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OPINION

More Than One Dummy

BY ROGER E. HERNANDEZ

Some people in upscale Madison, N.J., were screaming so loudly that they couldn't hear their neighbors. Worse, they couldn't even hear themselves.

The fight was over a Halloween display that Cheryl and David Maines put up outside their home that included a hanging figure wearing jeans, with its torso clad in a black shirt crisscrossed by ropes that looked like a slave's chains of bondage and a black (though featureless) face.

To neighbor Millie Hazlewood, it looked like a depiction of a lynching. She asked the Maineses to take the effigy down, but they refused. She asked the police to force them to take it down, and they refused too.

After Mayor Ellwood Kerkeslager asked them, the Maineses brought the effigy inside. They also took down all the other Halloween decorations and put up a sign (misspelling their neighbor's name and one other word) that read, "Thanks to the assistance of Mille Hazelwood & friends ... Halloween & Christmas will no longer be celebrated here!"

Like Stephen Stills sang 40 years ago,

"Nobody's right if everybody's wrong."

Did the neighbor have cause to feel distress? Sure. Despite the Maineses' insistence that it was just a Halloween decoration, one does not need to be black and have ancestors who were lynched to look at the figure and think of a black man hanging from a tree. Deliberate or not, that's what the figure evokes; denying it's legitimate to see it that way, as some defenders of the Maineses have done, is disingenuous.

Still, Millie Hazlewood overreacted by calling the cops. What the Maineses did has been likened to the hanging of a noose on the office door of a black professor at Columbia University, an incident that has New York lawmakers talking about stiffer penalties for using a noose to harass somebody. But the two cases have important differences.

At Columbia, an individual was singled out for harassment, and the offending symbol was placed on property that does not belong to the racist hooligan who left it there. In Madison, no person in particular was singled out, and the Maineses hung the noose from the chimney of their own house.

So even if the effigy was meant as some sort of sick statement (which the Maineses deny), it would have been a sick *political* statement, and therefore protected by the First Amendment. The local cops and county prosecutor did the right thing refusing to order the Maineses to remove it.

It became a contest about virtuous victimhood. Who can boast of the more righteous grievance, poor and oppressed "minorities" like Hazlewood, offended by yet another display of white racist supremacy but not too offended by the spectacle of American policemen telling an American citizen his political views are illegal? Or poor and oppressed whites like the Maineses, helplessly forced by political correctness to EVEN CANCEL CHRISTMAS!?

In the end, things turned out OK. The dummy at the center of the controversy got taken down -- not because police trampled the Maineses' right of free speech, but because the Maineses couldn't take it when others used theirs. ■

— Roger Hernandez is a syndicated columnist and writer-in-residence at New Jersey Institute of Technology.

The Children's Crusade -- Socializing Medicine

BY RICH LOWRY

Democrats are altogether too modest in the claims they make for the SCHIP children's health-insurance program. They talk only about what it does to cover needy families with uninsured kids, but never about all the wondrous things it can do for middle-class families with their own private insurance.

President Bush vetoed the Democratic re-authorization of the bill as too profligate. The House upheld his veto, but not without Democrats gleefully portraying the president as an enemy of children's health.

At bottom, the argument is about whether the government will extend public coverage further up the income scale -- including to families already with their own insurance -- in a push toward national health insurance. All children below the poverty line (\$20,650 for a family of four) are eligible for Medicaid. So the argument over SCHIP is not about "poor kids." Congress enacted the program in 1997 to help cover kids whose families aren't poor, but still can't afford insurance, basically in the income range of up to 200 percent of the

poverty line.

The Congressional Budget Office says that the rate of uninsured among these kids fell from 22.5 percent in 1996 to 16.9 percent in 2005. Many of these children, if uninsured, would get publicly funded health care anyway, through public clinics and the like. For them, SCHIP makes sense.

The problem is that, as families earn more, they are more likely to have private insurance, and SCHIP lures them from private insurance onto government insurance. The CBO estimates that for every 100 children enrolled in SCHIP, 50 children are dropped off private coverage.

The technical term for this phenomenon is "crowding out"; the nontechnical term is "socializing medicine." Since the federal government picks up two-thirds of the tab for state-administered SCHIP programs, states have an incentive to expand coverage -- for every \$1 they spend on the benefit, the feds pony up \$3.

And expand they have. Fifteen states cover kids and families above 200 percent of the poverty level. New Jersey covers kids up to 350 percent of the poverty level. New York wants to go to 400 percent. By throw-

ing an additional \$35 billion at the program throughout the next five years, the Democratic bill guarantees the program will grow well beyond its original purpose of insuring "near-poor" kids.

Of children in families between 200 percent and 300 percent of poverty, only 9.8 percent were uninsured in 2005. There are less-sweeping means -- like tax credits -- to help these families get coverage in the private health-insurance market.

Meanwhile, there are 5.5 million poor or near-poor kids -- roughly 60 percent of all uninsured kids -- who are eligible for public insurance now, but aren't enrolled. These kids are likelier to come from single-parent or no-parent families and families where all parents are unemployed. The focus should be on them rather than families with the wherewithal to fend for themselves.

Few things are as destructive of good public policy as outraged invocations of the "children." Democrats probably will benefit politically from their ploy on SCHIP, and advance a goal that goes far beyond low-income kids. ■

— Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review.

MOMENTS IN TIME

- On Nov. 5, 1994, George Foreman, age 45, becomes boxing's oldest heavyweight champion when he defeats 26-year-old Michael Moorer in the 10th round of their WBA fight in Las Vegas. Foreman dedicated his upset win to "all my buddies in the nursing homes and all the guys in jail."

- On Nov. 6, 1860, Abraham Lincoln is elected the 16th president of the United States over a deeply divided Democratic Party, becoming the first Republican to win the presidency.

- On Nov. 7, 1895, physicist William Conrad Rontgen becomes the first person to observe X-rays in the lab. It was initially

believed that X-rays were harmless to skin, until an assistant who had worked extensively with X-rays and radiation died of skin cancer.

- On Nov. 7, 1940, only four months after its completion, the Tacoma Narrows Bridge, also known as "Galloping Gertie" for its tendency to undulate in the wind, suffers a spectacular collapse. Due to the vertical dipping and weaving, tourists had treated the bridge as a roller-coaster ride.

- On Nov. 9, 1961, record-store manager Brian Epstein goes to a Liverpool nightclub called the Cavern to hear the Beatles. Two months later, he became their manager and

helped them land their first record deal.

- On Nov. 10, 1925, actor Richard Burton is born Richard Jenkins, the 12th of 13 children of a South Wales coal miner. He received a strong musical education from a singing teacher named Philip Burton and won a scholarship to Oxford. In gratitude, he later adopted his former teacher's last name as his stage name.

- On Nov. 11, 1918, at the 11th hour on the 11th day of the 11th month, World War I ends. The "War to End All Wars" left 9 million soldiers dead and 21 million wounded. At least 5 million civilians died from disease, starvation or exposure. ■