

## ARRA Talking Points (March)

*“The black agenda, at its best, looks at America from the vantage point of the least of thee and asks what’s best for all.”<sup>1</sup>*

Cornel West  
The New York Times (March 18, 2010)

### 1. Is it smart not to ballyhoo ‘a black agenda’?

- In an interview with *Race-Talk*, Cornel West stated that the Obama team “understands the black agenda to be a narrow, parochial, provincial slice of America.” He went on to argue that historically, the black agenda has always been broad, deep, and inclusive. West said, “Frederick Douglass’s agenda was an agenda, not for black people to get out of slavery. It was for America to become a better democracy. And it’s spilt over for women’s rights; it’s spilt over for worker’s rights and so forth. Martin Luther King Jr’s agenda was not to help Negroes overcome American apartheid in the south. It was to make America democracy a better place, where everyday people, from poor people who were white and red and yellow and black and brown, would be able to live lives in decency and dignity.”<sup>2</sup>
- John Powell argued that avoiding the ‘black agenda’ and structuring stimulus programs in a universal and race-neutral manner is not only illogical but it also fails to address the needs of all Americans (i.e., it is not universal). Powell stated that “Detroit, once described as the ‘arsenal of democracy,’ is fighting for its life ... When the governor of Michigan reaches out for help from the White House, it would be absurd to respond with the notion that aid must be concerned with all American states or cities.” Additionally, Powell uses the example of the stimulus program’s focus on “shovel ready” projects to illustrate how the stimulus has failed to address the needs of all Americans. These “shovel-ready projects have poured money into a construction industry that continues to be heavily staffed by white men.”<sup>3</sup> Consequently, Black and Latino businesses, which represent 5.2% and 6.8% of all businesses respectively, had only received 1.1% and 1.6% of all federally contracted ARRA funds.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Don Terry, A Delicate Balancing Act for the Black Agenda, The New York Times <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/19/us/19cncagenda.html> (March 18, 2010)

<sup>2</sup> Kathleen Wells, A Conversation with Cornel West, Race-Talk <http://www.race-talk.org/?p=2981> (February 23, 2010)

<sup>3</sup> John A. Powell, Tailoring Job Relief to America’s Diverse Communities, The Washington Post <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/03/01/AR2010030103155.html> (March 2, 2010)

<sup>4</sup> Hazel Trice Edney, Stimulus' Failure to Benefit Blacks Sparks Comparison to Days of Jim Crow, Carolina Peacemaker <http://www.carolinapeacemaker.com/news/Article/Article.asp?NewsID=21190&SID=3&ItemSource=N> (March 2, 2010)

2. Why are minority firms receiving less stimulus contracts than white firms?

- Laura Barrett, director of the Transportation Equity Network, stated that “Minority businesses are often too small to compete for projects; do not have access to the necessary capital, equipment or bonding requirements; or lose bids to companies with well-established relationships. There also has been an emphasis on spending stimulus money quickly, which favors businesses that have won past contracts.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Jesse Washington, Less Stimulus for Minority Firms, Associated Press [http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5i\\_A SC3UbKEMU5PBn1mEeSphYzmkQD9E9RF0G0](http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5i_A SC3UbKEMU5PBn1mEeSphYzmkQD9E9RF0G0) (March 7, 2010)