

OUR VIEW

Sorry Satire

"We've had a long history here at *The Nation* of publishing what many readers, editors, contributors, staff members considered sexist, or just generally offensive, cartoons, satirical images and pictures," *Nation* editor and publisher Katrina Van Den Heuvel says at the beginning of her commentary column on Wednesday.

"To some, it was satire. To others, it was offensive and malicious," Van Den Heuvel says in the beginning of her commentary Wednesday on thenation.com. "The *New Yorker's* cover, 'Politics of Fear,' shows Barack Obama dressed as a Muslim fist-bumping his gun-toting wife. *New Yorker* Editor David Remnick defended his magazine's decision to run the controversial cartoon, explaining that 'the intent of the cover is to satirize the vicious and racist attacks and rumors and misconceptions about the Obamas that have been floating around in the blogosphere and are reflected in public opinion polls. What we set out to do was to throw all these images together, which are all over the top and to shine a kind of harsh light on them, to satirize them. That's part of what we do.' Or, as comedian Bill Maher observed, 'If you can't do irony on the cover of *The New Yorker*, where can you?' I tend to agree."

We, at the *Sentinel-Voice*, agree *The New Yorker's* brass has every right to use satire to create compelling images that will drive pick up. But we disagree about the effectiveness of this particular image.

We have no reason to question Heuvel's sincerity or veracity when she says, "The intent of the cover is to satirize the vicious and racist attacks and rumors and misconceptions about the Obamas that have been floating around in the blogosphere and are reflected in public opinion polls."

There's every reason to ask more pertinent questions, such as why now; why attack viciously off-base distortions about the Obama family by satirizing them?

Truth be told, the media-fueled fallout over controversy is probably more entertaining than satirical image that birthed it. Within hours, the blogosphere lit up with angry rebuttals, which were then followed by denunciations of the angry rebuttals. In turn, the denunciations got denounced. The Obama campaign chose not to make a huge issue of it. In a statement, Obama spokesman Bill Burton said: "The *New Yorker* may think, as one of their staff explained to us, that their cover is a satirical lampoon of the caricature Sen. Obama's right-wing critics have tried to create. But most readers will see it as tasteless and offensive. And we agree."

This may well be true. Readers of the *New Yorker* should be smart enough to know what the editors were thinking. The danger lies with those unfamiliar with the vaunted magazine, the large swath of readers for whom this cover image will provide fodder to dislike the Obamas. It will confirm their worst fears: that he is a Muslim (his middle name is Hussein, after all); that Michelle Obama is an America-hating Black Panther in disguise; that they're both Al-Qaeda sympathizers.

Many might argue that the use of satire is an effective tool, that it adds levity to tense situations. This can be true. But one must be careful with satire, and there should be careful consideration of satirizing something that's true (Presidents Bush and Clinton have been relentlessly satirized for their weaknesses; Bush's language struggles, Clinton's fondness for women). In the *New Yorker-Obamas* case, the magazine satirized caricatures that have nothing to do with the actual people.

The reaction of cartoonists across the country has been mixed. Some love it. Others think it went too far, that it gives Republican an election plank. Still others think some sort of explanation was needed. Mike Luckovich, editorial cartoonist at the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, has a reasoned take:

"This is a fairly common thing with editorial cartoons: your symbolism overwhelms the satire, and that is when people react the strongest. As cartoonists, we have to be careful that we're saying the correct thing. It's like Dick Cheney shooting his buddy in the face: when the gun goes in the wrong direction, it can really cause some pain."



Let's not go there, Obama

By Harry C. Alford
Special to *Sentinel-Voice*

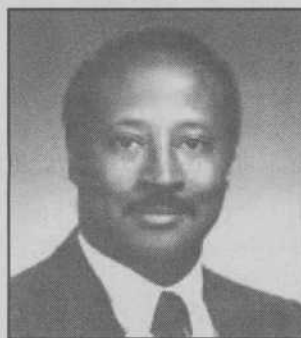
There he was on national television and on Father's Day berating and denigrating African-American males. It wasn't Bill O'Reilly, Rush Limbaugh or that vile Bernie Goldberg, it was a presidential candidate trying to appeal to White voters at the expense of the image and reputation of millions of Black men who live with their children and love them so.

He picked a stereotype that Black males abandoned their families — as if this isn't a concern amongst all ethnicities. The single-mother crowd is growing amongst all groups. Teenage pregnancy is at an all-time high for all groups not just African-Americans.

"The broken Black family" or "matriarchal Black family" was an attempted self-fulfilling prophecy. It started back in the 1960s. I was at the University of Wisconsin and our psychology books were talking about this. My friends and I couldn't understand it as none of us experienced "the broken Black family".

We all had fathers and they raised us along with our mothers. But soon after that you could see the external factors setting in.

The Vietnam War and the military draft were very anti-Black family. We would drive down to Southside Chicago and go into nightclubs



HARRY C. ALFORD

like the Guys and Gals on Halsted St. There would be a noticeable designated section of sisters who were without male escorts. Their husbands, fiancés or boyfriends had been drafted and were either in Vietnam or about to go. They would sit there en masse. They would dance, but that was it.

More than a few were pregnant. It was so sad and the fact that many of them would lose their man to this evil war was, indeed, tragic.

That was the beginning of the full, government-sponsored assault on the Black family. During the Vietnam War, the military draft was a Black male killer.

In addition to a rigged draft that put our Black men in harms way at great disproportional numbers, the drug importation from Southeast Asia began. As depicted in the movie, "American Gangster," the government sponsored much of the heroin that was invading our cities. Later, during the Iran Contra Scandal we found that the government introduced crack

cocaine into our communities at an overwhelming rate. This invasion was coupled with gun running. How in the world did so many AK-47's come into our communities? We all know how and why. It was the greatest social intervention upon a distinct group of people in history.

Psychological trauma of our veterans (those who survived our jive wars); drug trade being one of the few alternatives to income; sentencing guidelines that would send Blacks with crack to prison ten times longer than a White with powder cocaine; the development of the Prison Industrial Complex built to house more and more Black males; neighborhood gang wars sponsored by the gun runners and major drug traffickers; school systems that rendered our children semi-literate and incapable of making an honest living and supporting a family are

among a few of the major assaults on our community. They want to break us. They won't break us, but we do have to bend once in a while.

So, after hearing Sen. Barack Obama say Black men are Missing in Action (MIA) or Absent without Leave (AWOL) and need to "man up," it makes me enraged. I understand what Rev. Jesse Jackson was saying a few days ago. I feel his pain!

The fact is, the number one killer of Black males 18 — 30 is murder. They aren't MIA; they are KIA (killed in action). No, they aren't AWOL. They are POW (prisoners of war).

It is, indeed, a war, and I suggest Sen. Obama read the book "Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys" by his fellow Chicagoan Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu. Senator, you need a little edu-
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