

OPINION

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We All Need To Help Obama Keep His Promise

Now is not the time for complacency

BY MARC MORIAL

There may be a tendency to see the election of Barack Obama as the 44th President of the United States as a magic bullet that will instantly solve all our problems.

Some commentators have even suggested that an Obama presidency ushers in a new "post-racial" era that lowers the urgency and takes the spotlight off the need for equal opportunity and economic justice for urban and African Americans. I strongly disagree. This may be a time for

celebration, but it's no time for complacency.



While it is true that for the first time in a long time, African Americans and other minorities can feel like we have a real friend in the White House, we must also understand that President-elect Obama can only be effective if the same extraordinary coalition of white, black, Hispanic, Asian-American, and Native American voters that elected him, now works together to support his agenda for change.

In my view, the Obama presidency marks the beginning of a new "multi-racial" era in American governance that empowers and employs more of the growing

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diversity that is America's great strength in solving our common problems.

The thing that impressed me the most about the Obama campaign was its ability to bring so many heretofore disparate parts of America together in common pur-

pose. Candidate Obama liked to say that this election was not so much about him as it was about us.

He stressed that change comes from the bottom up, not the other way around. That means that we as citizens and advocates must take an even more active

role in governance at all levels.

Our voices must continue to be heard from City Hall to the halls of Congress to the White House. I am encouraged that the Obama transition team is putting a high degree of emphasis on building, as Bill Clinton did, an administration that "looks like America." But looks are not enough. We still have a lot of work to do.

On the one hand we now have the ultimate successful role model in Barack Obama. On the other hand, we see that fewer than 50 percent of African Americans graduate from high schools in many major American cities.

We see a financial crisis with huge numbers of African Americans losing their homes, jobs and life savings. We see an unem-

ployment rate that's double that of whites, and wide academic achievement gaps. Our prisons are disproportionately populated by African American males. Taken together, these facts underscore the reality that the first black president does not mean we can now all close up shop and go home.

People like you and organizations like the National Urban League are more important than ever to lifting up our communities and moving this country forward.

In just a few weeks, we will have a new president who campaigned on the promise of change. It is now up to us to help him keep that promise.

Marc Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

Equal Justice Gets Closer Attorney General pick is impressive

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

If his nomination is confirmed by the Senate, attorney Eric Holder will become this country's first African-American Attorney General.

Nominated by President-elect Barack Obama, Holder is the most qualified person for the job. Though the appointment is not yet official, Holder's background and commitment to fairness promise a march toward



equality in this nation's legal system.

Holder's resume is impressive. He has served as both a judge and U.S. Attorney in Washington, D.C. He was appointed by President Bill

Clinton to the position of Deputy Attorney General in 1997.

During his career, Holder has worked to fight corruption in politics and prosecuted several high-profile political leaders. He has

Holder has the relationships and reputation to work for positive legal change.

spoken out against the cruel treatment of detainees at Guantanamo Bay and has criticized the Bush administration for the civil-liberties policies it introduced after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

Liked by both Democrats and Republicans, Holder has the relationships and reputation to work for positive legal change.

This change will surely trickle down to the black community. A

long-time mentor of black youth, Holder has worked to instill values and to provide a positive role model for at-risk youth.

He understands firsthand the negative impact the black prisoner crisis has had on our communities. He knows that police misconduct in communities of color is real. And he realizes that, even in an era when a black man could and would become president, the civil rights of many black and Latinos are still being vio-

lated.

This insight will prove invaluable when the Justice Department is forced to tackle these issues head on. Holder won't be operating from a position driven by rhetoric; instead, his decisions will be driven by first-hand experience and a desire to make a change.

Judge Greg Mathis is vice president of Rainbow PUSH and a board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Scapegoating the Black Community

Here we go again

BY JOHN PAYTON

African American voters constitute only 6 percent of the California electorate. Yet, we hear that Proposition 8 in California, the ballot initiative that overturned the decision of the California Supreme Court that marriage was a fundamental right that extended to all couples, straight or gay, succeeded because of Black voters.

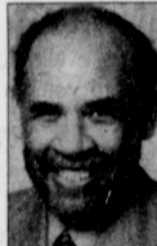
There are reports, based on exit polling, that some 70 percent of the African American voters in California supported Proposition 8, compared with much lower numbers for white voters or Asian voters or Latino voters.

But here's the thing: Proposition 8 passed by a margin that exceeded any impact traceable to African American voters. If the exit polling data is correct — and there are conflicting reports that put the number of African-Americans who supported Proposition 8 at closer to 57 percent — then a majority of the African-American community supported Proposition 8.

Nevertheless, given their limited electoral impact in California, scapegoating the Black community for its passage deflects attention away from other actors and away from the underlying issues that

are a cause for concern for all Californians, not just those who are for or against same-sex marriage.

The NAACP Legal Defense Fund urged the California Supreme Court to do what it ultimately did — find that marriage is a fundamental right available to all people. We did that because we are very sensitive to fundamental rights and believe that you



The loss of a fundamental right is not a black issue or a gay or lesbian issue. It is an issue for everyone.

cannot say that some people have them and others do not.

We have filed a new writ to the court making the argument that the California Constitution requires more than a simple majority vote to strip away a fundamental right from a minority group.

The loss of a fundamental right is not a black issue or a gay or lesbian issue. It is an issue for everyone. When one group is threatened with the loss of a fundamental right, we are all threatened by that potential loss.

A couple of months ago, there was a parade of stories about how the collapse of the U.S. financial system was caused by the irresponsible actions of black people who bought homes beyond their means and whose default on the mortgages they

used to buy those homes had resulted in the financial meltdown. This came from conservative columnists and news outlets and was quickly embraced by some conservative members of Congress.

Never mind that the actual numbers of African Americans who in fact had these "toxic" mortgages was quite small relative to the overall number of those mortgages. And never mind that many of these mortgage borrowers were themselves victims of predatory lending practices on the part of some of the country's most prominent banks and financial institutions.

Simply stated, the idea that the U.S. financial system — indeed the world financial system — could be brought down by the poorest sector of the American population was preposterous.

In the current financial crisis, it should now be clear to virtually everyone that the cause of this was in the financial institutions themselves and in the failure of any governmental institution to conduct oversight.

In the case of Proposition 8, it should be clear that the reason it passed is not because African American voted for it, but that California voters voted for it.

It also should be clear that this measure's passage is not just a loss for those who support same-sex marriage, but for all who cherish fundamental human rights.

John Payton is president and director-counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund.

Public Works is What Works

Build something and create jobs

BY JIM HIGHTOWER

Here's an idea: Instead of wasting our tax money on Wall Street slicks who don't use it to help anyone but themselves, why don't we use our public funds to build something in America?

Like what? Like bridges that are in disrepair, schools and libraries that need upgrades and expansion, high-speed rail networks to connect our population centers, energy-saving technologies for every home and building, public transportation for all of our cities, state-of-the-art Internet systems everywhere, and public park repairs and expansions.

America has important work that needs to be done. America also has millions of workers who need good jobs. Let's combine the two so we can lift our country up and move forward together.

"There is no better time than today" to launch a major public works program.

That's not a quote from some lefty do-gooder, but from the head of the National Association of

Business.

Corporate executives are now joining labor leaders, mayors, and other progressives who see the urgent need to invest in and rebuild America, creating new infrastructure and new middle-class opportunities all across our land.

President Bush and his laissez-faire ideologues oppose this. They assert that such a bold national undertaking would take too long to help with the current financial collapse. Hello, George — state and city transportation officials say they could have 3,000

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highway projects and \$8 billion worth of mass transit projects under way in less than 90 days. Let's get the money to them!

This is not a time for more ideological claptrap from right-wing theorists. It's a time to restore America's can-do spirit, turning our grassroots people loose to build.

This should not wait until January. Congress should come together now, this month, and begin to move money where it'll do some real good for everyone in America.

Jim Hightower is a national columnist.

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