

### The Two Sides of Jackson, Michigan□

There are two very different sides to the small Michigan City of Jackson. It is located off I-94 about 90 miles from Detroit. Its population is under 40,000 but it has been the focus of attention for two very different reasons. The first reason is a very positive one. It is the hometown of Tony Dungy who has risen through the ranks of the National Football League to become the winning coach of the latest Super Bowl championship. He happens to be African American and a very outstanding citizen – a model for all of America.

The timing was right for Mr. Dungy. He was coming up as a basketball and football star when the Big Ten conference started heavily recruiting Black talent. The catalyst here was the activity of football coaching legends Duffy Daugherty of Michigan State and Woody Hayes of Ohio St. They were recruiting and playing Blacks at every position and winning the vast majority of their games. This caused the rest of the conference to get with it. By the time I was playing at the University of Wisconsin, the entire conference had become quite “chocolate” and fearsome. To the point that even the southern schools started recruiting Blacks to remain competitive.

Yes, Tony Dungy is a product of Affirmative Action. Affirmative Action to implement the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and causing athletic teams to become more exciting and competitive. In essence, it was making a better America. The University of Minnesota recruited Tony at the quarterback position where he excelled and got a shot at the National Football League. He entered the League playing defensive back as the NFL wasn't quite ready to put Blacks at the three sacred positions – quarterback, center and middle linebacker. There would only be one or two at these positions in the league for the longest. America has now gotten over that hurdle too.

The next giant step for Tony came through the efforts of Pittsburgh Steelers owner Art Rooney who decided it was time to use Affirmative Action in the NFL for Coaching Development. It was approved by the League that every team would have to show proof that they were aggressively interviewing and recruiting minority coaches. By being with the Steelers, Tony was one of the first. Like Jackie Robinson in baseball, they picked a strong competent winner. The rest is history as Tony Dungy will go to the NFL Hall of Fame one day as a prolific coach and leader.

What is even more Americana is that Tony Dungy has become a superb role model. He is responsible for personal involvement in the development of the majority of Black coaches now in the league. He didn't forget his roots and went back to show others the "path". The other coach in the Super Bowl last year was Chicago Bears Lovie Smith, an African American and a direct protégé of Tony Dungy. What a proud moment for America!

That is one side of Jackson, Michigan. Now let's look at the other side. There is a freshman congressman living in the district that includes Jackson by the name of Timothy Walberg. Congressman Walberg (Republican), unlike Tony Dungy, was not born in Jackson but Chicago, Illinois. He is certainly making his mark on the local community in a very opposite fashion from Mr. Dungy. One could say he is the antitheses of Tony Dungy and what he stands for. The following is part of his Bio from Wikipedia:

"In March of 2007, Walberg was a guest on the Jack Ebling show on WILS-AM. During the broadcast he shared stories from soldiers who said that 80 – 85% of Iraq are as stable as Detroit or Harvey, IL. The Michigan Democratic Party released statements attacking Walberg with Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick and Harvey Mayor Eric Kellogg's offices have both released statements requesting an apology from Walberg. "Unfortunately, for years people have beat up on the city of Detroit. Detroit is the word for negative. We are working very hard to transform that image of our city." said James Canning, spokesman for the Detroit office of the Mayor. Mayor Kellogg was also deeply disappointed in the comments, stating that "Even though our country appears to have accomplished great gains in racial harmony, we still have members of congress who suffer from the highest levels of ignorance and stupidity."

Recently, Congressman Walberg sponsored an amendment to the Defense Bill in Congress. It was the destruction of affirmative action laws in procurement affecting minority and women owned businesses. It would have been devastating to minority communities throughout the nation. The vote occurred at about midnight Saturday night. Thankfully, it was strongly defeated by a count of 284 – 126. Even one third of the republicans in congress voted against their party mate.

There are the two sides of Jackson, Michigan. Which one do you prefer?

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

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