

“BEYOND THE RHETORIC”

Harry C. Alford

Why Black Neighborhoods have High Unemployment

Despite what many bigots and ignorant minds would like to think, Black neighborhoods are blighted for a reason other than a biological one. The reason or reasons are calculated schemes by sinister and greedy minds that conspire to exploit naïve entities to quench their thirst of money and power. For every exploited Black family or household there are these conspirators profiting and solidifying their grip on a disparity that benefits them at the cost of others.

We learned this early in forming the National Black Chamber of Commerce in Indianapolis. Prompted by a complaint from a local Black contracting group we began to investigate a particular Community Development Corporation, CDC, in a particular all Black neighborhood. This CDC was managed by whites who did not live in the neighborhood. They were adding new homes into the community but were blocking Black contractors who lived in this neighborhood from working. We learned that they were building homes for three times the actual costs. Why would they accept such high bids? They could retail them at that price and that would cause the existing homes to increase in comparable price. Property taxes and rents were beginning to skyrocket and, thus, forcing existing residents to flee or be forced out. The beginning of “gentrification” was forming in another Black community. White Yuppies were beginning to arrive and bust up a stable historical Black community.

It was time to go on the offensive. We teamed with the Concerned Clergy and demanded the board of directors of this CDC be solely made up of long time residents of the neighborhood it was serving. All contractors working there would be local residents. Any workers with cars having license plates not from that or neighboring communities would be subject to tire slashing and sugar in the gas tanks. Appraisers and realtors were warned not to consider the latest home prices as they were instruments of price fixing and gouging. Home prices would be monitored and the residents will appreciate their properties consistent with normal markets. We saved this neighborhood and created vast employment for the local residents. What are your local CDC's doing?

Housing Authorities are authorized to train and hire public housing residents for 30% of the jobs created through HUD monies. This is Section 3 of the HUD Act which became law in 1968. The problem is no more than 10% of cities and housing authorities offer this. They want the residents to remain poor and unemployed so that their little futures are guaranteed. You can't service poverty if there is no poverty. Please consider your local Housing Authority corrupt and noncompliant with Section 3. Section 3 complaints are supposed to be resolved in 6 months. Our complaint against the City of Jacksonville has been kicked around for 12 years and counting. It is probably going to take civil disobedience to get the City to move. Remember it was the Watts Riot that caused Section 3 to get on the books.

Banks in DC were touting their Community Reinvestment Act, CRA, activity by offering 2-3% mortgages to first time home owners in the Shaw District. Only problem was the first time home owners were Yuppies making 150-200 hundred thousand dollars per year and they were buying new homes and converted condos at exaggerated prices the locals could not afford. Today, the Shaw District is about completely gentrified with the old established Black families pushed out. At the same time, Washington Housing Authority has been offering section 8 rental vouchers to residents so long as they leave Washington, DC. Some have been displaced as far as Hagerstown, 70 miles away. I understand that Chicago has been transplanting people as far as Danville, IL hundreds of miles from the south side of Chicago.

A CDC in downtown Indianapolis built the Madame CJ Walker building with a grant from the US Department of Health and Human Services. The grant was to provide full time employment to people living on welfare and under the poverty level. The building ended up providing low rent for the Indiana University School of Optometry and a large law firm friendly to the Governor. Not one job went to anyone living under the poverty level. I asked the federal government for a copy of the grant specifications and application from that CDC. I pressed and pressed and eventually they proclaimed "The file is lost. We cannot give it to you because we don't know where it is". Yes, they were in on the scheme too.

These are just a few of the games played on us. They are harmful and, in fact, lethal in more ways than one. If we had jobs there would be no need to sell crack and rip off. As long as they block us, high unemployment will continue. Let's begin to fight it.

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