

Letters@Nypost.Com – Re: High School For Righteous Ignorance

June 5, 2006 -- If you want an example of the state of education at some city schools, look no further than the Law, Government and Community Service HS in Queens. Students from the school recently toured sites in Lower Manhattan where slavery-related events took place. Then they proceeded to post home-made signs calling attention the sites. Oops. That's against the law. As most New Yorkers know, such signs often wind up on the ground, adding to the litter. So the Alliance for Downtown New York took them down and notified the group. No one's against reminding folks of America's history of slavery. But you'd think kids at a high school specializing in law would check first to see if posting signs is legal. Fat chance. Heck, these kids not only broke the law, they later insisted on their "right" to do so. "Who gave the Downtown Alliance the right to touch our signs?" asked senior Jennifer Caroccio. Umm, maybe the law? Clearly, the school isn't doing its job. Or maybe should change its name. How about calling it the High School for Ignorance and Law-Breaking?

Response to the New York Post

On June 5, 2006 an editorial in the *New York Post* criticized Law, Government and Community Service Magnet High School as a "High School For Righteous Ignorance." This letter is from the Advanced Placement Government and Politics class that organized the New York Slavery Historical Walking Tour. It is also signed by our teacher, Michael Pezone, and Alan Singer, a curriculum consultant on the project who is a Professor at Hofstra University. We are disturbed by your editorial for a number of reasons.

Our field trip was not designed or intended as an act of civil disobedience. We apologize if any city ordinance was violated. We are committed to working within the law to get permanent historical markers erected commemorating the history of slavery in downtown Manhattan.

We plan to meet, and hopefully to work with, the Downtown Alliance and any other interested parties in a productive manner. We feel the hostility and name-calling in your editorial is counterproductive.

It was inappropriate for the *New York Post* to mock the students and the school. The students at Law, Government and Community Service Magnet High School are African American, Caribbean and Hispanic. We question whether your editorial would have had a similar mocking tone if the students were from a suburban school.

The editorial mischaracterized a statement by one of our classmates. Her comment was not meant to question the law, but rather to call into question the assumption of law enforcement responsibilities by the Downtown Alliance. Students gave extended interviews and only brief sound-bytes were reported in the press and on television. Responsible journalists would have followed up to find out what was really said before publishing a response.

The editorial shifts attention away from the issue of an accurate portrayal of history. You wrote that "No one's against reminding folks of America's history of slavery." If that were the case, why are there no markers in the downtown area at South Street Seaport, at the Wall Street Slave Market, or at the Wall Street offices of Citibank, one of whose founders was a financier involved in the slave trade to Cuba?

We don't believe anyone should be faulted for making an incorrect assumption about the law concerning the hanging of temporary posters. Any resident or visitor to the city sees posters hanging all over. Last election cycle, Mayor Michael Bloomberg had campaign posters hanging all around the city. We believe the law is used selectively as a device to censor unwanted messages. Should Mayor Bloomberg and other elected officials be mocked for ignoring the law?

We are proud to have engaged in an activity that has helped to educate many New Yorkers about a crucial part of the city's history. Education should be more than passive reception of knowledge. We believe that students should be actively engaged as citizens, and we are happy to say that our teachers and our school encourage us to do so.

Why does the *New York Post* want to discourage high school students who are trying to make a difference?

Students, Advanced Placement Government and Politics, Law, Government and Community Service
Magnet High School
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