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Southern Governors Block the Stimulus Like the Schoolhouse Door Color of Law

By David A. Love, JD

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board

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Recently, Rep. Jim Clyburn (D-S.C.) was accused of playing the race card when he characterized Southern governors' opposition to the \$787 billion federal stimulus package as "[a slap in the face of African-Americans.](#)"

He was referring to the four Republican governors who have opposed accepting some or all of the money, including Gov. Rick Perry of Texas, Haley Barbour of Mississippi, Mark Sanford of South Carolina, and Bobby Jindal of Louisiana. These states are part of the Black Belt, states in the South with the largest percentages of African Americans. These are among some of the poorest and neediest counties in America. Rep. Clyburn believes that these Republican governors don't want the stimulus to help poor Black people, so they'd rather not take the money. And not surprisingly, I agree with the Congressman.

When I first heard about this, I googled the deep recesses of my memory and recalled an episode of Little House on the Prairie. Just work with me on this one. In this episode, Dr. Caleb Ledoux, a Black university-trained doctor, comes to work with Dr. Baker, the town doctor. Ledoux is a far superior doctor to Baker, who assigns him menial tasks because he is, well, Black. And with the exception of the Ingalls, none of the other people in Walnut Grove would go to him. One day, Doc Baker is away, and a woman is in childbirth and needs an emergency C-section. Dr. Ledoux can do the job, and Dr. Baker would have been ill-equipped in any case, but the racist husband of the expectant mother refuses his help. A whoopin' from Charles Ingalls allows the husband to see the error of his ways, and the operation is a success, with mother and baby doing well. Dr. Ledoux, tired of the disrespect, decides to leave the town for good, but the townsfolk convince him to stay.

Fast forward to today: Obama is playing the role of Dr. Ledoux, and the Southern governors are defiant patients in a Black hospital.

Part of the GOP Southern Strategy had been to oppose social programs on the grounds that they would help people of color. Never mind that poor Whites would benefit as well. And it was this strategy which, applied years earlier by Southern elites, helped to keep the South dumb, backwards and poor by convincing poor Whites to support slavery and render their own labor superfluous. Under Jim Crow segregation, those elites kept poor Whites and Blacks separate and apart, by law, thereby preventing the formation of a biracial labor movement. Even to this day, the South is wholly nonunionized.

So, let's return to the matter at hand and take a look at the states in question. Texas, which will receive an estimated \$16.9 billion share from the Obama stimulus package, boasts the country's ninth highest [poverty rate](#) in the country, and ranks eighth in childhood poverty. The state is 15 percent Black.

Mississippi - whose governor says he will refuse \$50 million from the federal government for unemployment compensation - ranks first in the nation in poverty, second in childhood poverty, and ranks [48th out of 50 states](#) in educational standards. And the state is 39 percent Black.

South Carolina, where my family traces its origins in this country, is the twelfth poorest state in the union. It is also 30 percent African American. Clyburn noted that relief from the stimulus would assist 12 of South Carolina's 46 counties along the I-95 corridor, in which [more than one-fifth of the residents have lived in poverty](#) for the past 30 years.

Finally, Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal has said that he wants to reject \$98 million in stimulus money that would expand unemployment benefits for his state. Louisiana stands to collect \$4 billion from Washington, and it needs every penny. Its wounds still festering from Hurricane Katrina, and its people displaced, Louisiana ranks number 44 in education and number 3 in poverty. Louisiana is also one-third Black. Jindal, one of the more prominent water carriers and hewers of wood for the Republican retrograde freak show, is Louisiana's second governor of color (the first was [Pinckney Benton Stewart Pinchback](#), who became the nation's first African American governor in 1872).

Jindal, who is of Indian descent, opposes abortion, embryonic stem cell research and same-sex marriage. He has an A rating from the Gun Owners of America. He signed into law the teaching of intelligent design in the Louisiana public schools, and authorized the chemical castration of sex offenders. We are told Gov. Jindal is the future of the Republican Party, a brilliant individual who has accomplished many great things in his state. But during his fifteen minutes of fame, when he gave the GOP response to President Obama's address to Congress, we learned how underwhelming and inconsequential this man really is. His performance that evening was far more of an embarrassment for Brown University and the University of Oxford, the schools he attended, than for the governor himself.

We know about Jindal's Punjabi background, but we get absolutely no sense as to whether he has learned anything from his people's rich cultural heritage. And how ironic it is that this second generation immigrant, who would fashion himself as an anti-tax, anti-government spending, Simple Simon "redneck of color" in order to appeal to the base of his party, would quickly be labeled a "terrorist" by the same base that smeared and vilified Obama.

But I digress...

In opposing crucial economic aid to their citizens, these four governors seem to be channeling their inner [George Wallace](#), their inner [Ross Barnett](#), or their inner [Orval Faubus](#). Their strategy is to stand in front of the schoolhouse door, with a 21st century twist, and stand in the way of an historic seismic shift in America. The political winds have brought federal budgets that reflect progressive priorities and an emphasis on the needs and concerns of everyday people. Pragmatic moderates such as Gov. Charlie Crist of Florida, and Arnold Schwarzenegger of California are taking the stimulus money because they are no idiots (and Obama won their respective states in November), but they are few in number in their party.

Governors of any state likely cannot pick and choose which parts of the stimulus they wish to take, and their state legislatures can override them in any case. If nothing else, this latest chapter of the Republican Party makes for good entertainment, and I have my popcorn ready. If this is the only strategy they have left - to refuse to take the Black man's help when their people are jobless, hungry and increasingly homeless, yet conclude they'll end up looking fabulous in the process - then they have already written their own political epitaph.

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BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member David A. Love, JD is a lawyer and journalist based in Philadelphia, and a contributor to the [Progressive Media Project](#), [McClatchy-Tribune News Service](#), [In These Times](#) and [Philadelphia Independent Media Center](#). He contributed to the book, [States of Confinement: Policing, Detention, and Prisons](#) (St. Martin's Press, 2000). Love is a former Amnesty International UK spokesperson, organized the first national police brutality conference as a staff member with the Center for Constitutional Rights, and served as a law clerk to two Black federal judges. His blog is [davidalove.com](#). [Click here](#) to contact Mr. Love.

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