
“Hey Man, this is Louisiana; It is how we do Business down Here.”

Those were the words given to me as an explanation. I was involved with some individuals from Lafayette, LA in a business venture about 7 years ago. I flew down to solidify the incorporation papers for the State of Louisiana. To my surprise they had previously incorporated the venture as we discussed but without my knowledge and fraudulently signed my signature as President of the company. There they were, the incorporation papers replete with the signature stating Harry C. Alford. I screamed in protest. They calmly said the above like it was no big thing. From that point on the relationship went “South”. I couldn’t trust these guys and it was my first baptism to a culture that is prevalent to this state.

Corruption is everywhere but Louisiana has a certain flavor to it. Those who participate in it move without a concern for coming to justice. Former Governor Edwin Edwards (Democrat) once boasted that the only way to catch him would be a “dead woman or a live boy”. He was wrong. Strutting through an airport with \$400,000 in pay off money from a casino owner did the trick. Of course, there is corruption everywhere. Lake County, Indiana, East St. Louis, mob capital New York City and New Jersey and of course, that breeder of much corruption known as Chicago. The difference is the casualness of it and how widespread it appears to be in Louisiana. When a program starts the corruption seems to follow immediately.

Such was noted when the Louisiana Film Commission was started to attract more Hollywood film making in the state. Hollywood producers would receive Tax Credits if they filmed their productions in the Bayou State. The producers could then sell the tax credits to Louisiana corporations for eighty cents on the dollar. It was almost immediate (according to a recent indictment) that the Film Commissioner Mark Smith began taking bribes to the tune of \$65,000 in return for excessive and unearned tax credits. Mr. Smith’s previous job was General Counsel for the Louisiana Lt. Governor. Other indictments are promised in this matter.

Indictments have become a big business in this state. Most places have an FBI regional or district office located in the applicable federal building along with Social Security, IRS and other federal entities. In New Orleans, the FBI regional office is a huge stand alone building accompanied by a run way and airplane hanger. It’s got to be one of the biggest operations outside of DC. Recently, FBI senior official James Bernazzani remarked about Louisiana corruption, “Up north we have people skimming the cream but here people skim the cream, steal the milk, highjack the milk bottles and then go looking for the cow.” His office is indicting elected and appointed officials in mind boggling numbers. It is becoming a matter of who is

next. Where will the next surprise come from? Will it be someone we admire or someone we despise? We just don't know.

It was a big hurt to us that New Orleans City Councilman Oliver Thomas was recently indicted and has admitted taking a bribe a few years ago. He was our "Go To" guy on matters concerning the Gulf Rebuilding. A very dependable local elected official helping everyone who approached him. His transgression was slight but it was illegal and now he, too, will be missing from the work to be done.

Everyone is shaking their head waiting on the next "shoe" to drop. I had access to one recent correspondence that said, "They searched _____ office last week. They will probably hit mine this week. We are going down. You all should expect changes." That is strong medicine.

It has been an atmosphere of slinging money for favors. Favors that would have been made anyway but the ill thought of "pay for play" has been handed down since the days of former governor Huey P. Long back in the 1930's. Somehow the atmosphere must be cleansed and perhaps that is what's happening now. Hurricane Katrina seems to have lifted a "rock" that has exposed some bad ways and the US Attorney's office along with the FBI are acting like they are fishing in a barrel. Judges, council persons, school leaders, congresspersons, appointed officials and a myriad of others are going down for taking a little cash. Sooner or later it will sink in and change – Louisiana does business a different way now.

This era is coming to a close and a new, fresh group of leaders will come forward and carry this state to greatness. May that part of the culture change but the rest of this vibrant place that I have come to love stay as it is.

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