

# OPINION

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## College Basketball's Dirty Little Secret

Coaches must be held accountable

BY MARC H. MORIAL

There is a dirty little secret in college basketball. The sad truth lurking just beneath the surface of March Madness is that each year a large number of athletes — mostly black — play their hearts out for coaches whose salaries continue to rise, while graduation rates for their student-athletes remain unacceptably low.

And with only about one percent of college basketball players making it to the NBA each year, I am reminded of the words of William Gates, a struggling student-athlete

featured in the 1994 documentary, *Hoop Dreams*. "People always say to me," he said, "when you get to the NBA, don't forget about me." Well, I should've said

back, "if I don't make it to the NBA, don't you forget about me." I haven't forgotten about William Gates or the thousands of other young men like him who bring fame and fortune to their coaches and schools only to be left with no diploma and no future when the game is over.

What has prompted my latest outrage is the announcement that former UMass and Memphis coach John Calipari has just signed an eight-year, \$31.65 million contract to coach the Uni-

versity of Kentucky basketball team.

Calipari has a history as one of the winningest coaches in college basketball. But he has also been associated with numerous NCAA violations and his

rates of his players?

The college graduation rate for all NCAA basketball players hovers around 45 percent, with black athlete graduation rates about 20 percent lower than the average. I find it troubling

*Shouldn't there be some correlation between a college coach's salary and the graduation rates of his players?*

players have some of the lowest graduation rates in college basketball. The question must be asked: shouldn't there be some correlation between a college coach's salary and the graduation

that colleges and coaches who would not tolerate that kind of mediocrity on the basketball court are all too willing to accept it in the classroom, all for the lure of big money.

According to New America Media, the nation's largest consortium of ethnic news organizations, in the 1990s top caliber athletes individually generated more than \$500,000 for their schools, and the six-year contract the NCAA has with CBS for March Madness is worth \$11 billion.

To its credit, in 2004 the NCAA began to assess penalties for schools having graduation success rates of 60 percent or lower. These sanctions include loss of scholarships and potential restrictions on post-season play.

According to an analysis by the University of Central Florida, 65 percent (37 teams) of this year's men's tournament teams graduated 60 percent or more of their white basketball student ath-

letes, while only 42 percent of schools (26 teams) graduated 60 percent or more of their African American basketball players, resulting in a 23 percent gap. These numbers are a slight improvement over past years, but still not good enough.

It is clear while college basketball is enriching the coffers of major schools and coaches; it is not a guaranteed ticket out of poverty for the players.

Schools should base coaches salaries on graduation rates, and student-athletes need to place more emphasis on their first obligation — getting a good education and earning a college degree.

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

## Guns are Wreaking Havoc Throughout America

No one and no place is safe

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

In the last month, more than 40 people, across the country have lost their lives to gun violence in very high profile cases.

In Binghamton, N.Y., a gunman killed 13 people before shooting himself. In Pittsburgh, a reported white supremacist shot and killed three police officers. In Oakland, Calif., three more officers were shot down in the line of duty.

Sadly, these victims, spread across the country, in places like North Carolina, Florida and Alabama, are just a small percentage of those who will lose their



lives to gun violence this year.

Every day, more than 80 people in this country are killed by a gun while another 200 are shot and injured. No other developed nation has a higher rate of gun violence than America. No one and no place is safe: Senior centers, churches, businesses, schools have all been marred by gun violence.

For years, this country has struggled with ways to combat gun violence. Numerous advocacy groups have worked at the local

level to set up community policing programs to help residents feel safe and to establish youth centers that keep young people off the street and away from guns.

hard, spending millions, to keep the federal government out of the gun industry's business matters.

The NRA claims to be fighting for American's

*No other developed nation has a higher rate of gun violence than America.*

This approach has brought some success, but local programs can only do so much. Federal oversight is needed.

The National Rifle Association, the nation's largest and most powerful gun lobby, has fought long and

constitutional rights. But, during the course of their crusade, they've also fought against proposed legislation that would have extended the waiting period for gun buyers, severely limited the sales of automatic firearms and forced

gun makers to add mandatory child safety locks to all handguns.

Regulation isn't the only answer to our country's gun problem. Indeed, guns don't kill people, people do. However, with so little regulation of the gun industry — a child's teddy bear is more heavily regulated than a hand gun is — it is difficult to make sure firearms don't end up in the wrong hands.

As African Americans, we should be particularly concerned about this issue. We make up about 12 percent of the U.S. population, but account for 26 percent of the country's gun-related deaths; that's about 21 people — black people — killed by guns each day.

President Obama has promised that his administration will not be ruled by special interest organizations like the NRA. Let's take advantage of this opportunity.

Write your U.S. Senators and Congressmen and mention the recent headlines but also write about someone you know personally who lost their life to gun violence. Ask them to start talking about gun regulation and gun control in Washington. Let them know that safe streets are as equally important as jobs and a stable economy.

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

## Black Caucus Endorses Lifting the Embargo on Cuba

Black Caucus has it right

BY WILLIAM REED

A recent Black Caucus delegation visit to Cuba has riled up America's anti-Fidel Castro forces who are against lifting the 47-year-old trade and travel embargoes of that island nation. President Barack Obama proposes lifting travel restrictions on Cuban-Americans, but Black Caucus delegation members say the larger economic blockade of Cuba should also be brought to an end as well.

Over the years, the Black

Caucus has sought trade and travel with the Caribbean country just 90 miles off U.S. shores.

A Congressional Black Caucus 2000 delegation set up a model for the two countries working together. Regarding the subject of underserved medical needs of American inner cities, Castro suggested granting scholarships to low-income youths selected by the Congressional Black Caucus to come to Cuba and study medicine.

The 2009 delegation found over 100 American students — more than half of them

black — enrolled in the program at the Latin American School of Medicine, the prominent part of the Cuban healthcare system and possibly the largest medical school in the world.

The Black Caucus's schol-

ars receive free educations as doctors, nurses and dentists. Rev. Lucius Walker, executive director of the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organization, the

New York-based group that receives and processes the applications for the scholarships, says "We see it as a tremendous opportunity to help provide quality medical care in underserved communities." (According to the

*Cuba's 21 medical faculties all train young people of poor families from throughout the Americas.*

U.S. Census, only about 5 percent of U.S. doctors are black)

At the recent Summit of the Americas, President Obama suggested that the U.S. could learn a lesson of goodwill from Cuba. In 1998, Cuba's government began programs to send large-scale medical assistance to poor populations affected by natural disasters. Each year some 2,000 young people enroll at the school, which operates from a former naval base in a suburb of Havana, as well as hundreds of African, Arab, Asian and European students. The country sends teams of doctors all over the world to respond to natural disasters. Cuban doctors have provided medical services to the underserved in Africa for over a decade. Blacks' views of relations

with Cuba differ vastly from those of most Cuban immigrants and Cuban-Americans.

The former lily-white upper crust of Cuban society wield political clout in Florida and are dead set against normalizing relations with Cuba's government. Consequently most politicians have chosen to adopt Cuban-American views.

From 1960 to 1979, hundreds of thousands of Cubans began new lives in the U.S. Most of these Cuban Americans came were from educated upper and middle classes and form the backbone of the anti-Castro movement. Cuban Americans are America's fifth-largest Hispanic group and the largest Spanish-speaking group of white descent.

Back home, Black Cubans made great advances in the past four decades and are often cited as one of the signal accomplishments of Castro's revolution. The medical programs are an example. Cuban officials report there being 13,000 black physicians among the country's 11 million people, compared to America's 20,000 black doctors in its population of 290 million.

At present, the embargo limits American businesses from conducting business

with Cuban interests. It is the most enduring trade embargo in modern history. Despite the embargo, the U.S. is the fifth largest exporter to Cuba with 5.1 percent of Cuba's imports coming from the U.S.

Polling indicates that the American public is ambivalent about continuing the embargo. A 2007 AP/Ipsos poll indicates that 48 percent of Americans favor continuing the embargo, against 40 percent who favor ending it.

Mainstream media joined anti-Castro hardliners denouncing the Black Caucus position on Cuba, but that view is also opposed by business leaders who claim that freer trade would be good for Cuba and the United States.

Like the Black Caucus, U.S. corporate interests are impatient to do business with Cuba. Oil companies want to drill offshore, farmers to export more rice, vegetables and meat, construction firms to build infrastructure projects. Young Cubans from families exiled to Florida are less radical than their parents and also advocate ending the policy.

William Reed is a national commentator. He is president and chief executive officer of Black Press International.

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