

*CRIBB<S>NOTE - March 2, 2008*

Can America be saved? Do we even know we are in trouble? Depending on where you are and what you are doing, life in America may appear wonderful and lovely or desperate and disastrous. But appearances can be deceiving.

Recently, Michelle Obama, wife of Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama, was quoted, "For the first time in my adult lifetime I am really proud of my country." That excerpt from her complete statement made its way around the nation with numerous commentaries, judgments, and distortions. Her words were taken out of context to suggest she was slamming America.

Ms. Obama was talking about hope and a spirit of change that is "uniting farmers in Iowa with urban residents on the Southside of Chicago." She was making a point about her own frustration and disappointment with politics that divide and leave people with feelings of despair. She also said, "I've seen people who are hungry to be unified around some basic common issues, and it makes me proud."

That is very different from what has been reported. Her comment was twisted into something that was created by the minds of opinion makers for the American consumer to cast a shadow over her and her husband.

Last year, another one of her statements was used to falsely accuse her of criticizing the Clintons. While talking about her husband, Ms. Obama said, "One of the most important things that we need to know about the next President of the United States is, is he somebody that shares our values? Is he somebody that respects family? Is (he) a good and decent person? So our view was that, if you can't run your own house, you certainly can't run the White House."

That's all that was broadcast. Media personalities ran with that quip as if that was all she said, and proceeded to design a fictionalized scenario that suggested a barb leveled against Bill and Hillary Clinton.

On that occasion, Ms. Obama was talking about her own family and the roles she and her husband play in the lives of their children during the campaign. She went on to say, "So, we've adjusted our schedules to make sure that our girls are first, so while he's traveling around, I do day trips. That means I get up in the morning, I get the girls ready, I get them off, I go and do trips, I'm home before bedtime."

This week the focus on Cuba continued a long established narrative about Fidel Castro and his brother, Raul. While listening to a story about the change in leadership there, my son turned to me and asked, "What is a dictator?" For many of us, 'dictator' is synonymous with President of that island nation since 1959. But, what do we really know about Cuba?

Are we told about the two highest priorities in that country: first, the care and welfare of children and second, participatory democracy? While we hear a lot about the National Assembly and Castro's 49 year reign, do we also know that governance and the true power rests with what is called the "Committee for the Defense of the Revolution," local community groups set up in every neighborhood?

Do we know that Cuba is a dynamic country of 11 million people; an estimated 7 million reside in Havana; and, the country is constantly changing based on social, economic, and political conditions and needs? And, do we know about the economic

boycott imposed by our government that prevents food and medicine from going to the people of that country?

What is the point? We see and know what is presented to us. Too often we believe what others tell us...even about ourselves. We accept the facts as they are given. Beyond the facts however is the truth. That is not always so easy to see. We frame our positions and attitudes on what we read, hear, and are led to believe. Politicians and pundits lie on the one hand, and omit the truth on the other hand. We are left to figure out what is going on.

We are in trouble, but many of us don't know it or believe it. We have been distracted by trivia while serious conditions go unreported. As one religious leader in Cuba put it, "We aren't in heaven and we're not in hell. We are somewhere in between." What do you do when you don't know you are blind? How can we be saved?