



March 4, 2015

Board of County Commissioners
Escambia County
221 Palafox Place
Pensacola, Florida 32502

RE: Economic Development Committee Flag Response and Proposed Compromise Solution

Dear Board of Commissioners,

The most unfortunate aspect of issues like this "Flag ordinance," is that it evokes the passions of racial and class division that further exacerbates the status quo of racial division in Escambia County. Discussions about "CSA flags" adoption, causes the "opposing sides" to cling to their long-held beliefs and "shakes the foundation of trust" that is required to implement true collaboration for racial understanding needed to change the state of racism ... that we suffer together.

Instead of debating that almost every spending category for Escambia County is impacted by poverty and lack of economic opportunities which is affecting all citizens of all races. However, we are discussing Confederate flags, history, pride and culture -- as Escambia's poor falls further behind in economic development. Instead of adopting proactive initiatives and ordinances that bring together the races, we are debating "perceptions" stemming from the "past."

Let me clearly articulate position from the majority of the African American community in opposition to the flag supporters' position that claims this CSA "symbol" represents Southern pride, legacy and history.

African-Americans cannot separate the "CSA's pride" from the "CSA's prejudice" - nor the 'CSA's legacy' from the 'CSA's lynchings,' - nor the "CSA's history" from the "CSA's hatred" - nor "CSA culture" from "CSA cruelty" -- nor can one separate the 'CSA's Symbols' from the 'CSA's Slavery'."

The flag supporters cannot - and never will be able to - separate the truth that, "the Confederate States of America's (and the laws throughout the South) was built upon a fundamental "cornerstone" that was based in succession and a Civil War to preserve their "State-Right" to institutionalize and perpetuate "Slavery and Black Oppression" - that is not opinion that is undisputable fact.

The truth of the CSA's "cornerstone" ideology is best illustrated in the "Cornerstone Speech" by Alexander H Stephens, on March 21, 1861, in Savannah GA, where Mr. Stephens was explaining the "founding principles" of the Confederate

"Our new government [the CSA] is founded upon exactly the opposite idea [than the Union]; its foundations are laid, its cornerstone rests, upon the great truth

that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition. This, our new government, is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth."

Our community needs to recognize the past and increase our collective understanding of how the "legacy of the peculiar institution of slavery" has negatively shaped politics, perspectives and trust in Escambia and America - then and NOW. We need to respect people's "feelings and perspectives" that were most probably conceived based upon the reality of, "which side of the bull-whip their ancestors were on."

Let's no longer continue to fail to acknowledge that slavery was just the "initial act of oppression" and ONLY the "beginning" of a series of laws, policies, programs and practices that have clearly been proven to be discriminatory against African Americans that have affected the County and America as a whole.

Clearly, since the end of the Civil War and slavery -- we cannot deny the factual history and the "legacy" of the "night-riders", the KKK, sharecropping, Jim Crow, school segregation, voting rights, education segregation, housing discrimination, bank redlining, judicial-sentencing disparity, police brutality, economic-opportunity disparity, employment disparity, and other documented discriminatory practices -- have had a devastating effect on the socio-economic conditions of a disproportionate share of African-Americans -- that is not "opinion", that is fact.

We must acknowledge effects of slavery were a morally monstrous destruction of human possibility -- it has shaped perceptions about African-Americans to the world -- poisoning past, present and future relations with others who only know Black people through the "lens" of stereotyping.

Today, the legacy of slavery has helped damage the truly progressive human relations among Black and White people in Escambia. Slavery was only the beginning of the destruction of our "collective" cultures, understandings, beliefs. Since the Civil War, the legacy of Slavery has greatly diminished the "human possibility" that we could have achieved through collaboration between the races.

If we are not ashamed of our "racial history," -- we need to stop avoiding our talking about race, or even class. If we truly believe and we are committed to the idea that "everybody is capable of upward mobility, given enough effort on his or her part,"-- then we need to truthfully recognize that some major obstacles have been in the "path to upward mobility" and these obstacles have been "stumbling blocks" for many African Americans in Escambia.

It would be foolish to believe that there has been an "end of racism and discrimination" and thinking the election of Barack Obama and other examples of exceptional achievement among African Americans proves "racism is dead." On the contrary, racism depends on such African-American exceptionalism to buttress the "myth of the demise of discrimination."

In fact, the achievements by a few African-Americans, provides "flimsy-evidence" of the demise of racism. However, it clearly demonstrates the resilience and fortitude of a few aspiring African-Americans in the face of discrimination. Racism and discrimination does not require overt racial hostility or bigotry on the part of racists -- the indifference of our leadership serves this purpose.

The reality about the current existence of racism and discrimination NOW, can best described in William Faulkner's famous line "The past isn't dead. It isn't even past."

The ultimate tragedy derived from the perpetration of racism and discrimination, is not the “acts of the perpetrators and conspirators” – but the real tragedy is the silence from elected leaders that see the “acts of racism and discrimination” and remain silent and take “no action”, and thereby provide passive complicity in these “acts.” As elected official you have a duty to ALL citizens to provide representation and respect for ALL citizens of the County.

The NAACP’s Proposal for Movement Ahead

The NAACP would like the BOCC to turn this "controversy" into "collaboration" between the opposing sides. The NAACP Economic Development Committee sees the "possibilities" instead of the “conflict” ... we see the future instead of the past.

In that light and in an attempt to bring our community together, the NAACP will offer a compromise that is fair and progressive in thought. We propose that the BOCC take this opportunity to turn this “community controversy” into “community collaboration,” accordingly, we would like to offer the following:

1. Along with the consideration of the “racially-divisive” issue of the CSA Flag, we respectfully request the BOCC also immediately introduce an ordinance that supports the NAACP Pensacola Branch’s “non-racial” economic development initiative “Bank On Escambia.” This initiative provides a “platform for collaboration “ designed to help low-income and underserved communities of ALL races gain access to mainstream financial institutions and bank accounts to benefit the community by making citizens more financially stable and educated. An overview of this initiative is attached.
2. We respectfully request that Escambia County becomes an official “community partner” of the NAACP’s “Bank On Escambia” initiative and assist the NAACP build a collaboration between a broad-range of non-profit, civic associations, public officials and governmental agencies will help implement and shape the initiative; assist the financial institutions; and provide general expertise, experience, and credibility in working with and assisting underserved markets, regardless of race.
3. We are requesting that the County \$25,000 to the NAACP led “Bank On Escambia” initiative to be utilized for outreach, workshops, advertising, financial training and technical assistance required under the implementation of this initiative that demonstrates the “New South’s” commitment to building community partnerships between all races and all organizations. This initiative serves “unbanked” Escambia County residents of every race, not just African Americans – and no one can claim this initiative is not needed.

Thank you for consideration and review of this “compromise proposal” that takes proactive steps by embracing the past, and its legacy by taking concrete actions to make a brighter future for the citizens of Escambia.

Sincerely,



George Hawthorne, Chairman
NAACP Economic Development Committee