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LETTERS

A New Way to Achieve Civil Rights?

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To the Editor:

Richard Thompson Ford is right to say civil rights litigation should not be relied on as the sole agent of change, particularly given the makeup of the courts. But he is wrong to suggest that we abandon litigation in favor of regulation or other "comprehensive solutions."

He writes that police departments have "agreed" to collect stop-and-frisk data, yet the New York Police Department makes this information public only as a result of litigation by the organization I head, the Center for Constitutional Rights, and the New York Civil Liberties Union. The far-reaching solutions he calls for are often achieved as a result of consent decrees or settlements.

And to see how the threat of fines clearly does not work, one need only look at how police departments treat the rights of protesters, essentially factoring in settlements for wrongful arrest as part of the cost of doing business.

To achieve civil rights goals, we do indeed need to look to new solutions, but it borders on the naïve to think that governments and police departments don't still require more stick than carrot to get there.

VINCENT WARREN

Executive Director
Center for Constitutional Rights
New York, Oct. 29, 2011

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