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### A death bares America's biased policy

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If "Remember the Alamo" and "Remember the Maine" could ignite ordinary folks to demand government action - even war - then let me give you a suggestion: Remember Joseph Dantica and what filmmaker Jonathan Demme calls "the inhumane, racist treatment of Haitian refugees."

Joseph Dantica was a Haitian minister who lived in an area of his nation's capital that Gary Pierre-Pierre, editor of the Brooklyn-based Haitian Times, calls "the Fallujah of Port-au-Prince." Because UN peacekeeping troops used his church as a staging area to crack down on gangs, the gangs targeted Dantica. At the age of 81, he felt so unsafe that he left for Miami with all the proper papers, including a visa.

But to secure our borders from frail old Haitian men of faith, immigration officials hustled Dantica off to the infamous Krome detention center. He died five days later, on Nov. 3.

"They protected our borders from an 81-year-old minister," Demme says with barely disguised disgust. "It pulls me out of the numb state that so many have been in since 9/11."

"It is my nightmare that he died alone, handcuffed to a bed," Edwidge Danticat, the celebrated author and niece of Dantica, told The Associated Press.

Officially Dantica died of pancreatitis, but his family says his death was hastened by the stress of being locked up and being denied access to the relatives who had been waiting for him in Miami.

The best homeland security officials can say is that Dantica's death was "horribly unfortunate and tragic." Not good enough.

Reps. Charles Rangel and Major Owens of New York and Rep. Kendrick Meek of Florida are demanding answers. "This matter is of great concern to me," Rangel wrote to Homeland Security's inspector general. "Many of my constituents have long raised complaints about the poor treatment of Haitian detainees at Krome."

Rangel wants to know what I want to know: Why was Dantica taken into custody when he apparently held a valid visa? Why was he separated from his son while in detention? Why was his medication taken away? Given his age and the fact that he was on meds, why wasn't he given timely medical attention?

Demme abhors - as do I - America's "cold-blooded, arguably racist entry policy toward Haitians." Think of all the Haitians turned away or imprisoned on our shores compared with the open-arms welcome for their Cuban neighbors.

While giving thanks this season, let's give hope to Haitians by demanding that those who govern in our names make the playing field level and no longer single Haitian immigrants out for harsh treatment.

Remember Joseph Dantica.