

OPINION

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# Racist Language has no Civil Place

When words go beyond honest disagreement

BY PETER MONTGOMERY

In his first months as president, Barack Obama has taken on some big problems—health care, the economic collapse, Iraq and Afghanistan—so it's no wonder there's heated debate going on. But some of the rhetoric being thrown around has nothing to do with policy. Instead, some of Obama's opponents have moved beyond honest disagreement and used inflammatory racial language to attack the president. Whether their rhetoric stems from their own racism or simply a willingness to inflame and ex-



fanning the flames of racial division could be one way to try to win back some of the white working-class voters who backed Democratic candidates in 2008.

Central to this race-baiting strategy is accusing Obama himself of being a racist, and charging him with advancing policies that are meant to help people of color at the expense of white people, or foreigners at the expense of Americans. This is of course meant to stir racial resentment among working-class white Americans.

Obama "has a deep-seated hatred for white people, or the white culture." Hatred of "white culture"? That's rhetoric more appropriate for an avowed white supremacist like David Duke.

Bill O'Reilly told his viewers that "the left sees white men as a problem," and sees putting women and minorities in power as the solution.

Right-wing blogs still abound with charges that Obama's anti-white racism was reflected in a campaign reference to his own grand-

mother as a "typical white person."

These pundits reach millions of people with their inflammatory rhetoric, and there hasn't been enough pushback from people who believe that our country is better than that. GOP leaders who share the far right's goal of damaging the Obama presidency have not shown much interest in challenging egregious claims about the president and his administration. And many Democratic strategists, having concluded that any discussion of race is bad for the White House, prefer to avoid the conversation alto-

gether.

The election of Barack Obama as president was correctly considered a milestone in our nation's history and evidence of progress in overcoming racial barriers.

But that progress has unleashed a backlash against liberalism and the federal government generally, and against Obama in particular. Some of that backlash is calculated to create or worsen racial resentment, a poison that can be extremely toxic—consider, for instance, recent reports that the Secret Service is scrambling to keep up with a record number

of threats against the president's life.

Many Americans disagree with Obama's policy positions on any number of issues. Vigorous debate about those differences is central to our free society.

But so is the responsibility for all of us, especially those in positions of influence, to speak out against irresponsible and inflammatory rhetoric that threatens to deepen divisions in our society—or worse. Let's hear it.

Peter Montgomery is a senior fellow at People for the American Way.

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plot racial divisions for political gain is irrelevant: Their language is dangerous and irresponsible, and our political leaders have a duty to reject it.

Fomenting racial resentment as a political strategy has a long and dishonorable history in the Republican Party ever since the passage of civil rights legislation and the Nixon campaign's "southern strategy."

Ronald Reagan tapped that strategy when he made a campaign stop in Philadelphia, Miss., site of the notorious murder of three civil rights workers two decades before, to declare his support for "states' rights." Today it's clear that right-wing strategists have calculated that

When Obama was asked about the controversial arrest of Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates Jr. and answered that he thought the behavior of the police had been "stupid" (a comment for which he quickly apologized), Rush Limbaugh declared that Obama was "fanning the flames of race" as "a black president trying to destroy a white policeman." Limbaugh, whose record of racially charged rhetoric is well-documented, has also said recently, "We need segregated buses...In Obama's America, the white kids now get beat up with the black kids cheering."

Fox News' Glenn Beck went a step further to declare that



## Math Counts for Future Jobs Scores show nation at risk

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

In 2001, then President Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act which was intended to, among other things, get the nation's public school students to 100-percent proficiency in reading and math by the year 2014.

Recently released math test scores show that we are not on target to reach that goal. Math is a critical component to so many industries that drive our new economy; if our students—future workers—don't master the subject, the financial health



of our nation is at risk. According to the test results, just 39 percent of the nation's fourth graders and 34 percent of its eighth graders scored at or above the proficiency level on the nationwide math test given this past spring.

There's been very little improvement in student's scores and the goal of reaching proficiency by 2014 is in jeopardy. Additionally, improvement in math proficiency among students has actually slowed.

Arne Duncan, the Secretary of Education, says that this is

the first time in nearly two decades that fourth grade math scores remained the same. More disturbing is the fact that achievement gaps between students and color and their

*In some cases, tutoring should be a mandatory part of school curriculum.*

white counterparts are not closing.

The average black and white eighth grader is separated by about 32 points on the math test; this number represents

about three years' worth of mathematical knowledge.

We have to focus more resources on training and retaining teachers and reducing class sizes. Our educators must be

highly trained and rewarded for their achievements in the classroom. The socio-economic factors that create these disparities in achievement must also be ad-

ressed. Schools in poorer neighborhoods must be given additional resources to ensure they are equipped to properly educate its students. Tutoring must be made available and promoted within the community. In some cases, tutoring should be a mandatory part of school curriculum.

Math is the basis for so many science, technology and business careers; industries that are growing and will soon dominate our economy. If our young people are not proficient in the subject, their ability to secure sustainable employment in the future is at risk.

America has already lost thousands of jobs and billions of dollars as technology and other jobs have been outsourced to countries like India, because of a lack of qualified candidates here at home.

Ensuring our students understand and can successfully apply mathematical concepts is not only important to their education, but also to the health of our country if we are to experience and maintain economic growth.

Greg Mathis is a retired Michigan District Court judge and syndicated television show judge.

## Advancing Education Agenda Starts with Early Learning

BY MARC H. MORIAL

A few weeks ago, the nation's 50 million public school children returned to the classroom. According to the U.S. Department of Education, this included a record 3.8 million kindergartners.

While we should be pleased



that enrollments are up, we cannot ignore the fact that, if current trends persist, many of those eager five-year-olds will never earn a high school diploma.

More than a million American students drop out of high school each year, with graduation rates in some of our

largest cities at less than 40 percent. Instead of being on their way to lives of productive adulthood, too many of our young people, before they even start school, have already been snagged by what Marian Wright Edelman of the Children's Defense Fund calls America's "cradle to prison pipeline."

That insidious pipeline is fueled by a combination of poverty, single-parent families, disparities in health care, underperforming schools, unequal treatment by the criminal justice system, misguided values and the lack of high-quality early childhood learning opportunities.

The U.S. House of Representatives took a big step towards reversing that trend with the

passage of an \$8 billion Early Learning Challenge Fund, designed to raise standards and improve training and oversight of programs serving infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

This new effort, now awaiting Senate approval, is a central component of President Obama's early education agenda. His stimulus plan, for example, included \$4 billion in new money for child care and education programs, including Head Start, which currently

serves about 900,000 preschoolers.

While the new stimulus funds are largely designed to increase the number of children who have access to early childhood education, the Early Learning Challenge Fund is devoted to improving the quality of pre-school programs, which in many cases is uneven and loosely regulated. According to the New York

Times, this lack of structure, standards and accountability often means that "...poor children, even many who have access to government-financed early care or learning programs, tend to enter kindergarten less prepared for school than those with wealthier parents."

States receiving the funding would be required to develop measurable strategies to address essential aspects of program quality, such as child health and safety, the qualifica-

tions of staff, and program effectiveness. The National Urban League applauds this new effort. It is consistent with the education goal of our recently announced Centennial Empowerment Plan which challenges the nation to ensure that every American child is ready for college, ready for work and ready for life by the year 2025. Research shows that quality childhood education for all is essential to achieving that goal.

But all of us, especially young people themselves must do our part. As President Obama said during his back-to-school speech to the nation's students, "at the end of the day, we can have the most dedicated teachers, the most supportive parents, and the best schools in the world—and none of it will matter unless all of you...put in the hard work it takes to succeed."

From pre-school to high school, that's a lesson all our children need to learn.

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

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