

OPINION/ FORUM

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After the Apology - Pass the Conyers Bill



Julianne Malveaux
 Guest Columnist

I am not sure how I feel about the United States Senate unanimously passing a resolution apologizing for the historic mistreatment of African-American people.

The resolution "acknowledged the fundamental injustice, cruelty, brutality and inhumanity of slavery" and "apologizes to African-Americans on behalf of the people of the United States for the wrongs committed against them and their ancestors who suffered under slavery and Jim Crow laws." Unanimously passed!

Could that have happened a decade ago? Part of me is appreciative for the apology. Part of me says too little, too late, and what's next. The apology is especially tainted by the refusal to deal with the issue of reparations, but the apology is a step forward.

A North Carolina friend and colleague, Lenora Billings Harris, sent an email to her list that says "acknowledgement... the first step for healing and change."

There is a necessary next step. It is not to pay out reparations. It is to understand exactly what the Senate (and Congress) are apologizing for. Congressman John Conyers has, since 1989, introduced legislation to simply study the impact that slavery had on contemporary African-American life. Last time I checked the cost of the Commission to Study Reparation Proposals for African-Americans Act had a modest price ticket, something around \$12 million. Lots in a recession? When do we settle up? How long do we let this simmer?

I know that there are those who say, "Just get over it."

Last time I checked the descendants of slaves are the only ones asked to get over our history. Of course this is a history about which so many Americans have much ambivalence. How can we, on one hand, tout education while accepting the fact that more than 15 southern states actually had the temerity to pass laws that prevented slaves from learning to read?

"To teach a slave to read is to excite dissatisfaction to the detriment of the general population," reads the 1831 law that passed in North Carolina. The excitement of mass dissatisfaction, then, was perhaps postponed for 135 years until cities sizzled in response to the injustice that had base discrimination at its roots.

Even if we could "get over" slavery, what about



contemporary disparities, such as the growing wealth gap? Are we supposed to get over that, too?

The Conyers Commission would "examine slavery and discrimination in the colonies and the United States from 1619 to the present and recommend appropriate remedies."

What's wrong with that? What's wrong with getting it all out? The remedy might not be reparations as in write a check to every African-American. The remedy might be community repair, as in upgrade inner-city high schools and HBCUs. An apology without a remedy is only symbolic, which is possibly why it garnered a unanimous vote.

Let's get past the symbolism to really review and repair aspects of our history.

Congressman John Conyers is to always be commended for his tenacity. He keeps introducing his bill, every legislative session. He keeps talking about it.

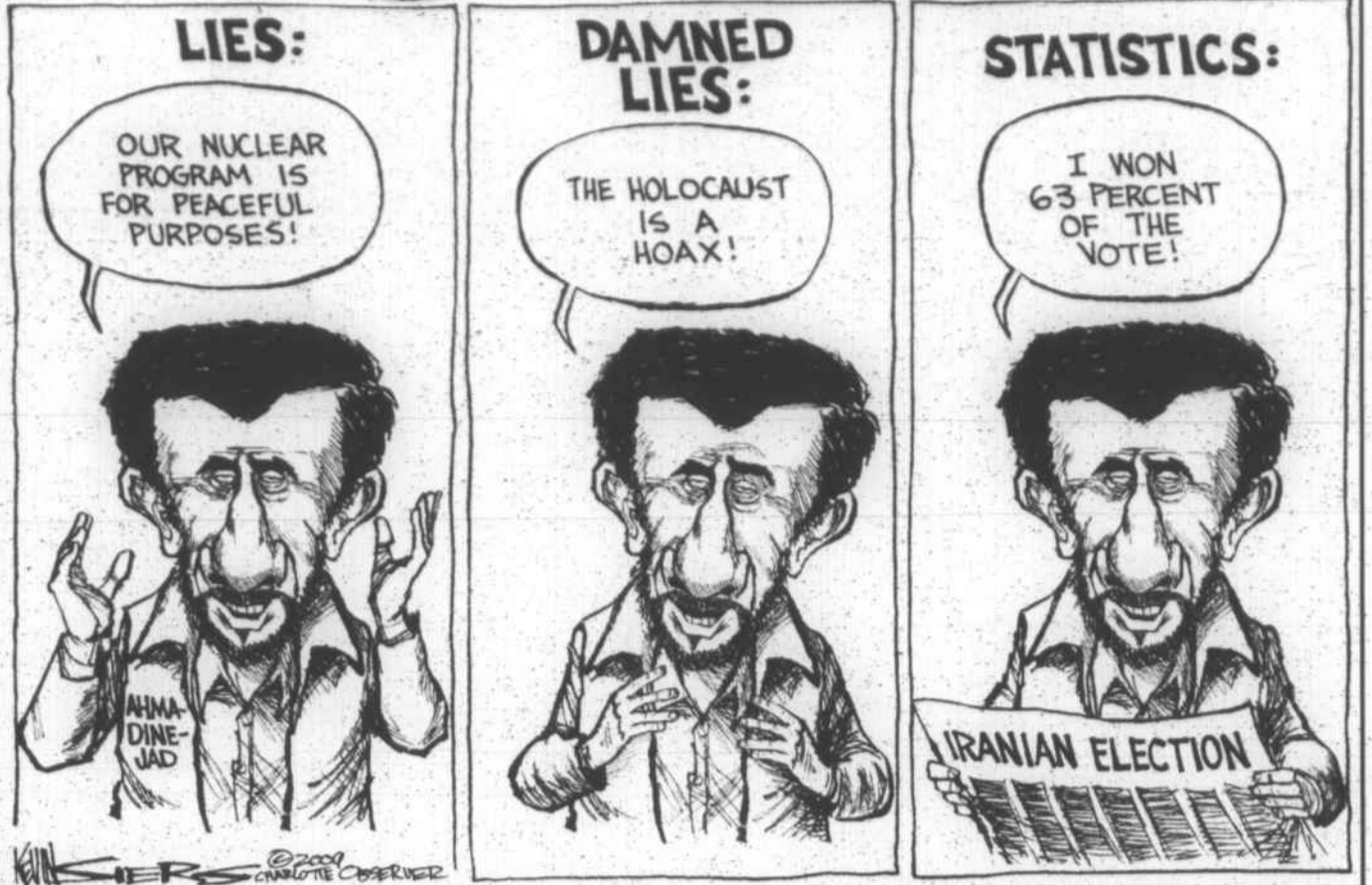
He can't even get the full support of the Congressional Black Caucus, and that's some kind of a shame. For him, though, it does not matter. He believes in this study.

The Senate apology, passed just two days before Juneteenth, the anniversary of the day that Texas slaves were informed that they were free (June 19, 1865, more than two years after the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation) represents growth for the U.S. Senate and the possibility of healing for our nation.

It does not close the door, however, on a history that can only be described as shameful. Passing the Conyers legislation brings us closer to closing the door.

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THE 3 KINDS OF LIES...



Immigrant treatment similar to slavery



Al Sharpton
 Guest Columnist

We often hear the phrase, "this country was built on the backs of slaves". Men and women who were stripped of all rights and liberties, and forcibly made to execute the hardest labor around, are undeniably responsible for the construction and subsequent power of the United States of America.

But what we as a collective nation often forget is the daily humiliation and abuse endured by our founding mothers and fathers. In addition to repeated beatings, killings and torture, there were public humiliations; slaves shackled and dragged through the streets, an overall dehumanization of an entire race, and a climate of hate and fear mongering.

Fast forward to present-day Phoenix, Ariz. For several years now, Maricopa County is proudly and willingly profiling, harassing and rounding up another ethnic population.

Under the tutelage of Sheriff Joe Arpaio, officers

and overly zealous vigilantes are openly infiltrating Latino neighborhoods, stopping individuals for routine traffic violations (or for no reason at all), and then demanding proof of citizenship.

A local Sheriff has taken it upon himself to play the role of border patroller and enforcer, and tear apart the sanctity of his locale.

What's more, is that these 'inmates' are placed in outdoor convict tents under atrocious conditions which include inadequate food and hygiene, as well as 'chain gangs.'

Reminiscent of slaves being dragged to the auction block, Sheriff Arpaio has even brazenly paraded these men and women - shackled and in prison clothes - from the County Courthouse to these tent city jails. These individuals have been forced to wear pink underwear and suffer in the tents where temperatures can rise well above 100 degrees.

Sheriff Arpaio openly boasts of his success in round-

ing up illegal immigrants, but what he fails to acknowledge is the continual harassment of anyone who appears Latino, irrelevant to his or her immigration status.

His office proudly states that it has thousands in these tent facilities and that it has diminished costs to fewer than

15 cents per meal per inmate. It is in fact this falsity of reducing' prison costs that has won Sheriff Arpaio much acclaim, but the reality is that he and his county have suffered million-dollar losses after civil suits filed by family members of inmates who died under the horrid conditions of the tent city.

Charges of beatings, killings and an overall insecure climate of these facilities have resulted in an urgent demand for justice.

Open beleaguering of an entire group of people goes beyond the pale of law enforcement. And what is equally troubling and dangerous is the creation of an environment of abhorrence and animosity.

With talk of 'taking your jobs,' Sheriff Arpaio and his

self-proclaimed 'posse of 3,000 volunteers' have transformed a police department into an immigration enforcement agency that demeans anyone who may appear Latino. These fear-inducing words are used to incite and divide, and we as African Americans cannot allow ourselves to fall into the trap of Black vs. Brown.

We cannot condone the outright discriminatory practices of Sheriff Arpaio and his minions of followers who publicly humiliate and demonize others. The subliminal messaging of such actions can have grave detrimental effects beyond overt abuse that may one day play out in a life or death situation.

We cannot and do not stand with those who paint all Brown folks with the broad stroke of 'otherness.' For Latinos today are bearing the brunt of hard labor, and helping to build much of the foundation for our future as a country just as we did scores ago. I wholeheartedly support the Justice Department's investigation of Sheriff Arpaio and his misguided practices.

Noted activist the Rev. Al Sharpton is head of the National Action Network.



Sheriff Joe Arpaio

Just having money no cause for celebration



Peter Bailey
 Guest Columnist

Columnist Flo Anthony noted in the New York Amsterdam News that rapper T-Pain tweeted people that they should "celebrate the fact that a Black man can have things like this (this being a diamond-encrusted chain that holds 97 carats and reportedly weighs 10 pounds) and still care for three kids and a wife in a \$6 million house with 32 cars. Oldest child 5 and already \$4 million is in her own account."

Sorry T-Pain, this is one Black man who is not inclined to celebrate you just because you have a \$6 million house, a \$400,000 chain that, according to Anthony, reads "Big A... Chain" and 32 cars. It is commendable that you support your three children and your wife but that's what you are supposed to do. That you can do so on such a grand scale doesn't mean that you deserve more credit than the man who supports his family with a blue collar salary.

The Black man who should be celebrated is that man, no matter what his income, who accepts the huge, critical responsibility



Rapper T-Pain.

of being a loving and nurturing Daddy to his children, a husband to his wife and a contributor to his community.

Also worthy of celebration is that man who has vision and commitment to a cause larger than himself, who puts some of his resources, energy and time into providing guidance to youngsters in his neighborhood and leadership in his

community. Such a man is not consumed with and dazzled by owning 32 cars and a chain that reads "Big A... Chain."

By the way, since the days of enslavement, there have been Blacks who have made sizable amounts of money in this country, much too often by exploiting other Black folks or performing as buffoons for Whites. Probably the chief Black

money makers in the early 1900s were Black minstrels who delighted mostly White audiences with their buffoonery. From the 1930s to the 1960s the big money makers included the Blacks who were the Beulahs and Steppin Fetchits (the predecessor of colorful names such as Snoop Dog, 50 Cent and T-Pain, etc.) of the world.

It is not surprising that big Black money makers of the late 20th Century and early 21st Century include many so-called gangsta rappers who, like modern day minstrels, provide a bit of comic relief for White males between 15 and 24 who are reportedly the largest purchaser of their "music."

Such "success" is not a reason to celebrate.

Don't get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with having a whole lot of money. In fact, the best of all worlds is to have a man with both money and commitment. But money alone is not enough. For a man to be celebrated, he must also have commitment, vision and perseverance. A group of people can never have too many such men and, I must add, women.

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