

OPINION

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Defining Moment Barack Obama's nomination



BY RALPH B. EVERETT

As we recognize the nomination of Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill., as the Democratic Party's candidate for President of the United States, we mark the realization of an American ideal.

It has been less than a half-century since African Americans could only dream of participating in our democracy and civic life.

Senator Obama's victory will forever alter the politics of our nation. He is an example of talent, diligence and passion at its finest. We commend his success and share in his triumph.

This defining moment in our history will forever impact our children and their beliefs in their own possibilities to reach their full potential.

As we celebrate this milestone, we must remember where we began. Dr. Martin Luther King's dream is no longer a dream, but it is a symbol of progress. Senator Obama and the American people have breathed life into Dr. King's lofty dream that he first spoke of 45 years ago at the Lincoln Memorial.

"Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy," Dr. King said during the March on Washington, August 28, 1963. The promises of democracy are indeed coming to life and we hope to continue to see them realized by all citizens of all colors. This is a great day for America.

Ralph B. Everett is president and chief executive officer of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

Stop Spinning the Truth

The facts don't lie

BY LOEY POWELL

Everybody spins it. The spokespeople for politicians spin it. The talking heads on news shows spin it. The teacher in the classroom spins it. The preacher spins it. Your last lousy date spins it.

Everybody spins it. The truth, that is. If I say the glass is half full, you'll say it's half empty. If she says the dog ate her homework, he'll say it was the cat. Truth is an illusory thing sometimes—a reality for one, a nightmare for another, a facade for someone else.

How do we know who is telling the truth? How do we know when a candidate is lying to us or telling us like it really is?

Does it have to take investigative journalists to uncover the real story? Or are we going to hold onto the distortions and lies put out initially about one's opponent even when they are clearly shown to be false a week later? (Remember those weapons of mass destruction that led the U.S. into war with Iraq? Not there—yet a significant portion of the public still believes that the presence of WMDs is why we invaded Iraq.)

Statistics—hard, cold numbers—don't lie. They simply expose what is there without commentary. I wish we had more discussion in the coming months leading up to election day about some statistics that paint a troubling picture of our country. I wish we could have some

thoughtful consideration about what might be done to address them.

Here are some stats to chew on:

For all the rich countries in the world for which there is data, the U.S. has the highest infant mortality rate, homicide rate, teenage birth rate, incarceration rate, child poverty rate, overall poverty rate and people living alone.

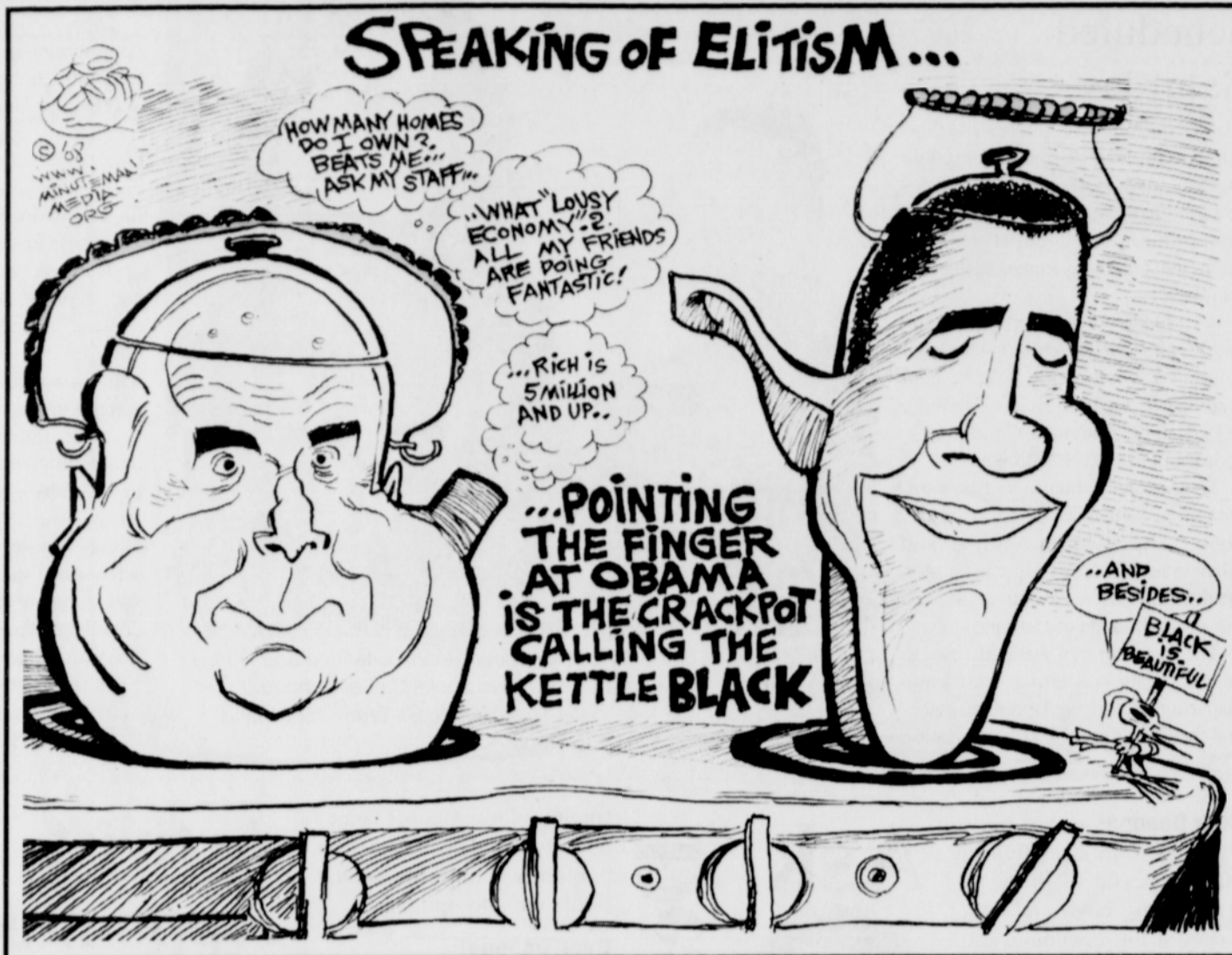
The U.S. has the smallest middle class, the largest wealth gap between the rich and the rest of the population and the lowest voter turnout.

It's time we stopped spinning the truth—like the truth represented in these stats—and start taking a long, hard look in the mirror, admit that there are significant problems confronting our country and that there just might not be easy answers to any of them.

If we stopped spinning enough to regain our balance, we will recognize that we have to work together—across the aisles, across the streets, across neighborhoods, across self-interests—to turn things around positively for those who bear the greatest burden of our dysfunction.

A resource on how to get your questions answered is included in "Our Faith, Our Vote," now available at ucc.org/ourfaithourvote.

Loey Powell is a co-team leader with justice ministries in the United Church of Christ.



What Are College Presidents Thinking?

Lowering the drinking age is a copout

BY JUDY CUSHING

The recent announcement by some 100 college presidents floating the proposal to lower the drinking age from 21 to 18 is nothing short of irresponsibility and foolishness.

It's also a selfish copout that would have horrific implications in our state and throughout the country.

As an Oregon non-profit dedicated to the prevention of alcohol and drug abuse, we agree with Mark Rosenker, the acting chief of the National Transportation Safety Board, who called the idea "a national tragedy to turn back the clock

and jeopardize the lives of more teens."

In the early 70's, a number of states lowered the drinking age and nighttime fatal crashes increased 17 percent in the 18-20 age group.

But in 1984, President Reagan signed the National Minimum Drinking Age Act, which said if states didn't adopt a drinking age of 21, they would see 10 percent of their federal highway funding cut. So now, all 50 states and the District of Columbia have set a drinking age of 21.

There is no doubt that the law has been effective in saving lives. Studies by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has shown that raising the drinking age to 21 from 18 has resulted in 900 fewer traffic fatalities annually involving teens.

And according to recent polls,

the American public overwhelmingly agrees that the current drinking age is just fine.

So instead of saying that the problem of binge drinking on campuses would simply go away by legalizing it—which is ludicrous—college administrators need to finally step up and tackle the problem head on.

It's time for real leadership in formulating campus alcohol policies, instead of dreaming up ways to limit potential liability.

And any such policy should include strengthening efforts in prevention, intervention, and enforcement.

Colleges need to inform and educate students and their parents (which still hold a lot of influence on their kids, not to mention helping with tuition) about the wide range of consequences of binge drinking. There is a very

strong correlation between student drinking and physical and sexual assault, depression, anxiety, and school failure. And as alarming, is alcohol poisoning from binge drinking that can result in death.

And college administrators are going to need to communicate loud and clear that the overriding message to students, parents, trustees and alumni is that alcohol is off limits if you're not 21.

This would be a radical shift in the college culture, no doubt. But cultures change and this one can too.

Make no mistake—partying students drink to get drunk. With this latest move by some college presidents, one wonders what in the world they've been drinking.

Judy Cushing is the president and chief executive officer of Oregon Partnership.

Wake Up Call on HIV Are we still paying attention?

BY MARC MORIAL



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently released a report showing that new HIV infections are 40 percent higher than previously estimated, with the majority of new infections occurring among African Americans.

African Americans make up only 13 percent of the population, yet account for 45 percent of all new HIV infections. The CDC report begs the question: As the face of AIDS in America has turned increasingly black, have our federal government and many of our fellow citizens simply stopped paying attention?

About 600,000 African Americans are now HIV positive and as many as 30,000 are infected each year. According to an analysis by the Black Aids Institute, despite extraordinary improvements in HIV

treatment, AIDS remains the leading cause of death among black women aged 25-34, and the second leading cause of death among black

African Americans make up only 13 percent of the population, yet account for 45 percent of all new HIV infections.

and others are resulting in fewer deaths and greater access to affordable antiretroviral drugs in places like Namibia and Cambodia.

In fact, according to the Black Aids Institute, if Black America were a country, it would rank 16th in the world in the number of people living with HIV.

The Bush Administration should be applauded for its allocation of \$50 billion in new emergency AIDS funding for the global fight against the disease, but I agree with NBLCA president and chief executive officer C. Virginia Fields' contention that the president's focus on combating HIV/AIDS overseas has not been matched with a commitment to fighting the epidemic here at home.

We need better and more targeted prevention efforts. We must also do more to promote needle exchange programs, improve testing in prisons and deal with issues like poverty, homelessness and drug abuse which are known incubators for the disease.

But government can't do this job alone. We must do more in our own communities to change behaviors and end the stigma and homophobia that keep us from reaching out to those in greatest need.

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

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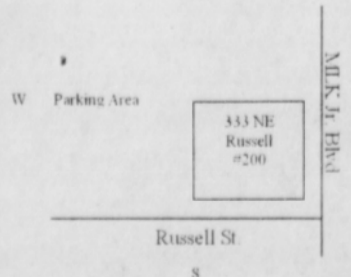
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