

Needed: Serious judicial reforms

By Ada M. Fisher M.D.
SPECIAL TO THE POST

Recently approached for help by a man convicted of a felony at 18, it became clear how crazy and illogical our judicial punishments are.

For passing a few bad checks, not only was he sentenced to a few days in jail with a suspended sentence because he hadn't had a previous violation, but he also lost his right to vote. He has had good jobs with exemplary performance and now in view of 9/11, his background check has cost him a job and future opportunities. If he shoots for a college degree, he won't be able to qualify for student aid. And his right to vote is questionable in some places. He has served his time and hasn't had a violation of any law in

the last ten years, but can't seem to catch a break.

There are instances when the death penalty may seem quite logical, say for a Timothy McVeigh or a Richard Speck (the Boston Strangler) or a Jeffrey Dahmer. But the recent not guilty verdict for the man who admits to killing "a friend" and then dismembering his body brings into question our whole sentencing system. Should Hinkley be allowed to walk free when he is now being described as mentally okay? The unequal sentencing based on the



Fisher

quality of one's lawyer or political clout not one's guilt or innocence also should make us look to bring some equity to our judicial process. Why is it okay to propose executing children or the mentally ill who are guilty of murder when we are willing to let a man walk away who not only admits to a murder but whose dismemberment of the victim's body points to possible premeditation on his guilt?

The three strikes and you're locked up mentality is also clogging up jails for non-violent and in many instances victim-less crimes. When one in eight black males will have some encounter with the criminal justice system including jail, have we just written off their lives? When crack is sen-

tenced differently than cocaine though the same drug is involved, but the kids reflect socio-economic disparity does the punishment fit the crime? When three of eight existing Presidential Candidates and the sitting President admit to problems with substance abuse what does this say to those penalized for doing much less? Should people have to pay forever for their misdeeds? When sexual abuse by predators and priest often goes unpunished but the lives of their victims are destroyed, what is it exactly that is being said? Is there no redemption of sin or must kids wear a scarlet letter forever with no hope of a 2nd Chance? Is it not time to rethink our approaches? Why can't those found

guilty of non-violent and victimless crimes be sentenced to work on farms to decrease our utilization of illegal aliens or staff services for the needy? Why can't community service encompass the needs to rebuild cities or infrastructure repair? And then, why shouldn't those who have done the crime or done restitution, be allowed to start over entitled thereafter to a civil life and an open slate?

ADA M. FISHER M.D. is a physician, licensed teacher for secondary education in mathematics and science, previously elected school board member, and was a Republican candidate for the U.S. Senate. Contact her at P. O. Box 777; Salisbury, NC 28145; telephone (704) 637-6134.

OUR VOICES

Help kids understand consequences of sexuality

This letter is in response to the article printed November 6, written by Lynn Elber, *The Associated Press*.

The author promotes various entertainment TV shows such as "Friends" as an educational opportunity to teach sex education to our children. The author also states that "watching or discussing entertainment shows such as "Friends" with an adult reinforces or clarifies the lessons carried by television such as the use of condoms in and pregnancy.

First, television shows such as "Friends", "Living Single," among other sitcoms promote behaviors such as premarital sex, promiscuity, single parenting, cohabitation and homosexuality to name a few. According to various research these type behaviors produce unhealthy relationships. How is this a positive for our teens with the many social problems that we are currently experiencing?

I asked my students (approximately 150 in high school) who watched TV and discussed sex education with their parents, not one of them stated that this is something that they do. Let's be realistic. According to studies, very few parents watch TV or supervise their children during this activity. The author also stated that children are learning about the proper use of condoms. How effective is this information if this is true? Studies have found that even with education about the use of condoms teens are not using them correctly or consistently. Among black American adolescents, there is an epidemic of teen pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases to include HIV.

According to research one in every four teens have a sexually transmitted disease and over 1 million teens become pregnant a year. Should we as parents consider the use of a sitcom entertainment show to educate or reinforce sex education with our children? Our teens are under tremendous pressures from the media, music, videos and television presentations. We have a responsibility to educate them as parents.

Lastly, God created sexual intimacy to be enjoyed within the safe boundaries of a publicly-declared, life-long commitment of marriage. This promotes healthy relationships.

Before we hastily promote various TV shows we must consider the consequences. It is not the responsibility of the media, government or any other entity to educate our children. We must teach our children to make the right choices and make a difference in this dying world.

Linda Cruz
via e-mail

Disinformation today's enemy of equal rights

By Sherman N. Miller
SPECIAL TO THE POST

U.S. civil rights struggles are symbolized as big street demonstrations by African Americans over some injustice perpetrated against them by the economic mainstream. However, one must ask, "Is this yesteryear street demonstration strategy still valid today?"

The African American civil rights struggle has morphed into a mainstream equal rights quest. On Nov. 26, Kevin Rothstein of the Boston Herald reported on Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney's assessment on where today's civil rights effort should be focused. "One of the real civil rights issues of our day, if not the pre-eminent issue of our day, is how to close the achievement gap based on race and ethnicity in America in education," Romney said.

The achievement gap battle is not your stereotypic civil rights struggle but an equal rights battle that will require an expanded set of tools to win. Clearly, education is a conduit to gaining entrance into the economic mainstream and without a quality education; you will find yourself simply left behind. Today, the rise in the nonwhite population now makes it imperative that all American citizens regardless of race and ethnicity be included in the bounty of this great nation for it to remain competitive in the world marketplace and militarily strong. Disenfranchised

groups cannot be allowed to become beachheads for foreign terrorists to dupe in their efforts to implode this nation by exploiting some sort of internal strife.

President George Bush's "No Child Left Behind Act" symbolizes the development of all racial and ethnic group people by making accountability for all of American children's educations become a national priority. This act is forcing the closure of the chasm between today's form of public school racial desegregation (intra-school building racial segregation - White children on college preparatory tracks and minority students taking general or special education tracks) and racial integration (wanting to teach and encourage minority children to reach their full potential).

Although racial desegregation was ballyhooed as a way to improve public school education for minority group children, white flight has re-segregated many of these schools into overwhelming minority group student enclaves. The impact of White flight on dashing the hopes for integrated public schools is appreciated in an Oct. 16 Chicago Tribune article written by Lori Olszewski entitled, "Expert says bias still in schools." Olszewski reported on the feelings of U.S. District Judge Charles P. Kocaras where she writes, "Kocaras said it would be impossible to integrate the schools now that white students make up less than 10 percent of the district's

enrollment."

However, one of the tough equal rights issues for today's civil rights activists is what is the honest data on minority group children's performance. Pam Easton, Associated Press, in a Sept. 8 article entitled, "Definition of Dropout Disputed," offers a disquieting look at data reported to the general public. "According to TEA (Texas Education Agency), the state's overall dropout rate for 2001-2002 in grades 9-12 was 1.3 percent or 15,117 students, down 0.1 percent from a year earlier. (Maria Robledo Motecel, San Antonio-based director of the Intercultural Development Research Association) Motecel's numbers show in 2001-2002 the dropout rate was 39 percent, or 143,175 Texas students."

Since education is a local issue, it appeared that this new equal rights struggle must be fought at the local level. The first issue is truly defining the problem with credible data. Nevertheless, finding credible data is not always an easy exercise. The city of Wilmington, Del., public school students feed into four New Castle County metropolitan public school districts but it is difficult to know what percent of the city public schools entering the 9th grade graduate four years later from their respective high schools.

What is very disturbing is the ability to make bad data look good. Norman Lockman, associate editor of the editorial page of the

News Journal in Wilmington, Del., puts things into perspective. In his October 27, 2003 column appearing in *The Reporter* (a Wisconsin newspaper) entitled, "Commentary: Bogus basic diploma shunts aside failing kids," Lockman makes the case that a new Delaware three diploma system makes a mockery of Delawareans' common sense. He allows the powerful voice of Dr. Allen L. Sessoms, the new president of Delaware State University, to point out the silliness in giving some poor performing students a certificate of attendance versus a real high school diploma.

"...This is more than a dodge. It is outrageous," Sessoms said. "... It is nothing more than an effort to flush poorly performing kids out of the system and out of their hair," Sessoms continued: "They clearly don't care if these kids, most of whom are minorities, get jobs or educational opportunities. This basic certificate isn't even a GED (General Equivalency Diploma) diploma. It means nothing and it's an insult."

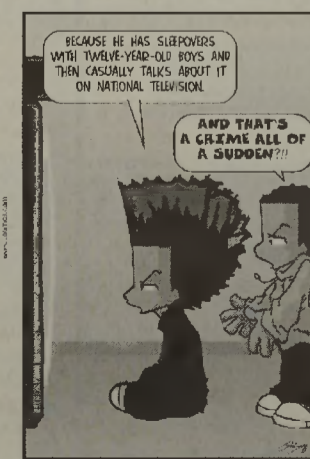
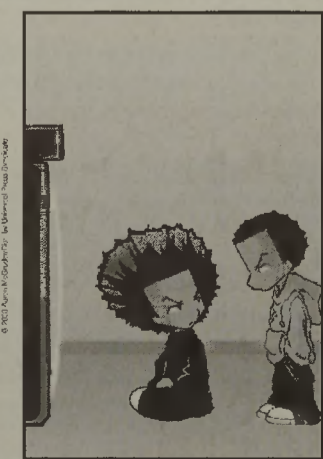
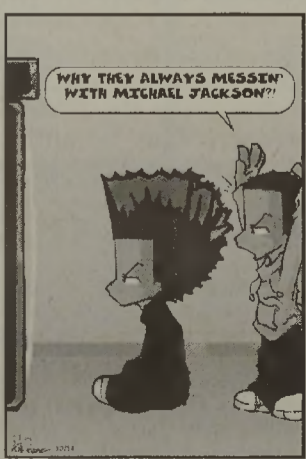
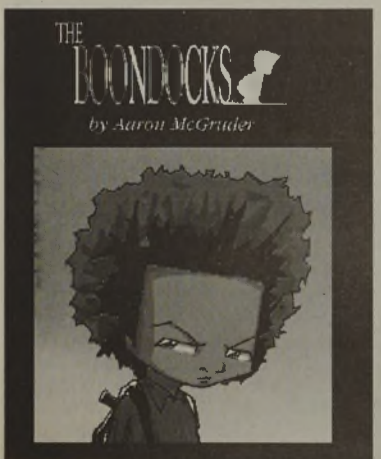
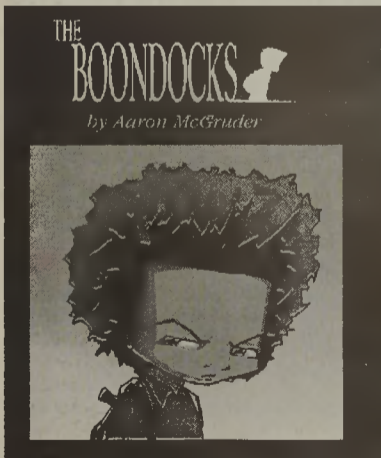
If one cannot get direct answers, one has the potential to use inferential techniques to gain an assessment of the truth. Therefore, the 2000 U.S. Census data gave some insight on what desegregated metropolitan public schools were doing with children from the Northeast Section of the poorest sections. According

to the U.S. Census, 25.6 percent of the people in the city of Wilmington who are 18 years old and older do not have a high school diploma. However, in census tracks 7 and 8 combined (Northeast Wilmington) for young people in the age range 18 to 24, the data indicate that 63 percent of people don't have a high school diploma.

This high non-graduation rate is particularly disturbing when you consider Caroline Wolf Harlow's special report for the Bureau of Justice Statistics, revised on April 15 entitled, "Education and Correctional Population." She writes, "Young State inmates were more likely than older inmates to have failed to complete high school or its equivalent. Over half of 24 or younger had not completed the 12th grade or the GED (52 percent), while just over a third of those 35 or older did not have a high school diploma or GED..."

What is suggestive from the data above is the failure to get a high school diploma significantly increases one's chances of landing in jail. It also highlights the ability of white-collar perpetrators to exploit aggregated data to mask real problems thereby legitimating unrealistic reports. Hence, the Urban League and NAACP must help their local branches combat today's equal rights enemies of misinformation and disinformation.

SHERMAN MILLER is a writer and educator from Wilmington, Del.



Connect with The Post

Send letters to The Charlotte Post, P.O. Box 30144 Charlotte, NC 28230 or e-mail editorial@thecharlottepost.com.

We edit for grammar, clarity and space where necessary. Include your name and daytime phone number.

Letters and photos will not be returned by mail unless accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.