

BEYOND THE RHETORIC

By Harry C. Alford

□ An Opportunity We Must Take □

The tragedies of Katrina and Rita have a silver lining behind their huge gray clouds. What was destroyed must also be rebuilt.

The key to Black residents of
New Orleans
is to ensure that the rebuilding be inclusive of them.

Like never before the economy, job market and business ownership must be totally diverse with a heavy amount of Black involvement.

The way that can happen is through strong advocacy up front.

I am not talking about marching and speech making.

The positive change must come from planning and proactive approvals of a process that will ensure that we are at the table every step of the rebuilding.

We must also screen the nation for good talent such as program management, construction management, architecture, engineering, specialty, community development.

Also, we have in
New Orleans
a large potential workforce that must be trained.
Beginning soon will be the rebuilding of three public housing communities – St. Bernard, C.W. Cooper and Lafitte.

These won't be conventional projects anymore.

Each community will have single homes, multi-family units and affordable housing.

This is a concept known as mixed use.

Serving each of those housing complexes will be a charter school, medical clinic and a retail shopping center.

The cost of this rebuilding will be over \$1.2 billion.

The request for proposals has gone out and the winners have been announced.

Two of the three winners are Black owned firms (St. Bernard and C.W. Cooper) with a very good track record.

Both of these entities have committed to record breaking Black participation.

Jobs, construction contracts, franchises for the retail centers will have extremely high Black involvement.

Remember, the developers have complete discretion at this and we will be involved, through their permission, in making this the greatest Black business involvement in the history of this nation.

The third developer seems to be reticent or resistant to this concept.

It's my prediction that he will come around to the 21st century of doing things.

He may come willingly or kicking and screaming but he will come.

It is our ambition that every tenant of these three housing communities can find work in the rebuilding if they desire it.

Under Section 3 of the HUD Act we will keep a list of tenants seeking work. If they won't enforce Section 3, we will.

At every phase we will put out a call for interviews and work with the contractors in targeting job availability.

Each significant job opportunity will have a training component for the new workers. This approach will also be applied to the medical clinics, charter schools and franchisors at the retail centers.

Requirements for new trainees will be 8th grade reading and math skills.

Also, they must be drug free.

Those who cannot meet the reading and math skills will be referred to classes for assistance.

Those not being drug free will be referred to an appropriate rehab center.

In essence, there will be jobs and a ready workforce to match.

In addition to the Section 3 job project, there is already in existence the Gulf Rebuilding Workforce Initiative.

This program is covering the entire Gulf affected areas.

The National Black Chamber is proud to be a part of it.

To date, 5,345 jobs have been created to first time workers most of whom are minorities.

During the next five years we hope to have over 40,000 new workers from this program.

For information and registration go to

www.imgreat.org

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Presently,

New Orleans

does not have enough Black contractors to meet the upcoming demand nor the bonding capacity.

In response we are starting a Bonding Assistance Program beginning July 26.

After completion of this program local contractors should have significantly more bonding capacity that will enable them to perform more work like never before.

We are also recruiting bona fide and qualified Black owned firms to relocate to the New Orleans area on a permanent basis.

The more active Black contractors we have, the more available jobs for the Black community.

Another opportunity will be the

World

Trade

Center

which will be totally rebuilt.

The winner of that project is an African American from

Boston

, originally

Jackson

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MS

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We are confident that he, too, will come correct.

He has already hired a local Black attorney, a member of the Black chamber, for his legal needs.

That's a good start.

The State of

Louisiana

has no minority business program – in violation of the Civil Rights Act.

We are going to make that a major campaign debate in the upcoming election for Governor.

The Black vote shall prevail!

The City of

New Orleans

has already introduced a 35% DBE (Disadvantaged Business Enterprise) program.

It also safeguards against carpet bagging by having a 60% Local Business Enterprise program.

If we do this right when people talk about Black opportunity, they will say

Atlanta

,

DC

and

New Orleans

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Mr. Alford is the co-founder, President/CEO, of the National Black Chamber of Commerce.

Website:

www.nationalbcc.org

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