

New York Post cartoon is racist and careless

by Roland_S_Martin

President Barack Obama earned kudos from the media when he said he screwed up in nominating Tom Daschle as secretary of health and human services despite Daschle's problem with paying taxes.

Too bad the leadership of the New York Post didn't follow the president's lead by admitting that an editorial cartoon they ran Wednesday by Sean Delonas was offensive, careless and racist.

It is clear that Delonas compared President Obama to a chimpanzee. In the cartoon, a cop is holding a smoking gun and, with another officer, looking at the bullet-riddled body of a chimpanzee. The caption reads, "They'll have to find someone else to write the next stimulus bill."

In a statement to The Associated Press, Col Allan, the Post's editor-in-chief, said the cartoon was an obvious reference to the story of a chimp in Connecticut that viciously attacked a woman and was killed by police.

"The cartoon is a clear parody of a current news event, to wit the shooting of a violent chimpanzee in Connecticut. It broadly mocks Washington's efforts to revive the economy. Again, Al Sharpton reveals himself as nothing more than a publicity opportunist," he said, referencing a news release the civil rights activist sent out blasting the paper and demanding an apology.

Delonas, the cartoonist, said to CNN: "It's absolutely frigging ridiculous. Do you really think I'm saying Obama should be shot? I didn't see that in the cartoon. The chimpanzee was a major story in the Post. Every paper in New York except The New York Times covered the chimpanzee story. It's just ridiculous. It's about the economic stimulus bill. If you're going to make that about anybody, it would be (House Speaker Nancy) Pelosi, which it's not."

To the editors who approved the cartoon, as well as to the cartoonist, the piece was clearly all fun and laughs. But anyone with half a brain, especially someone knowing the history of African-Americans being called "monkeys" and "gorillas," would have said, "We need to rethink this."

First, mixing the two stories is ridiculous. Yes, the chimpanzee incident and the passage of the stimulus bill have a lot of folks talking, but to put them in the same element just doesn't make sense.

Second, the cartoonist didn't hang a sign around the neck of the chimp, so he left it up to readers to determine exactly whom the cops were referring to.

We all know that the stimulus bill was the first priority of the new president, so when reading the caption, it was easy to infer that the cartoonist was implying the president of the United States.

You know, the black guy. And that's where the problem comes in.

What could be seen as silly humor if former President George W. Bush were in the White House has to be seen through the lens of America's racist past, as noted by the leaders of the New York Association of Black Journalists, who also are demanding an apology from the Post.

"How do you think the Jewish community would feel about the use of rats in any depiction of them? How do you think the Italian community would feel about being generalized with mobsters?" the organization said in a statement. "Monkey slurs against Africans and African-Americans go back to the days of early colonialism, when Anglo Saxon, Spanish and Portuguese conquerors used these types of drawings and descriptions to dehumanize black people so that their mistreatment and enslavement would not be viewed as wrong or sinful. The practice also took on more sinister roles later in history including during the slave trade here in the U.S. and in Hitler's Nazi Germany."

Ignorant leaders of the New York Post and others may think everything is fair game, and certainly criticizing the president of the United States is just fine. Yet while everyone seems to be caught up in the delusion of a post-racial America, we cannot forget the reality of the racial America, where African-Americans were treated and portrayed as inferior to others.

And just as some members of the media brotherhood were taken to task for their obvious sexism during the Democratic primaries because of comments about then-Sen. Hillary Clinton, we had to be sensitive to the historical treatment of women.

Oh, yes, the Post will have defenders who accuse African-Americans and others of being hypersensitive. The Post already has shown its hand by trying to make this all about Sharpton because they know he's the black boogeyman to white America. But they should understand that my e-mail inbox and Facebook page are filled with comments from folks of different backgrounds stunned by the callousness of the Post.

I guess it's fitting the cartoon ran in February, because the best statement to sum up the issue can be taken from a Black History Month speech given Wednesday by our first black attorney general, Eric Holder.

"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," he said. "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."

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