

OPINION

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Unfortunate Rewriting of Equal Protection

Knockdown of school integration plans was a wake up call

BY DARRYL R. MATTHEWS SR.

The decision by the Supreme Court to strike down voluntary school integration plans in Louisville, Ky., and Seattle was as disappointing as it was a wake up call.

It is truly unfortunate that the Supreme Court has rewritten the meaning of the Equal Protection clause of the United States Constitution to protect those acts that it was written to protect against.

But the court did our country a favor by awakening a sleeping giant; a giant who will channel its energy of disappointment into energy of action -- action to raise the level of quality education in our communities and the level of our expectations of those we educate.

We can no longer accept or expect mediocrity. We must not only expect excellence, but also demand it. This is not an easy task but it is worthwhile.

The hue and cry of many civil rights pundits and citizens has been that the decision could set this country back to its pre-1954 separate but equal ways; that we,



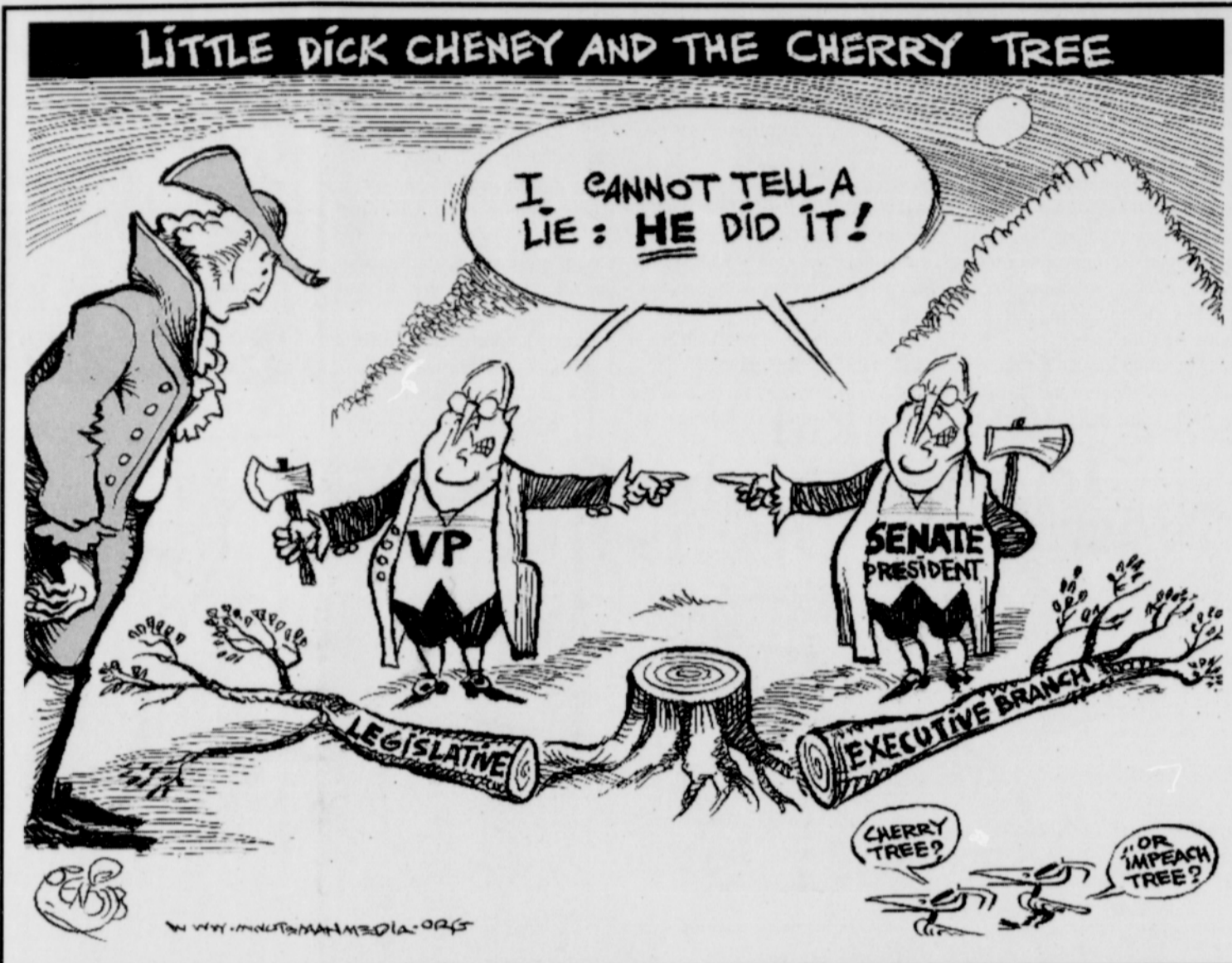
as African-Americans, have been diminished by this decision because it does not allow states to use race as a factor in determining who sits next to white children in a classroom.

But I ask the question, do black children need to sit next to white children to learn? Do we need an integrated classroom to elevate our collective intelligentsia to compete, as a people, in the now global economy?

What we need is a collective effort to raise the level of education in our communities such that court ordered integration becomes a relic of a by-gone era.

For 100 years the Brothers of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., have been at the forefront of efforts to improve educational opportunities and to ensure equal opportunity for all of America's citizens. We will continue to fight for the rights of children in this nation.

Darryl R. Matthew, Sr. is general president of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity.



PCC CASCADE CONNECTION

Get involved in the Urban League



BY ALGIE GATEWOOD

BY ALGIE C. GATEWOOD

One of the most rewarding efforts of my time in Portland has been my past year as board chair for the Urban League of Portland. Few experiences have taught me as much about the kind of city that Portland is, and no experience has made me feel more like a Portlander at heart.

The Urban League is an organization that is hardwired into seemingly every distinct community in Portland. Its members and leaders are drawn from the public, private and nonprofit sectors, and comprise a cross-section of nearly every racial, ethnic and cultural group in our city.

This diverse collection of citizens is united around one, broad objective: to elevate the economic, educational and social condition of our entire city. And I am happy to say that over the past year, the Urban League added significantly to both its individual and corpo-

rate membership.

The organization has much to be proud of these days. In the arena of education, our primary area of interest, the Urban League's programs have shown categorical improvements in student attendance, test scores, grades, and -- most significantly -- a 100 percent graduation rate for all participating high school seniors over the past two years.

Our team of Portland Public Schools-certified Academic Coaches continued their fine work with local young people, helping 60 percent of their charges to increase their grade point averages, with 40 percent posting significant GPA increases, sometimes as much as 50 percent. The Urban League Foundation has been an outstanding partner with our city's public education system, at every level from pre-school through high school and beyond.

Safeguarding the respected el-

ders of our community has also been a focus of the Urban League since its inception, and this past year was no different. Through our Senior Center in northeast Portland, as well as through ongoing outreach and advocacy, the organization has helped area seniors to live empowered, independent lives.

The Urban League's efforts have helped our seniors with energy assistance during the winter months, with transportation around the metro area, and with a wide-ranging slate of enriching activities, classes, and trips.

Finally, the Urban League has been in the vanguard of the continuing effort to advance the causes of civil rights, social justice and economic empowerment. The organization's leadership worked closely with state legislators during the 2007 session to identify legislative priorities for the underserved populations of Portland and beyond.

At the local level, the Urban League of Portland continues to advocate for enlightened policies that benefit the less fortunate, including reducing tobacco advertising in low-income communities, protesting against county budget cuts to social programs, and work-

ing to retain funding for senior services.

Simply put, there is no better advocate in Portland for people of color, particularly African Americans, than the Urban League. On many of the pernicious problems that continue to trouble our society -- unequal treatment for Driving While Black or Getting a Home Loan While Black, for example -- the Urban League continues to lead the way toward greater tolerance and understanding.

As long as the struggle continues, the Urban League will be there. But however much good work the Urban League carries out, with additional resources -- both financial and human -- we can do even more.

While my term as Board Chair is coming to a close, my efforts on behalf of the League will continue, and I hope you will join me. I urge everyone to get involved with the Urban League -- make a donation, volunteer your time, and help advance the cause of liberty and justice for all.

Algie C. Gatewood, Ed.D., outgoing Chair of the Board for the Urban League of Portland, is president of Portland Community College's Cascade Campus.

Discriminatory Drug Sentencing

Fix disparity in jail terms for crack, powder cocaine

that it doesn't work. It hasn't succeeded in getting crack cocaine off the streets or targeting major drug dealers.

Instead, the mandatory minimums have subjected low-level participants in the drug trade, such as couriers and look-outs, to the same or harsher sentences as major dealers. Senator Biden's bill will repair an unjust and ineffective law, and we urge his colleagues in the Senate to support it.

BY CAROLINE FREDRICKSON

The American Civil Liberties Union praises Sen. Joseph Biden, D-Del., for his introduction of a bill aimed at addressing the sentencing disparity between crack and powder cocaine.

Under the current law, distributing five grams of crack cocaine carries a mandatory minimum sentence of five years in federal prison, while distributing 500 grams of powder cocaine carries the same sentence. Senator Biden's bill would fix this 100:1 sentencing disparity, raising the amount of crack cocaine required to trigger the ten-year mandatory minimum to 500 grams, the same as powder cocaine.

The law establishing this federal drug sentencing policy has been in place for 20 years now. What's clear -- to the ACLU, to the U.S. Sentencing Commission that's recommended a change on four separate occasions, and to Sen. Biden -- is



The Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, passed during the media frenzy following the death of University of Maryland basketball star Len Bias, established mandatory minimum sentences for distribution of specific amounts of cocaine.

However, it also established the 100:1 disparity between distribution of powder and crack cocaine. The discrepancy remains despite repeated recommendations by the U.S. Sentencing Commission to Congress to reconsider the penalties.

Caroline Fredrickson is the director of the American Civil Liberties Union's Washington Legislative office.

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