

OUR VOICE

Yes, Cowards

The right wing is having a field day. And, everyone should let them. They're up in arms about comments U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder made Wednesday at a speech in Washington on Black History.

"Every year, in February, we attempt to recognize and to appreciate Black history. It is a worthwhile endeavor for the contributions of African-Americans to this great nation are numerous and significant. Even as we fight a war against terrorism, deal with the reality of electing an African-American as our president for the first time and deal with the other significant issues of the day, the need to confront our racial past, and our racial present, and to understand the history of African people in this country, endures. One cannot truly understand America without understanding the historical experience of Black people in this nation. Simply put, to get to the heart of this country one must examine its racial soul."

Holder is spot on.

"Though this nation has proudly thought of itself as an ethnic melting pot, in things racial we have always been and continue to be, in too many ways, essentially a nation of cowards."

Oh, no he didn't! Oh, yes he did!

He said it alright: cowards. Called America a nation of cowards. Right to our faces. He did it without the least bit of equivocation or mental reservation whatsoever. In front of a camera, no less. And now right-wingers and libertarians and many other folks whose words may not portray them as racists but whose actions, policies and politics betray their purported color-blindness have launched an all-out attack on Holder. The same way they castigated Michelle Obama for saying during the campaign that, for the first time in her adult life, she was really proud of her country. The same way Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin said then-Sen. Barack Obama saw America as imperfect enough to "pall around with terrorists." The same way they raked Rev. Jeremiah Wright through the coals for exposing America's ugly racial history. Now Holder is the race-baiter, the racial pariah, the person who sees discrimination in every corner and in every situation.

And you know what? Who cares? Let the right-wing have its way. You know why? Because they're precisely the cowards about whom Holder speaks.

"Though race-related issues continue to occupy a significant portion of our political discussion, and though there remain many unresolved racial issues in this nation, we, average Americans, simply do not talk enough with each other about race," Holder continued. "It is an issue we have never been at ease with, and, given our nation's history, this is in some ways understandable. And yet, if we are to make progress in this area, we must feel comfortable enough with one another, and tolerant enough of each other, to have frank conversations about the racial matters that continue to divide us. But we must do, more, and we in this room bear a special responsibility."

Of course, none of what Holder said after he called us on the carpet is important to the tone-deaf folks who want nothing more than to posterize him as an Al Sharpton.

These same people jump to the defense of a *New York Post* cartoonist who's either ignorant or dismissive of frequent caricatures of Black men as monkeys, and draws a cartoon showing cops shooting a chimpanzee, adding a caption about finding someone else to write the next stimulus bill. The cartoon is so thick with racial animus it's hard to know where to begin: the Black-man-as-monkey caricature; police brutality against Black men. It goes on.

Holder is calling us to listen to our better angels.

"As a nation we have done a pretty good job in melding the races in the workplace... We know, by American instinct and by learned behavior, that certain subjects are off limits and that to explore them risks, at best, embarrassment, and, at worst, the questioning of one's character. And outside the workplace the situation is even more bleak in that there is almost no significant interaction between us. On Saturdays and Sundays, America in the year 2009 does not, in some ways, differ significantly from the country that existed some 50 years ago. This is truly sad."

Preach on, good brother, preach on.



We must track stimulus money

By Ron Walters

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Now that the "American Recovery and Reinvestment Act" has been signed into law by President Obama, what has happened through much trial and tribulation is tantamount to what Cuba Gooding said in one of his movies — "show me the money."

We have been shown the money, \$787 billion, and now it is up to us to get down to business and follow the money and then access it for the good of our communities.

The stakes are enormous. This is one of the rare moments in history when a cruise-ship size load of funds docks in our states in a few weeks, but if we are not savvy enough to know enough how to access the funds, that ship could come in and leave us with substantial needs unmet.

The act is a big one with lots of sections, and you can Google the title of the act above and look at them all. But I will provide a quick glimpse of a few things in Title 9 on "Labor, Health, and Human Services and Education."

\$4 billion is added to the Workforce Investment program;

\$500 million of that amount goes to states for adult employment and training activities;

\$1.2 billion will go to states for youth under 24 years old for summer jobs;

\$1 billion will go to states



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to assist dislocated workers employment and training;

Another \$500 million will be put in the dislocated worker reserve to assist through June 30 2010;

\$50 million will go to YouthBuild programs through June 30, 2010;

\$750 million will provide grants for training and placement of workers for careers in energy efficiency and renewable energy employment;

\$120 million will be allotted to fund community service jobs for senior citizens;

\$500 million will be given to states to augment their unemployment insurance funds;

\$300 million for Job Corp.

This is the time for Black leaders in the various communities to come together and work out a system of communicating information to many people who have been laid off, who are disabled, who are youth, who have been unemployed, who are elderly but want to work, and generally everyone who wants to participate in the program funded by this act.

Citizens themselves who want to participate in these programs, many of which are already going in some states like YouthBuild and some that have been shut down, should contact the office of their elected officials at the local, county, state and national level to find the entry point into these activities.

The Obama Administration has vowed to create a website Recovery.gov for the average citizen to follow how these funds will be used. That will not be a place to access the programs, but to understand how they are being distributed and what effect the funding is having on things like the unemployment rate.

As the debate has suggested, this may not be the last stimulus package needed to jump-start the economy by the spending made possible through job creation.

But our national organizations such as the Congressional Black Caucus, Black

Leadership Forum, National Urban League, NAACP, National Action Network, RainbowPush, and others should followed the distribution of such funds carefully to see whether or not the Black community is getting a fair share of those jobs and the other resources made available by this act.

I must confess however, to being somewhat worried when I see that Black leaders have not visited the White House to make their position felt on this matter, but on Friday, February 13, 60 Latino and Latina leaders from around the country visited the White House for a briefing by key White House staff.

Perhaps we should not have been first in the door among racial and ethnic groups — perhaps we would not have been permitted to be first — but we should make it plain that there is an expectation that the Black commu-

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Nevada's only African-American community newspaper.
Published every Thursday by Griot Communications Group, Inc.
900 East Charleston Boulevard • Las Vegas, Nevada 89104
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Member: National Newspaper Publishers Association
and West Coast Black Publishers Association