

OUR VIEW

Our History

Back to the future. It's more than the title of a popular movies series from the '80s, it's also a guide for Black people. We can look back to antebellum times and admire the resilience of our ancestors as they were stolen and deposited in a foreign land and forced to work the land to build their new homeland, a place called America.

We can reflect on the hell that was chattel slavery and the inhumanities and indignities faced by Black men and Black women and Black children, the brutality, the rape, the splitting up of families, of husbands and wives, parents and children, siblings. Yet we made it through.

We can wonder at our perseverance through Jim Crow, through lynchings, through hangings, through torchings, through the wholesale destruction of entire towns (Rosewood) and, in later years, through water hoses and vicious dogs, through spit and invective, through unjust civil laws and unequal educational and social opportunities.

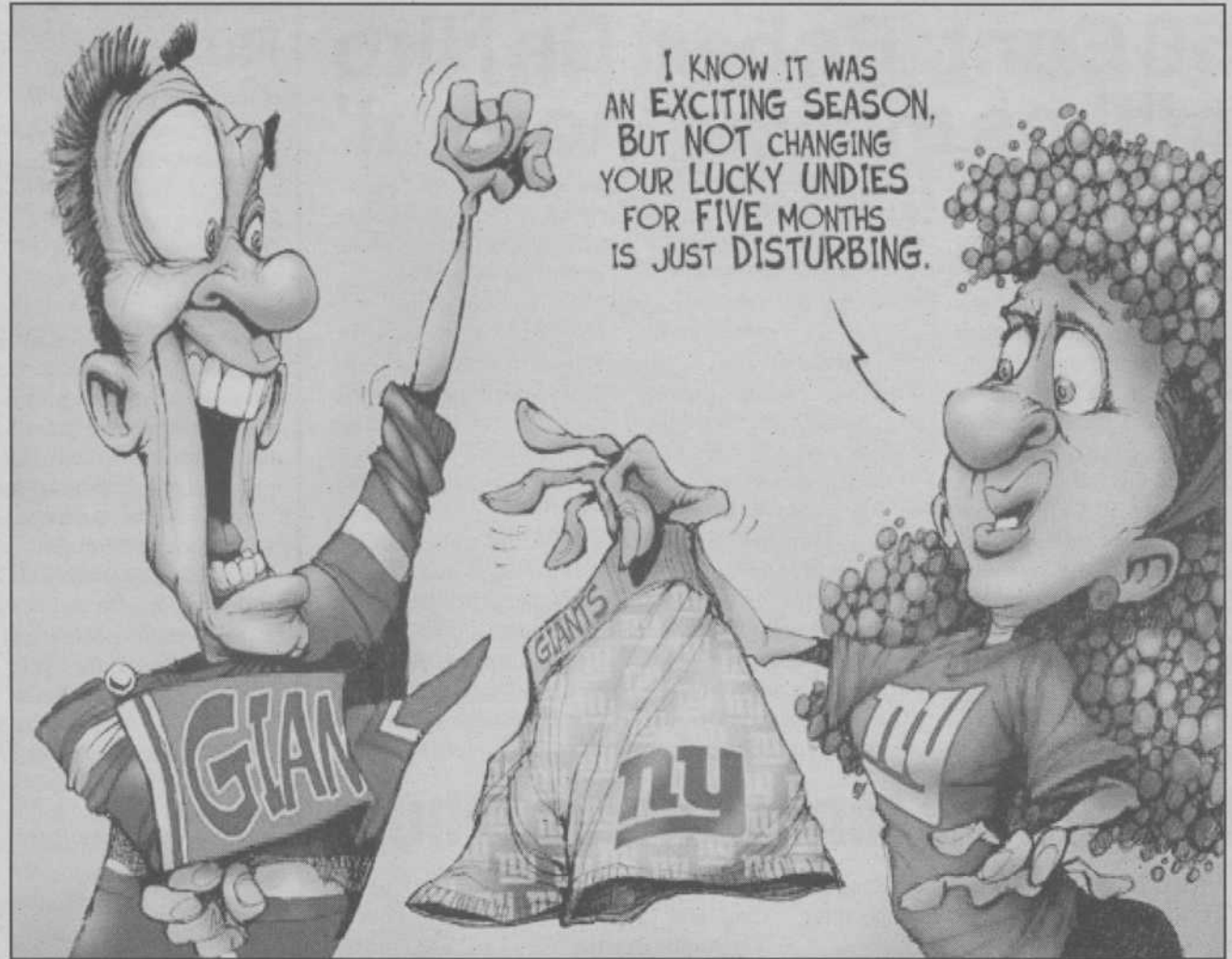
We made history just by being here. So it's not wrong for us to get a little miffed when we hear Illinois Senator and Democratic presidential candidate downplay his status as America's first bonafide Black presidential candidate. By doing so, he downplays his historical run. He is there because of those who've come before him and, thankfully, he acknowledges this. Obama is probably feeling what W.E.B. DuBois described in one of his most notable quotes: "One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."

It's as important for Obama, and for us, to recognize, acknowledge and celebrate his heritage in the now, as it is to honor the legion of Black inventors who created many of the creature comforts we now enjoy. It's as important to validate Obama's contribution to our history as it is to venerate DuBois and Martin Luther King Jr., Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X, Nat Turner and Fannie Lou Hamer, L. Douglas Wilder and Mary McLeod Bethune, Roy Wilkins and Maya Angelou.

DuBois' opponent, Booker T. Washington once said, "At the bottom of education, at the bottom of politics, even at the bottom of religion, there must be for our race economic independence." Madame C. J. Walker's feat as Black America's first millionaire and its foremost entrepreneur in 1910 is to be celebrated. As is Oprah Winfrey and Robert Johnson becoming our first billionaires. The Black middle class continues to grow. Black America's economic might will soon top \$1 trillion. Every year, dozens of Blacks become millionaires by virtue of their drafting into professional sports leagues; others gain financial strength through signing record deals. Blacks open more businesses than any other race. We've got a long way to go, but we're not sitting idle.

Black history should be a daily pursuit. One month, one year, 100 years. Our contributions to America—let alone the world—couldn't be touched upon in this amount of time. If we're to continue making the tremendous strides we have and to continue climbing back from the huge deficit and disadvantage wrought by slavery, we're going to have to do so with the mindset of making history. That is, where we're weak, we must become strong. Where we're strong, we must become stronger. Obama's candidacy represents that hope, that possibility. Condoleezza Rice represents that possibility. The critical acclaim of HBO's "The Wire" represents that possibility. Robert Johnson's ownership of the Charlotte Hornets represents that possibility. There are examples ad nauseum on the macro level. But let's bring it back home.

Las Vegas and Clark County can represent that possibility. There's a growing mass of Black professionals, social architects and activists who are intelligent, engaged and working hard to improve the plight of our people. To make sure we're represented at the highest levels of the gaming industry, to make sure we're getting contracts, to fight against civil injustices, to help our students achieve (role modeling and providing money for college). Each and every day, we should make positive Black history. That is your charge. Do you accept it?



Katrina recourse is to vote

By Harry C. Alford
Special to Sentinel-Voice

It all seemed pretty simple. It was evident to all that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had practiced malfeasance in the stewardship of levees in Mississippi and Louisiana.

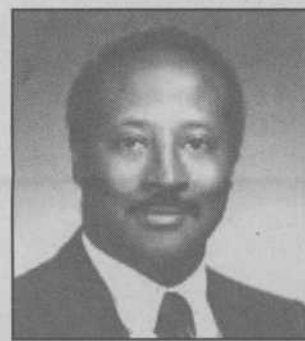
They had done it since its beginning in 1928, and up to the roar of Katrina, they had neglected their duties in establishing and updating a levee system that would withstand the harshest hurricanes and floods.

So, there they were, this team of litigators representing over 489,000 Katrina victims in a class-action lawsuit against the federal government and its Corps of Engineers Division.

The judge was sympathetic. Clearly, he stated, the federal government neglected its duty and was at fault. Millions of people suffered because of the malfeasance.

However, he went on, the law as it was written in 1928 exempts them (federal government, Corps of Engineers, etc.) from damages, and the plaintiffs cannot be awarded a penny. That's the way it goes. If you want to improve this condition, you need to elect a president who will order the administration to conduct itself in a responsible manner and adequately protect its citizens.

This doesn't shock me. It is the same legal reasoning



HARRY C. ALFORD

when it comes to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. It is the duty of the U.S. Attorney General to enforce this law. Any discrimination in the business practices of a federal agency or an entity receiving federal funding or benefiting from federal regulation must be dealt with by the U.S. Attorney General's office.

A citizen or a collective group cannot sue to enforce it. If you don't like what the Attorney General is doing, then you need to replace him. The logical way to do that is to have our president fire him, or we fire the president through the electoral process.

Thus, we have a harsh reality. We must get totally involved in the political process if we are to hold the federal government accountable. The only big chance we get comes every four years, and we need to prepare for it in a very open and complete way. As we elect a president and he assembles his administration, we must be certain that we have very competent people working in that ad-

ministration, and the president himself must have the strength and commitment to enforce all civil rights laws and to ensure that the people are protected.

So far, in this upcoming presidential election, has anyone brought up the enforcement of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act or the mandate that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers must become accountable and ensure excellence in their duty? We overlook it and let them off the hook.

It reminds me of when the state of California was shutting down their minority business programs during the 1990s — even those that were receiving federal money. We asked the Clinton Administration to step in and force them to reopen the diversity programs for highway construction. They sent their boy out there to face Caltrans and make them back

down.

As a *Los Angeles Times* reporter informed me, it was very embarrassing to see a federal official get verbally whipped by a state official who conditionally receives federal money. In the end it was apparent. We did not have a president who had the resolve to enforce Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, and Californians of color have been suffering ever since. I guess Clinton said to himself, "So what, they still love me. Yes, the poor Coloreds do."

Until we and all Americans get the resolve to hold a president accountable to all the people, we will have more Katrina disasters. There will be more wholesale and illegal discrimination by state and local governments.

Our population will not be proportional to our share of the economy. Mandated services afforded to the general

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Contributing Writers: Shirley Savage, Lés Pierres Streater, Kanika Vann

Ramon Savoy, Publisher, Editor-in-Chief
Parker Philpot, Copy Editor
Don Snook, Graphics
Ed & Betty Brown, Founders

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