

OPINION

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We Need Community Schools

Uplifting local neighborhoods



BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

America needs to start thinking differently about the services its public schools provide. Of course schools must, first and foremost, educate. And educate well. But, with students spending nearly six hours each weekday in school, there is a need and an opportunity for school districts to provide additional services.

Over time, these services, if they are well funded and administered properly, can reduce crime in the surrounding community, improve the overall health and well-being of young people and, most importantly, encourage student achievement.

Currently, students go to school and are instructed by their teachers. They may eat breakfast at the school and will definitely be provided lunch. Some school districts in poor communities have a "traveling" doctor and, possibly, a dentist who comes in once or twice a year to briefly examine students and then sends recommendations for follow-up care home to their parents.

If a student is especially troubled, a school social worker, already overloaded with cases, is called in to speak with them. Extras such as tutoring, reading lessons, gymnastics classes, computer-based instruction, are voluntary.

Most students are out of school by 3 p.m. each day and many of their parents do not arrive home until well after 5 p.m. During this time, many of our young people hang out with friends, unsupervised, and are introduced to the alcohol, drugs and gangs. They are seduced by the street life and begin to suffer academically.

Community schools provide poor, urban areas with needed resources while keeping our kids off the street, stimulating their minds and increasing their chances for success. At a community school, students will receive their instruction. But, also on site, will be a health care professional and a counselor to deal with issues as they arise. There will pre- and post-school child care facilities. After school activities would be varied and mandatory. Tutors would be on hand each day to help students with their schoolwork. Some of the recreational offerings would be open to the public. Students will spend their post-classroom hours in a safe, productive, supervised setting and will leave the school building just as their parents are arriving home.

The idea of a community school is not new. Some version of this idea has been around for decades.

With the national education system's continuing failure and no signs of improvement on the horizon, community schools are once again a hot topic, and with good reason. Critics say the cost of such programming is too high. Perhaps the money that has been spent on monitoring the No Child Left Behind Act, a law that has turned our public school system in a test mill, could be diverted to create these community schools, schools that not only provide instruction but also anchor and uplift the areas in which students live.

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

Unfunny Cartoon *Playing games with a misconception*

BY MARC MORIAL

I want to add my voice to the growing chorus of Americans who were offended by the unfunny cartoon that appeared on the July 21 cover of The New Yorker magazine.

As has been widely reported, the New Yorker cover, in what they claim was a sincere attempt at satire, depicted caricatures of Barack and Michelle Obama fist-bumping in the Oval Office, with Barack wearing Muslim garb, Michelle dressed like a 60s-era machine-gun toting revolutionary, the American flag burning in the fireplace and a picture of Osama Bin Laden on the wall.



The cartoonist, Barry Blitt and the New Yorker editor, David Remnick, have defended the cover as "satire meant to target distortions, misconceptions and prejudices about Obama."

The Obama campaign called it "tasteless and offensive." I agree.

With more than 10 percent of American voters holding the false belief that Senator Obama is actually a Muslim, or worse, that he has sympathies for terrorists, now is not the time, and the New Yorker front cover is not the place to play games with this misconception.

As is so often the case with mainstream assumptions that thrive in an airtight cultural vacuum, the New Yorker assumed that because its urbane, white readership, would immediately get the "joke," everybody else would too. How wrong they were.

Outrage at the insensitivity of the cover is raging across the wide swath of America that

lives outside the universe of Manhattan.

Millions of Americans who have never picked up a copy of the New Yorker understand the unique nuances and potential pitfalls of a presidential campaign featuring the first African American candidate who happens to have a funny sounding name and a seriously powerful and intelligent black wife. It is hard to believe that a supposedly sophisticated and politically astute publication like the New Yorker doesn't get it.

A substantial percentage of white Americans either believe or want to

in this campaign. Senator Obama's opponent, John McCain is being unambiguously hailed at every turn as a courageous patriot who spent five years in a POW camp during the Vietnam War.

The New Yorker cover and its defensive posture in the wake of the widespread objection to it, demonstrate, not only a disrespect for the candidate, his wife, and this most important presidential campaign, but also the need for more diverse and dissenting voices in the editorial boardrooms of American media.

I understand and applaud the important role that humor and satire play in exposing the

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believe the worst about Barack and Michelle as a smokescreen for other historically entrenched fears.

For this small but significant subset of citizens, the cartoon cover confirms those fears. The New Yorker's political and racial tone deafness is especially troubling since the issue of patriotism has been front and center

worst and promoting the best of the American experience. But let me be clear: It is in no way satirical to suggest that Michelle Obama is unpatriotic. It is simply not amusing to infer that somehow Barack Obama has affection for a man who has killed 3,000 Americans.

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

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Letter to the Editor

More than the Military

The opinion piece "Running our Nation into the Ground" by Sherwood Ross (July 16 issue) is another rant about the "military-industrial complex." But that is only a small part of the big picture.

Consider the "political-industrial complex." Its purpose is to collect money from us in the form of taxes, fees and fines and distribute it into the pockets of big private business.

It can take many forms, like the criminal justice-industrial complex, education-industrial complex, military-industrial complex, prison-industrial complex, public safety-industrial complex, public works-industrial complex, transportation-industrial complex and on and on. There is almost no limit!

If you wonder where your money went? Remember the "political-industrial complex."

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