

“A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry: but money answereth all things.” Ecclesiastes 10:19. King Solomon never lied and the Bible is the answer to life. What he said thousands of years ago still applies today. We know how to party and make liquor and wine companies successful through our drinking. Yet, we lack money, i.e. economic empowerment. Money, good clean money, is a blessing. It buys your basic needs and guarantees a safe and prosperous future. You make that money through jobs and jobs are created by entrepreneurs. Successful entrepreneurs eventually become wealthy even though they may struggle and fall a few times along the way. Thus, business growth is the key to prosperity for Black communities. It is that business growth that was stymied through Jim Crow and constant discrimination from our government and rival communities.

When the Civil Rights Struggle ended in victory, the damage of past discrimination was addressed. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 addresses that. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act addresses discrimination in contracting. This is the basis for all minority business programs administered by federal agencies. The key is to get it fully enforced which has yet to happen. Corruption and discrimination are first cousins in business. Both are engrained into the federal procurement system and are the challenges of minorities, including Black businesses. These programs started rolling out in 1982 and, still, have yet to be fully effective. That money King Solomon was talking about has yet to find its way into our communities on a level that is fair and impartial.

These programs are clumsy at best. Because of that many mean thinking groups have challenged them saying that they are reverse discrimination. That is laughable as these programs may provide no more than seven percent of the total procurement and that is divided among every ethnic group other than white male contractors including white females who naturally get most of that seven percent. Many times they are just representing their male counterparts and are used to thwart any real minorities from getting their just amount. This is probably the biggest problem of these programs. They are in need of being corrected and providing business growth and jobs into our communities in a way that would make a noticeable difference.

Despite their anemic effectiveness, these programs have been challenged via lawsuits from white organizations such as the Associated General Contractors and ultra conservative think tanks. The United States Supreme Court has made two major decisions regarding minority contracting programs. One for local governments and it is known as The Croson Decision. The other is for federal contracting programs and it is known as The Adarand Decision. Many minority business activists cringed at these decisions. However, when you study them they simply explain what must be done to do it right. Both say the same thing. The agency or

government entity running the contracting program must do a study to understand the full impact that discrimination, if it exists, has had on specifically which groups. These are called Disparity Studies. Most states and large cities are doing them on a regular basis. You do your first and then update it approximately every five years.

If you do this right, the study will show the level of discrimination for Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans, etc. The report should also address white women as they lobby to get into these programs. The fact is that white women are not discriminated in a fashion that would be identical to those ethnic groups. Studies will show this but the problem comes when you try to implement a program to offset and correct the discrimination of the past. What white women lobbyists will try to do is “lump” all the groups into one goal as opposed to separate goals for each group. When this happens white women will exploit whatever the goal is at the expense of Blacks, Hispanics and others.

This ignores what the Supreme Court has said. The programs must be narrowly tailored to address the specific discrimination as noted in the study. The federal government has yet to do these studies. President Clinton pledged to do them for each of the ten federal regions. He stalled and never did it. President Bush did not do them and now President Obama is trying to ignore this responsibility. In 2012, we must make this a campaign issue. We want every candidate to pledge to perform Disparity Studies and address discrimination at the federal level within the first two years of the next administration. If we do this right, contracts will start flowing to our businesses like never before. Jobs will be created exponentially and the money will “answereth things”. After all, it says it in the Bible.

Mr. Alford is the co-founder, President/CEO of the National Black Chamber of Commerce®. Website: [www.nationalbcc.org](http://www.nationalbcc.org) . Email: [halford@nationalbcc.org](mailto:halford@nationalbcc.org) .