also been keeping up with the new gun violence laws and I realized they would affect our communities at a disproportionate rate.

## How exactly does the trade-off work?

✦ The idea is to get people to

turn in their guns. If they do the work and go to the mentoring, I continue to provide incentives like tickets or headphones. It's about getting kids to realize there are results and rewards for doing the work. It was never about tickets to concerts.

## Why was it important for you to incorporate a music element?

✦ We need to impact change and do something positive in our neighborhoods. It's important to me that hip-hop gets credit for this because it gets blamed for everything.



## Getting Booked

### • LA COUNTY SHERIFF

Leroy Baca believes we need more classrooms than prison cells. That's why he proposed a \$1 billion rehab project to transform the city's Men's Central Jail into an inmate learning center. If approved, the 50-year-old institution—which can house over 3,000 men—would be completely remodeled and become a school where prisoners can earn their GED. Convicts who go through the program will be more likely to get employed upon release and less likely to return to jail, says Baca. At press time, his proposal, which also includes a new high-tech men's facility, was still under review by the County Board.

—by *Jessica Paris*



## Caving in to Kim's threats

Max Boot

*CommentaryMagazine.com*

"It was too good to last," said Max Boot. When North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un first began threatening to launch military attacks on his neighbors and the U.S., the Obama administration responded with a tough, resolute stance. The U.S. put Kim on notice by flying B-2 stealth bombers on practice runs, and moving warships and planes into the region. This suggested the White House had learned from the mistakes made by the Clinton and Bush administrations, which thought that offers of food aid and recognition would soothe North Korea's strategic belligerence. But this week Secretary of State John Kerry announced that the U.S. was willing to open direct negotiations with the North—and cancel deployment of U.S. anti-ballistic missiles in the region—if Kim would only play nice. This "is a sign of weakness and will be read as such in Pyongyang." Kerry has essentially told Kim that if he ratchets up his dangerous game—"another missile launch, anyone?"—Washington will "cave in completely" and grant him the concessions he sought all along. You don't negotiate with blackmailers.

## The NRA's most absurd argument

Michael Tomasky

*TheDailyBeast.com*

No new gun-control law can prevent all future massacres. Of all the arguments against commonsense gun laws made by the National Rifle Association, said Michael Tomasky, that one is clearly "the dumbest." Gun-rights absolutists have been insisting that there's no point in mandatory background checks and bans on assault weapons and large-capacity magazines, since these restrictions couldn't guarantee that Aurora and Newtown would never happen again. But what law prevents all lawbreaking? The Clean Water Act did not end all pollution. Laws against armed robbery don't prevent all robberies. Laws are passed to *reduce*, not eliminate, acts that society deems objectionable. The fact that it's impossible to design a perfect gun-control law should not serve as an excuse to do nothing when psychos armed like commandos shoot up malls, schools, and movie theaters with horrifying regularity. Gun-rights absolutists write off such massacres as the price for their continued access to killing machines designed for mass slaughter. "The prevention canard" serves as "the least morally objectionable way for them to express that." No one should be deceived.

## Why continue the Cuba embargo?

Steve Chapman

*Chicago Tribune*

Cuba's communist government was about to fall—until Jay-Z and Beyoncé decided to go there on vacation, said Steve Chapman. Or so you'd think, judging from the explosion of outrage over the celebrity couple's visit to Cuba, under a license granted by the U.S. government. Sen. Marco Rubio claimed that by circumventing the U.S. embargo on Cuba, Jay-Z and Beyoncé had propped up "a cruel, repressive, and murderous regime." But the embargo has been in place for 51 years, having accomplished nothing but to give the Castro brothers a convenient scapegoat for their country's persistent poverty. The U.S., meanwhile, freely allows travelers to visit China, Vietnam, and Myanmar—which are no less cruel and repressive than Cuba—in the belief that contact "will foster liberalization." Only in Cuba do we seek that end by *banning* contact. Meanwhile, tourists from Europe and Canada are flocking to Cuba, making the U.S.'s "attempted economic strangulation of Cuba" even more pointless. The embargo has been "an emphatic bust." It's time we admitted it and moved on.

## ECONOMY

# Wealth disparity grows for minorities

Hispanics, blacks had harder time during recession.

By **Annie Lowrey**  
New York Times

WASHINGTON — Millions of Americans suffered a loss of wealth during the recession and the sluggish recovery that followed. But the last half-decade has proved far worse for black and Hispanic families than for white families, starkly widening the already large gulf in wealth between white Americans and most minorities, according to a new study from the Urban Institute.

"It was already dismal," Darrick Hamilton, a professor at the New School in New York, said of the wealth gap between black and white households. "It got even worse."

Given the dynamics of the housing recovery and the rebound in the stock market, the wealth gap might still be growing, experts said.

The Urban Institute study found that the racial wealth gap expanded during the recession, even as the income gap between whites and non-whites remained stable. As of 2010, whites, on average, earned about \$2 for every \$1 that blacks and Hispanics earned, a ratio that has remained roughly constant for the past 30 years. But when it comes to wealth — as measured by assets, like cash savings, homes and retirement accounts, minus debts, like mortgages and credit card balances — whites have far outpaced blacks and Hispanics.



## How they see us: Why can't Iran enrich uranium?

The West is once again flouting international law, said Reza Ramezani in *Resalat* (Iran). The latest round of talks between Iran and the West ended this month in stalemate. The U.S. and other powers want Iran to abandon all enrichment of uranium and buy power-plant reactor fuel from other countries instead, so we won't have the ability to enrich uranium to weapons-grade. But the Non-Proliferation Treaty explicitly grants us the right to control our own enrichment process, as long as we allow inspectors in. The West keeps trying to exploit that requirement, arguing that we must allow inspectors into all kinds of military facilities that have nothing to do with our nuclear programs. Apparently "Westerners not only do not abide by laws, but they see themselves as being above the law."



Exercising 'fundamental rights'

The U.S. is simply unreasonably hostile toward Iran, said Mohammad Kazem Anbarlui, also in *Resalat*. In an address last month for the Persian new year, President Obama quoted an Iranian poet and urged us to "plant the tree of friendship" and "uproot the sapling of enmity"—as if Iran were the one threatening the borders of the U.S. So are we supposed to believe that Americans traveled thousands of miles across the ocean and slaughtered thousands of Muslims with their "weapons of mass destruction" in order to surround us with an orchard of friendship in Afghanistan to our east and Iraq to our west? Warmth and affection, I suppose, are the reasons why they have "mobilized and equipped forces" in Turkey and Azerbaijan, to our north. The U.S. has a nuclear arsenal that can destroy the world

many times over. Yet it claims to fear our peaceful nuclear program. Only blind hatred toward Iran can explain this paradox.

Even the recent focus on North Korea is part of America's anti-Iran push, said Hossein Shariatmadari in *Kayhan* (Iran). The first two nuclear tests by North Korea only brought "a diplomatic frown" from the West—so why has this third test, done two months ago, prompted "such noise and ruckus"? The answer is that the U.S. has failed to make its case at the negotiating table with Iran. At the last round of talks, it "had no choice but to admit defeat when faced with the strong technical

and legal documents" proving that Iran is already in compliance with treaties governing nuclear activities. In fact, that's why the U.S. blocked Iran's suggestion to open the meetings up to the press. So now it is trying to stir up hysteria about nuclear weapons by invoking an imagined threat from tiny North Korea. Every time a Western leader mentions the North Korean situation, he follows it with a caution that this proves Iran must never be allowed nuclear weapons. "If you didn't know better, you would think it was actually Iran that did the nuclear test."

Still, there is some room for optimism, said *Jomburi Eslami* (Iran) in an editorial. Iran presented "constructive proposals" at the last round of negotiations, and while the Western powers didn't immediately accept them, they did agree to study them. As long as the West is willing to recognize "the Iranian nation's fundamental rights," we can still reach a compromise.

### SOUTH AFRICA

## Meet the new poor people: Whites

Leslie Bank  
*Daily Dispatch*

*na ha nahal' what?*

For white South Africans, slipping into poverty brings on an existential crisis, said Leslie Bank. For the first time in decades, nearly 40 percent of white households are struggling, and more and more whites are jobless. Poor whites' sense of self has been upended by this "historic shift from full employment and privilege to a precarious existence on the fringes of the urban economy." Those who find themselves homeless and disheveled, begging in the streets, act very differently from black beggars—they don't approach cars or ask for money out loud but stand still, holding placards that apologetically explain their plight.

"It is difficult not to sense their pain, their sense of indignity and desperation." Many of them are actually less able to make do than blacks who make the same wage, because rent, food, schooling, and transportation costs are all much higher in the white neighborhoods they inhabit. In the suburbs, a family living on the equivalent of \$675 a month can barely feed itself, while in a township, a family with that income would be "part of an emerging black middle class." Under apartheid, to be white was to embody *ordentlikheid*, or respectability. Poverty was shameful, and somehow unwhite. These days, it is whiter than ever.

### IRAQ

## Deny the U.S. any of our oil wealth

Jamal Muhammad Taqi  
*Al-Iraq*

Iraq deserves reparations for the "genocide" the Americans perpetrated, said Jamal Muhammad Taqi. In the course of nearly 10 years of invasion and occupation, the U.S. spent more than \$4 trillion laying waste to this country, killing and maiming half a million Iraqis, mostly civilians; it caused an order of magnitude more in damage to our infrastructure and economy. And the crime continues: The country is "no longer safe to live in because of high levels of radiation and chemical pollution" from the depleted uranium bullets and bombs the Americans used. Rates of cancer and gruesome birth defects are soaring. The occupiers

also "booby-trapped the country" in a metaphorical way, by "engineering a fractured system" that pits ethnic and religious groups against one another and ensures conflict. We know we'll never get an apology, much less the reparations we deserve. But the least we can do is deny the Americans any oil contracts so they won't profit from their crime. Alas, the corrupt cabal running Iraq is made up of those who "collaborated from the beginning" and owe their power to the Americans. "How long will it take Iraq to recuperate and completely liberate itself from the claws of the occupation and its handpicked regime?"



## Washington, D.C.

**Ricin scare:** Letters sent to President Obama and one senator this week tested positive for the poison ricin, and Senate offices were briefly evacuated as other letters and packages were removed for inspection. The letters to Obama and Sen. Roger Wicker (R-Miss.) were postmarked in Memphis and signed with the words, "I am KC and I approve this message." Both were intercepted at off-site screening facilities set up after the anthrax scare of 2001. Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.) said that federal authorities suspect an individual who often wrote to senators, but the White House declined to comment. If ingested or inhaled, ricin can cause death within hours. The FBI said more testing was needed to confirm the poison's presence, since preliminary tests sometimes produce false positive results.



Mail for the hazmat team

## Washington, D.C.

**Torture confirmed:** An independent review has found it "indisputable" that the U.S. engaged in torture after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks and that top officials are ultimately responsible for the human-rights abuses. In a 577-page report sponsored by the Constitution Project, a legal advocacy group, a bipartisan panel found that intelligence officers and military forces engaged in torture and "cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment" of detainees in Iraq, Afghanistan, the U.S.-run Guantánamo Bay prison, and elsewhere, in violation of U.S. and international law. The widespread torture, the report said, was the direct result of "decisions made by the nation's highest civilian and military leaders," including President Bush, who decided that the Geneva Conventions did not apply to al Qaeda and Taliban militants.

## Washington, D.C.

**Background checks thwarted:** President Obama's hopes of tightening gun laws in the wake of the Newton, Conn., school massacre faded this week, when a bipartisan bill to expand background checks for gun buyers was blocked in the Senate. The Senate voted 54-46 for the amendment, falling short of the 60 votes needed to move the legislation ahead. Proposed by Sens. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) and Pat Toomey (R-Pa.), the measure would have expanded checks to include online and gun-show sales in order to prevent criminals and the mentally ill from procuring guns. It had the support of nearly 90 percent of Americans, but the National Rifle Association argued the checks would be the first step toward a national gun registry. The mother of a student wounded in the Virginia Tech massacre shouted "Shame on you!" from the gallery during the roll call. The NRA celebrated the amendment's defeat, saying checks would not have kept "our kids safe in their schools." Proposals to ban large-capacity magazines and assault weapons also appear to be doomed.



## Saratoga, Calif.

**Juveniles charged:** Three 16-year-old boys were charged this week with sexual battery, distribution of child pornography, and forcible sexual penetration in connection with an assault on



Audrie Pott

Audrie Pott, the 15-year-old girl who committed suicide after a photo of the alleged attack was circulated around her school. In September, Pott awoke after passing out at a friend's house to find she had been sexually abused, and that her attackers had scrawled on her body with a marker. The three boys, who had known Pott for years, apparently passed at least one photo of the unconscious sophomore on to classmates. Eight days after the humiliating attack, Pott hanged herself. Her stepmother, Lisa, said that she "had no idea what happened to Audrie until after her memorial service," when she checked her Facebook account. "My life is ruined," she'd written, "and I don't even remember how."

## Kaufman, Texas

**Murder charges:** The wife of a disgraced justice of the peace was charged this week with murdering the Kaufman County district attorney, his wife, and an assistant prosecutor. Kim Lene Williams, 46, has reportedly confessed to carrying out the murders along with her husband, Eric Williams, who was expected to be charged as well. District Attorney Mike McLelland and his wife were gunned down at their home at the end of March, two months after Assistant D.A. Mark Hasse was shot in broad daylight. Eric Williams soon emerged as a prime suspect because of his history with McLelland and Hasse, who had prosecuted him in 2012 for the theft of county computers. He was arrested last week for allegedly making terrorist threats to police investigating the killings. If convicted, Kim Williams could face the death penalty.

## Miami

**Giant snails:** South Florida is battling a growing infestation of one of the world's most destructive invasive species: the giant African land snail. At least 1,000 of the snails are being caught each week in Miami-Dade County, and a total of 117,000 of the mollusks have been caught since September 2011. They can grow as big as a rat and feed voraciously on more than 500 plant species, but one of their favorite things to eat is stucco, because it contains calcium, which they need for their shells. In the Caribbean, which in places is overrun with the creatures, the snails' shells can blow out car tires or be hurled in the air by lawnmower blades, and their excrement and slime coat walls and pavements. "It becomes a slick mess," said Denise Feiber, a spokeswoman for the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.





# Talking points

## Guantánamo: A detainee's plea for justice

"I've been on hunger strike since Feb. 10," said Samir Najj al Hasan Moqbel in *The New York Times*. Detained at Guantánamo for 11 years, I have never been charged with any crime or received a trial. In 2000, I moved from Yemen to Afghanistan to find work, but fled when the Americans invaded. I was arrested on false charges and sent to Gitmo. Because we detainees are being denied basic human rights, about 40 of us are refusing to eat; some prisoners are now below 100 pounds. The guards have reacted by tying us to chairs twice a day, strapping down our limbs, and shoving feeding tubes down our noses, as we bleed and vomit. I don't want to die here, but I hope that because of our hunger strike, "the eyes of the world will once again look to Guantánamo before it is too late."

Moqbel's is "one of the most powerful op-eds you will ever read," said Glenn Greenwald in *Guardian.co.uk*. Every American should feel shame that our country is imprisoning human beings indefinitely without charges, and treating them so horribly that they'd rather starve to death than go on. Just six of the 166 Guantánamo detainees face formal charges. Eighty-six others have been cleared to go, but can't leave because



No trial, no charges, no hope

of Obama's 2010 moratorium on any Yemeni releases. "Few Americans really understand what's happening at Guantánamo," said John Dear in *HuffingtonPost.com*. In this "hell hole," detainees are routinely humiliated, denied water and health care. Why not give every one of them a trial, and let those we can't convict go home? "Or are we a totalitarian state?"

That's all very moving, said Geoff Earle in the *New York Post*, but Moqbel omitted some significant details. He's a prisoner of war because he was "captured at Tora Bora" with bin Laden's guards during the assault on the al Qaida leader's hideout. It's highly unlikely that Moqbel "accidentally" stumbled upon this remote place just as the Americans were bombing the hell out of it. Still, this is an ugly situation, said Ari Melber in *MSNBC.com*. Baton-wielding guards are now physically battling skeletal detainees, and shoving feeding tubes down their noses. Obama once pledged to close Guantánamo, but Congress put up significant roadblocks, and there are concerns that if the Yemeni inmates were sent home, they'd seek revenge by joining al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula. "So the prison stays open, while the door to fair trials is pretty much closed."

## Rand Paul: The GOP's outreach to blacks

"I'm not the world's leading Rand Paul fan," said David Frum in *TheDailyBeast.com*, "but good for him for speaking at Howard University." The Republican senator from Kentucky and Tea Party hero last week reached out to African-American voters in a speech at the historically black college, pitching the merits of the GOP and libertarianism to a skeptical audience. "I come to Howard today, not to preach, or prescribe some special formula for you," said Paul, "but to say I want a government that leaves you alone." That got a chilly response, but Paul got a warmer reception when he portrayed "school choice" as a civil-rights cause, and advocated the repeal of the harsh drug laws that had locked so many young black men in prison. How could it be, Paul asked, that the party of Abraham Lincoln and emancipation was now so out of favor with black voters?

It's a patronizing question, said Adam Serwer in *MotherJones.com*, and throughout his lame speech, "Paul condescended to his audience." He tried to whitewash his own stated opposition to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and commended himself for being "brave or crazy" enough to speak in such an obviously dangerous environment—that is, a college full of black people. At

least we now know Paul's strategy for expanding the Republican Party's appeal, said Jack White in *TheRoot.com*: "Amnesia." There was no mention of the Southern Strategy that Richard Nixon and other Republicans used to win white votes for decades, or Ronald Reagan's attacks on "welfare queens" and coded support for "states' rights." Paul may find it convenient to forget that Republicans effectively "embraced racism" from 1964 on, but African-Americans haven't.

Paul deserves credit for trying to open a dialogue, said Jay Bookman in *AJC.com*. But without real candor, he and other Republicans are "stuck." Once Democrats became the party of civil rights, "the Republican Party consciously remade itself as a haven for white voters who had grown uneasy with the rise of minorities." But the GOP's internal party narrative prohibits any frank admission of this historical fact, and insists that Republicans are "blameless for the abandonment of their party by black voters." Outside the party, and especially among minorities, that comes off as "condescending and dishonest." Until well-meaning Republicans like Paul can openly address the elephant in the room, their "efforts at outreach will bear very little fruit."



ATLANTA

# Obama urges graduates: 'Be the best'

President tells Morehouse College graduates to 'keep setting an example.'

By Mark Landler  
New York Times

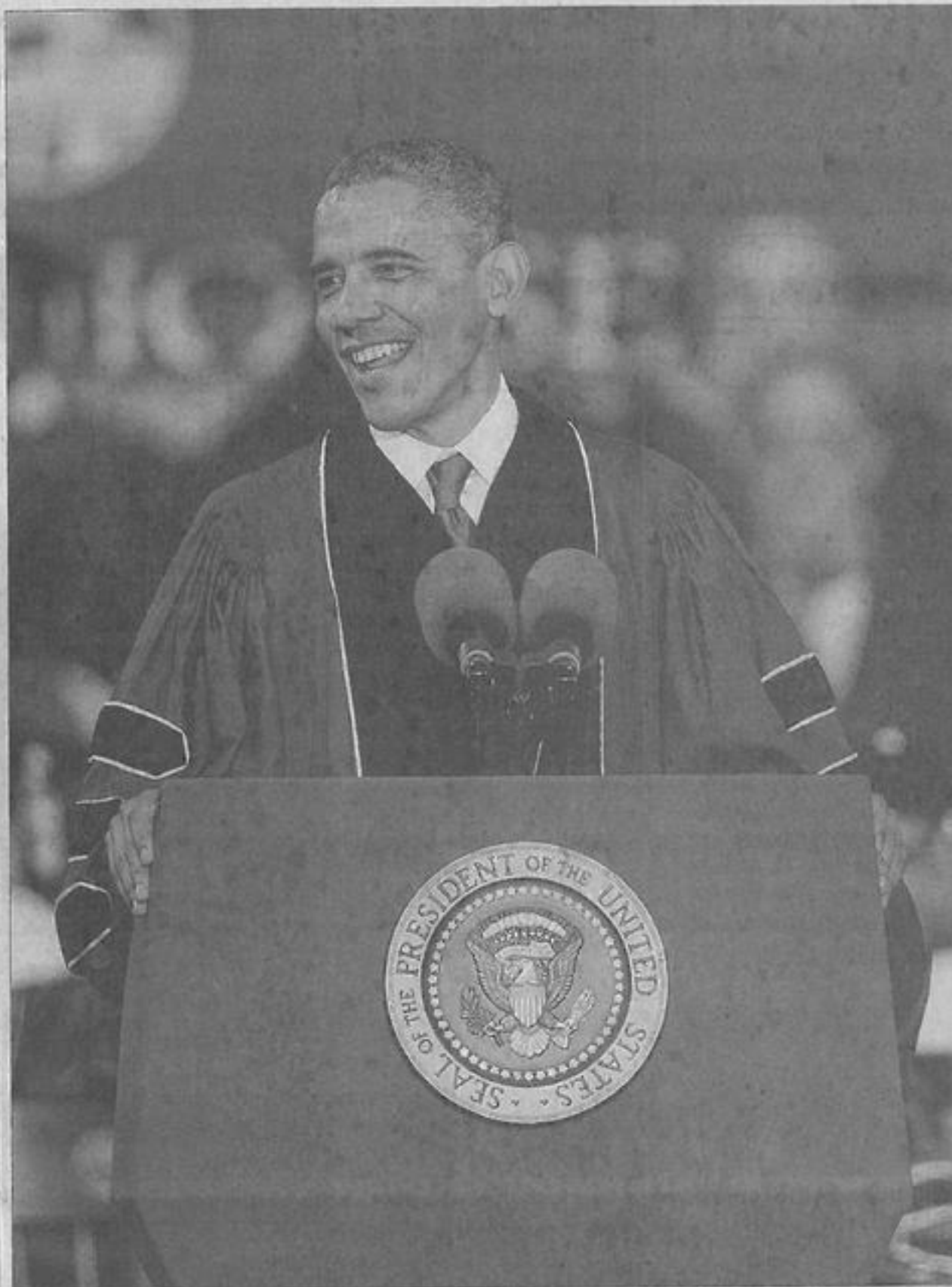
ATLANTA — President Barack Obama came to Morehouse College, the alma mater of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., on Sunday to tell graduates, 50 years after King's landmark speech in Washington, that "laws, hearts and minds have been changed to the point where someone who looks like you can serve as president of the United States."

Wearing an academic robe, Obama paid tribute to Morehouse as the place where King first read the writings of Gandhi and Thoreau, and absorbed the theory of civil disobedience.

The president tied King's journey to his own, speaking in forthright and strikingly personal terms about his struggles as a young man with an absent father, a "heroic single mother," supportive grandparents, and the psychological burdens of being black in America.

"We know that too many young men in our community continue to make bad choices," Obama said. "I have to say, growing up, I made quite a few myself. Sometimes I wrote off my own failings as just another example of the world trying to keep a black man down."

"But one of the things you've learned over the last four years is that



President Barack Obama delivers the commencement speech Sunday at Morehouse College, the alma mater of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. JOHN BASEMORE / ASSOCIATED PRESS

there's no longer any room for excuses," the president told the 500 or so graduates, who greeted him enthusiastically.

"Along with collective responsibilities, we have individual responsi-

bilities," Obama added. "There are some things, as black men, we can only do for ourselves."

Obama exhorted the graduates to extend a hand to other black men, saying that his success

depended less on his Ivy League credentials than on his sense of empathy and obligation he felt as a black man to help his brothers.

"But for the grace of God, I might be in their

'Along with collective responsibilities, we have individual responsibilities. There are some things, as black men, we can only do for ourselves.'

President Barack Obama

shoes," he said. "I might have been in prison."

Reflecting on his turbulent childhood and his own family, Obama said, "I still wish I had a father who was not only present, but involved. And so my whole life, I've tried to be for Michelle and my girls what my father wasn't for my mother and me. I want to break that cycle. I want to be a better father, a better husband, and a better man."

Obama urged the graduates to "keep setting an example for what it means to be a man. Be the best husband to your wife, or boyfriend to your partner. Be the best father you can be to your children."

The president dwelt on the legacy of King, a member of the class of 1948, whom he described as an undersize 15-year-old nicknamed "Tweed" when he arrived here.

"It was here that professors encouraged him to look past the world as it was and fight for the world as it should be," Obama said.