

OPINION

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America Holds On To Its Family Values

Single parents spend more time with children

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

For the last 20 years or so we've been told - by the media, policymakers and conservative groups alike - that the increase in crime is a direct result of the growth in single parent households. Children do poorly in school and get into trouble, we've been led to believe, because their single mothers have to focus their energy on working and have little to no time left in their day to effectively parent.

We can now toss those theories out of the window. A new study shows that both married and single parents spend about the same amount of time with their children as parents did 40 years ago. Knowing this, what, then, can be blamed for the increase in high school drop out and crime rates? It's time to finally take a close look at public institutions - schools, government human service agencies and the

like - that have failed our children and our communities.

Without the conservative double talk that seeks to draw our attention away from the real issues by shift-

Two generations ago, 60 percent of American children lived in a house where the father went to work and the mother stayed home and took care of the house. Today,

lies are led by just one parent.

Over the years, a crime increased and children became increasingly harder to reach, many began to blame the changing face of the American family, with single mothers taking the hardest hits. But, according to a book recently published by the American Sociological Association, today's single mothers spend more than 11 hours per week with their child.

In 1965, single mothers reportedly spent less than 8 hours per week caring for their child and married mothers spent just under 11 hours per week with their kids. It seems that single mothers, in an effort to spend more time with their children, don't obsess as much over housecleaning and other chores. Many focus their energy on their children, and rightly so.

Conservative groups have long maintained that 'family values' were the key to a safer, better America. America hasn't lost its family values; though the idea of family has changed, the core beliefs - support, love, unity - still hold true for many of us. Some politicians, though, have twisted the ideas behind such values and used them to further their

own agendas. While the country is distracted, busy debating divorce, single parenthood and gay marriage, money is being cut from the national education budget and added to the defense budget, social service programs are being eliminated altogether and prisons, instead of community-based intervention programs, are being built. America's family values are still in place, it's the ethics of many of our leaders that are out of whack.

The need for stable two-parent households, especially in the African-American community, shouldn't be trivialized. However, our single mothers - and fathers - shouldn't be used as scapegoats for the country's troubles. Now that we know today's single parents are working just as hard - and, in some cases, harder - than even married mothers did years ago, it's time to really start addressing the social issues that plague this country today. We don't have time for any more excuses.

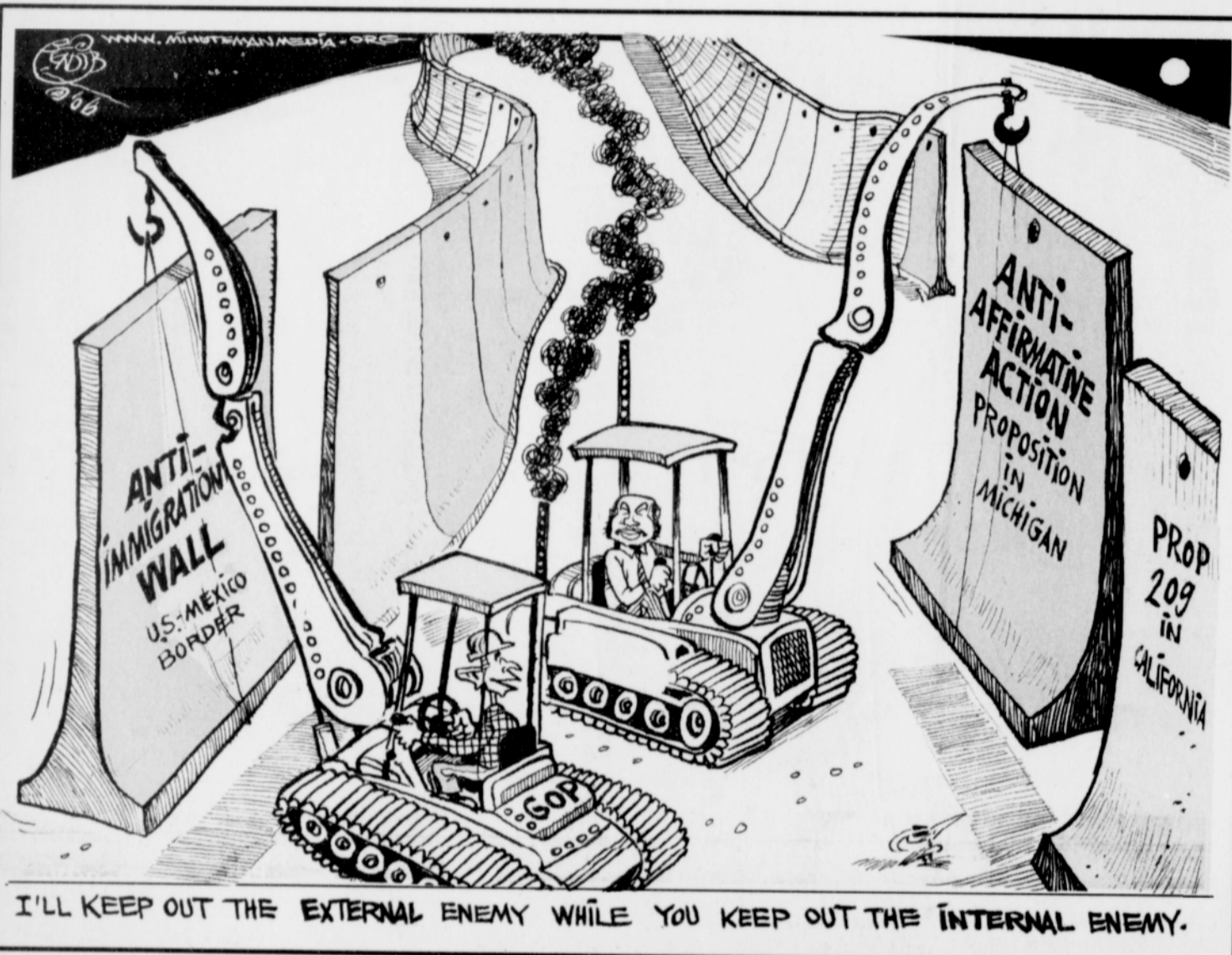
Judge Greg Mathis is national vice president of Rainbow PUSH and a national board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.



Our single mothers - and fathers - shouldn't be used as scapegoats for the country's troubles.

ing blame, perhaps this country can finally work to fix the broken organizations that serve our communities.

about 30 percent of the country's children live in such a house. More mothers work than ever before and about 26 percent of American fami-



A National Tragedy Being priced out of college

BY MARC H. MORIAL

At the National Urban League's annual conference in Atlanta in July, Time Warner Chairman Dick Parsons identified education as the "sine qua non."

"It is the thing without which nothing good happens," he said.

That is why recent conclusions by a U.S. Education Department advisory committee are so disturbing. It finds that the cost of higher education is deterring more and more low- and moderate-income students from going to college. And in the United States, people of color tend to be disproportionately represented in the low- and moderate-income range.

From 1990 to 1999, between 1 million and 1.6 million potential bachelor's degrees were lost among college-qualified and -prepared high school graduates from low- and moderate-income families, according to the study. From 2000 to 2010, that number is expected to increase to between 1.4 million and 2.4 million.

Roughly 16 percent of low-income and 27 percent of moderate-income students who were 8th graders in 1988 ended up graduating college by 2000, compared to 43 percent and 65 percent of middle- and high-income students.

In an increasingly global marketplace, our nation's workers cannot just depend on a high school education to tackle the tasks demanded of them today and tomorrow.

Higher education is essential for this nation to remain a player on the world economic stage. In 2001, the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that jobs requiring postsecondary education would make up 42 percent of total job growth in this decade. They accounted for 29 percent of all jobs in 2000.

These students are either dropping out of higher education or digging themselves into major debt, which forces them to put off purchasing homes, starting families, investing for their retirements and pursuing advanced degrees.

From 2000 to 2005, the average cost of tuition increased nearly \$2,800 or 42 percent while median household income for African Americans has fallen 8 percent, according to the Campaign for America's Future. The average debt load of a college graduate is \$23,600 in student loans and \$2,000 in credit card debt. In 2004, two-thirds of college students graduated in debt, compared to one-third in 1993.



Whereas the U.S. once led the world in terms of students seeking higher education, the nation now ranks 13th in affordability and 4th in accessibility among European and North American countries, according to the group's report.

Increased costs in the face of reduced government aid appear to have hurt African American students more than their white counterparts: The price tag for attending a public institution amounts to 37 percent of median household income compared to 24 percent for whites. It requires 86 percent of household income for blacks to go to a private school, compared to 54 percent for whites, according to the report.

What enabled Dick Parsons to rise through the ranks of Corporate America? Greater access to opportunity than his father and grandfather had. That means access to a good education with the expectation of college graduation. We cannot make that same expectation for

Limiting higher education to only those who can afford it will only serve to exacerbate the gap.

future generations if our nation does not invest in their higher education and their ultimate success in life.

"The fact of the matter is that education is not a silver bullet. It's not an overnight phenomenon. It takes a long time to educate an entire population but it does pay dividends," Parsons said.

Limiting higher education to only those who can afford it will only serve to exacerbate the gap between the nation's haves and have-nots and between minorities and whites.

We cannot expect to compete in a global economic market if low- to moderate-income Americans - a disproportionate share being people of color - are relegated to low-wage jobs with little future. It will produce starker disparities in this nation that will imperil our competitiveness as well as threaten the stability of our democracy.

As the United Negro College Fund slogan goes, "a mind is a terrible thing to waste." Wasting 1 million to 1.4 million minds is a national tragedy.

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

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