

November 14, 2013

Statement for the Jacksonville Florida Consolidation Task Force

Dr. Juan P. Gray, D.Min. Board Chair Jacksonville Chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference

Jacksonville Florida as a Consolidated City is a “Dream Deferred” for African Americans. Memories of the past when Earl Johnson was our first highest elected Black Official is fresh in our minds. The Black Community was thriving. Its schools systematically developed academically literate students who later became exceptionally functional citizens as witnessed by four of our current Black City Council members (Dr. Johnny Gaffney, Warren Jones, E. Denise Lee and Reginald Brown).

What happen to the functional component of the Black Community of Jacksonville, Florida? The Good Ole Boys decided to disrupt the functional educational system, dilute the economic foundation located in the Bus Company and the Port System, gut the political strength the Black Community had established to control their destiny. This idea of Consolidation changed the life of the Black Community forever and unfortunately not for the best.

Consolidation was a Political Dream full of promises that have proven to be nothing more than a nightmare. Prior to Consolidation the Black Community had political and economic strength to determine its existence. Today there are four Black elected members of the fourteen city council, which also include five at-large members, with a total of 4 of 19. Today we have 2 published Disparity Studies covering periods from 1990 to 2013. These Disparity Studies state in clear and definitive terms the historical intentional patterns of economic and criminal injustice perpetrated by city officials against the minority members of our city. Most noteworthy was my published article in the Times Union August 19, 2007 citing the facts that “Peyton’s administration had misappropriated some \$78 million per year from HUD earmarked for Section 3”. The city was at that time boasting of having more than 50,000 households living below the poverty line. This \$78 million per year was programed to provide: Housing, Job Training and transportation. My article published December 19, 2007 cited “The city has received, squandered and misdirected hundreds of millions of HUD Section 3 dollars away from the poor. HUD defines this as \$22,000 to \$16,000 per year per household”.

Today we have a zip code “32209” where all of the sociological dysfunctions known to humanity can be found in our city. Today we have the lack of economic development due to failure of the city to invest in infra-structure in large parts of the Black community. This drastic disrepair offers legitimate reasons why businesses refuse to “partner and invest” for the required growth in the Black Community. We should have a Consolidated Dream that “Beaver Street to Dunn Avenue” reflect the economic growth and prosperity that occur all alone Southside Boulevard.

A Black Mayor has offered almost nothing to the hope of the Black Community. Unfortunately, he has been involved in a constant fight trying to function as a “Strong Mayor” promised in a Consolidated City. The political strife witnessed today between the Mayor and the City Council never happened in the past to this degree. What is the primary reason for all of this political infighting? Some suggest it’s political, others say it’s race. Whatever the answer might be, it is killing the dream for a City Government for All. Dr. King once said “we must live together as brothers or we will perish together as Fools”. If the Dream for Jacksonville to be realized as a Consolidated City reasonable people must do as Pastor R. L. Gundy the State President for SCLC says “The Culture must change”. A culture of racial division and status quo which the Good Ole Boys used to fuel and give life to the documented Disparity Studies (1990 & 2013)

The future is in our hands to transform this Consolidated City to benefit all its citizens. The past tells a sorted and ugly story which is evident in our Black Community today. What must we do together to change this nightmare to a Dream of Hope. It will take a consolidated effort of the leaders of our City. Daniel Davis, President of the Chamber of Commerce must include all citizens in the economic growth of our City. He must stop the pattern of exclusion. Ted Carter, Chief City’s Economic Development Office must revive the “Economic Dead Zones”. These are the areas between Beaver Street and Dunn Avenue where the infra-structure is in drastic disrepair. Bill Gulliford, City Council President must lead the City Council in passing laws to address and reverse the economic disparities created by the mismanagement of city tax payers’ dollars. Mayor Brown must somehow reduce the cost for his personal staff. We the tax paying citizens must demand that our elected officials function effectively and efficiently ensuring a City Government for “All the People”. This Dream for a Consolidated City can be achieved if we work, reason and exist together in love. The walls that have separated us must be abolished. Why, because our Children’s, children’s children are counting on us for progress.

Jerry Holland the City’s Supervisor of Elections report to the Consolidation Task Force on August 13, 2013 said “The core city of Jacksonville African Americans make up 53% of the voters population and 57%of the census as of 2010. These are the reasons we must have a seat at the table where decisions are made to determine our future.

Dr. Juan P. Gray, D.MIN. Board Chair Jacksonville Chapter Southern Christian Leadership Conference

