

"BEYOND THE RHETORIC"

Harry C. Alford

It's Time to Take Back California□

It happened so fast during the 1990's. California once the leader in diversity and fairness became the "pit bull" for bigotry and right wing extremism.

Yes, under the guidance of former Governor Pete Wilson, this state became the new Mississippi

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Or should I say the "old Mississippi"
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Mississippi
today is doing well in diversity and inclusive business practices.

Like the old state,
California
has become the white male only club in regards to procurement and minority participation.

With Proposition 209 as the excuse, the doors of procurement and admission slammed shut for Blacks and Hispanics.

The biggest tragedy is that no one stood up to fight it.

Blacks in this state had no infrastructure for organizing and the political will was most weak.

The traditional organizations gave out some comments and held a few small meetings but for the most part, the resistance to the assault was paltry.

As a native Californian, I toured the state and held meetings with the local Black chambers. It

became very clear to me that they were all looking for Jesus or someone to come to the rescue.

They did not have the will to fight.

Such is the case today.

African American businesses are getting absolutely nothing in terms of contractual dollars in California

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Not only are they blocked from state dollars via Proposition 209 but even the federal dollars because no one is ready to fight.

What it is going to take for
California
to return to its glory is outside agitation.

Like the “old
Mississippi
” this state is in need of “freedom riders” to come in and break the stranglehold.

How could a state that possesses the Speaker of the House and some of the strongest congressional leaders on Capitol Hill be so archaic and racist in its local policies?

It’s like this is the way it is supposed to be – un-American, apartheid and Jim Crow.

What we have in
California
are volunteer slaves who are satisfied in their second class citizenship.

As these people will be reading this editorial, they will not rise up or shout in anger.

They will say to themselves “yes, that’s us in the back of the bus; that’s just the way it is”.

That is just the way it is going to stay until agitation from the outside comes into play.

The locals are intimidated and afraid just like the “old
Mississippi
”.

It is time for all of us who care about economic equity to focus on this Jim Crow state and begin to demand change.

California has a minority population that exceeds 50%. It is minority majority but less than 5% of any government procurement from federal to city goes to minority businesses.

In most cases, such as
San Diego
, not one Black business gets a government contract.

California
is in violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

No government entity in this nation can authorize or allow discrimination.

Why are we letting the largest populated state in the nation get away with this?

New York can be the best practices model for California. New York City has performed a comprehensive Disparity Study and is now implementing the recommendations to return diversity to the procurement place since it was lost under the Giuliani years.

New York City
has returned to a city that is progressive.

It's time for
Los Angeles
,
San Francisco
,
San Diego
, etc. to do likewise.

Having their mayors apologize for racist results in contracting doesn't solve the problem at all.

Likewise, the State of
New York
has just contracted with a consultant to perform a statewide Disparity Study.

Within the next two years we will see billions of new dollars coming into the minority business communities of this state.

If
New York
can do it so can
California
but only if we demand it.

This February the Board of Directors of the National Black Chamber of Commerce will hold a summit in San Francisco to organize and plot a strategy to change Jim Crow California back into a progressive state. It is so sad to see the land that gave birth to the peace movement and the Black Panther Party become such a “chump”.

As God as my witness, we are going to change this around if we have to do it all by ourselves.

Look out
California
the new freedom riders are about to descend on your racist land and fight the power until change has come.

It is our sincere hope that the victims of all this will soon stand up and join the fight.

Harriet Tubman once said, “I must have led over 1,000 slaves to freedom.

I could have led 1,000's more if they had only known they were slaves.”

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