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Parity, Regionalism & Equity: A position paper regarding regionalism in the Dayton Area and its potential impact on African Americans

Parity Inc.

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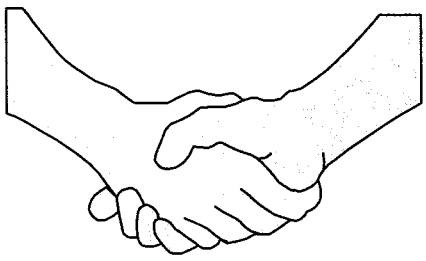

Presented by

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"These next years are going to require us to thoughtfully reexamine our region's political structures, governmental financing methods and to find some means by which a greater civic parity can exist between Dayton and its surrounding neighbors. Whether this is achieved through improved taxing schemes or modernized county or regional government, - Dayton must not be left to become the anemic core of a dying, if affluent, suburban encampment."

Mayor James H. McGee, January 25, 1978

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PARITY, REGIONALISM & EQUITY

Introduction

Known originally as the Issue Nine Committee, Parity, Inc. was established in 1989 to improve the economic, educational and social conditions of African-Americans so that they achieve and maintain parity. As this community embarks upon the discussion of regionalism, Parity, Inc. will monitor and actively participate in these developments to ensure that any movement toward governmental regionalism or regional service delivery indeed provides *parity* and enhances the economic, educational and social conditions of African-Americans throughout the region.

As noted in the *State of Black America 2005: Prescriptions for Change*, African Americans across the country experience an alarmingly high level of unemployment and poverty as compared to their white counterparts. In 2004, the national unemployment rate for African Americans was 10.8%; over two times the 4.7% unemployment rate for whites. The national poverty statistics showed a similar trend, with 24.1 % of African American families living below the poverty level as compared to 10.2 % for white families. In Dayton, Ohio the unemployment and poverty rates for African Americans are even higher than the alarming national statistics.

The success of the Miami Valley region depends on collaborative discussion and solutions to the challenges facing this region. Parity, Inc. believes that the concern for safety, education and stopping the region's brain drain are shared universally, not solely by members of a specific racial group. However, as concerned members of a community that has been historically excluded when plans for the region's future have been developed, we are compelled to offer our comments, which will spark a dialogue and collaborative problem solving that will transform this region and become a model for the nation.

Increase Economic/Wealth Capacity and Accumulation – Economic Empowerment

As noted in the *State of Black America 2005: Prescriptions for Change*, across the country African Americans experience an alarmingly high level of unemployment and poverty as compared to other racial groups. In Dayton, Ohio the unemployment and poverty rates for African Americans exceeds these alarming national statistics.

In order to create movement toward a level of economic parity, the following issues must be addressed.

Full participation of African Americans in the economic well being of the region

Initiatives must be developed throughout the region, not just in the City of Dayton, to actively seek and employ African Americans in all sectors of the region's economic growth.

For example, we all witness the expenditure of public dollars each day as we travel the streets and roads of this region. Tax dollars are expended for the construction of schools, colleges, public offices, roads, parks, etc. The likelihood of observing an African American on a work site is rare. The same holds true for private construction projects in the region. A few short decades ago, it was quite common to observe a predominance of African American workers and the masonry, cement and asphalt trades. Today, it is unusual to see African Americans working in these trades. This example can be replicated in many other employment categories.

As governments, commerce and industries go about their business of providing goods and services, inclusion must be a driving force in order to bring about a greater level of economic parity for African Americans.

Increase in living wage jobs as the region prospers

A disproportionate number of African American citizens in the region are working in full time jobs that pay wages that are insufficient to raise their family incomes above the poverty level. Many breadwinners are working two or more jobs to make ends meet, and depending on their family size, still fall below the poverty level. In Dayton, African Americans experience a poverty rate that is significantly higher than most communities across the country. No full time worker in this region should have to raise a family in poverty. A region-wide effort to establish a living wage standard would go a long way toward addressing this problem.

Develop dispersion process to reduce high geographic concentrations of poverty and work on elimination of poverty

In this region, poverty is highly concentrated in the center City of Dayton, which experiences the disproportionate burden of providing services and resources to low income citizens. The concentration of poverty in the center city can be attributed to two primary factors. One, subsidized low income housing is largely concentrated within the city of Dayton, and two; the concentration of most of the region's human services agencies are located within the core of the city of Dayton. The percent of Dayton's population living in poverty decreased from 26.5% (1990) to 23% (2000). There have been discussions dating back to the 1960's and 1970's regarding the dispersal of low-income housing and services through the region. In fact, low income housing dispersal was a topic on the agenda of the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission in the early 1970's. Now is the time for the discussion to result in action, and for cities, villages and townships throughout the region to begin to reach out and assume their fair share of housing and services for low income citizens.

Equitable economic growth & development throughout the region

Economic growth and development in the region has not occurred evenly throughout the region. Because of the changes in the economy, factories and industries that once made the City of Dayton the region's Mecca for employment and business venues, have now left Dayton with a virtual sea of vacant buildings and abandoned brownfields. This relocation of businesses that spurned these brownfields costs the region millions of public and private dollars to make usable again. Many of the remaining factories and industries are facing the ongoing threat of closure or downsizing. While this is happening, economic growth and development is occurring at a tremendous rate in the fringes surrounding Dayton. The very freeways and parkways that Dayton lobbied to have built to help transport workers, raw materials and finished products into and out of Dayton, are now the attractive magnets that pull businesses and industries farther away from the core city.

Some examples include:

- Lau Blower from Home Avenue in West Dayton to along I-70 in Englewood
- Dayton Daily News Press from Downtown Dayton to along I-75 in Franklin
- Reynolds & Reynolds from Downtown and West Dayton near US 35 in
    - Kettering
- Coca-Cola from Downtown Dayton to along I-70 in Huber Heights

The movement of commercial and retail from the core city has been even more dramatic, with the shopping mall concept pulling retail to the fringe areas and the new advent of the Town Center concept having the potential to pull commercial and retail even further away from the core city.

At some point, the concept of smart and orderly growth must prevail, otherwise the core of the region and the inner ring suburbs will continue to lose at the expense of the whole region.

Equitable opportunities for employment & career advancement throughout the region

Governments, businesses and industries must recognize that as business and commerce migrates to other sections of the Miami Valley, there still remains an obligation, both morally and legally to provide equitable employment and career advancements opportunities to African American citizens. This moral and legal obligation exists in spite of the fact that few, if any, African American citizens may be residing in or around the location of jobs site.

Adequate modes of transportation to jobs throughout the region

As business and industry migrate to other areas of the region, it must be accepted that accessible modes of transportation are maintained and improved. Transportation to places of employment is critical and particularly acute for those dependent upon public transportation. Unfortunately, a disproportionate number of inner city residents remain in poverty. Employment is an absolute necessity for lifting one from the ranks of poverty and allowing him/her the opportunity to begin the road to self-sufficiency. We must work with transportation planners, MVRPC, local governments and our regional transportation authority to meet these needs. It is critical that we come together and do this to remove any barriers that inhibit success for our residents, as a disproportionate number of inner city residents remain mired in poverty.

Increase in black business development

It is clear that the development of black businesses is one key to the economic health of the entire region. In order for the region to prosper and grow, black businesses must have capacity, opportunity and economic empowerment. It is necessary for the region to ensure that development opportunities, assistance, and nurturing occur for black businesses. National and local trends indicate that the development of black businesses lags significantly behind that of majority owned businesses. We need to work to close this gap and strengthen black businesses, which in turn strengthens the entire region.

Encourage the development of diversity and inclusion programs and policies for awarding contracts in the public and private sector

In 1989, the U.S. Supreme Court rendered a decision in the City of Richmond, VA vs. J.A. Croson, which established higher standards of review for race and gender-conscious governmental procurement programs. This decision had a chilling affect on public procurement programs that provided opportunities to minorities. Some of our local governments and the State of Ohio had procurement programs specifically targeted for minorities before this decision. After the Croson decision programs assisting minority businesses decreased significantly locally and across the country. Nationally, the trend for minority businesses has been one of decline since the rendering of the Croson decision. Local jurisdictions throughout our region must be prepared to discuss and develop policies that ensure adequate procurement opportunities for minority businesses.

Encourage the development of diversity and inclusion programs and policies for awarding contracts in the public and private sector (continued)

This effort must have the support of local elected officials who must oversee and enforce regulations establishing applicable programs.

The private sector is not bound by the Croson decision and has the ability to implement a range of procurement programs and polices to ensure that minorities receive sufficient procurement opportunities. While our region has several initiatives aimed at addressing procurement inclusion programs for minorities, we need stronger support from private sector companies and consortiums to address procurement opportunities for minorities.

Increased fair lending and capital to minorities throughout the region

Nationally African Americans have been denied home mortgages and business capital at twice the rate of their white counterparts. Home Mortgage Disclosure Act (HMDA) and Small Business Administration (SBA) records document these practices. Fair lending coalitions nationally and locally urge prime lenders to uphold their Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) obligations to make capital available to low and moderate income and minority communities. If African Americans residences and businesses are to flourish, access to capital and credit for mortgages and businesses is necessary.

Health/Quality of Life

Equitable access to healthcare and reduction of health disparities throughout the region

There are "troubling disparities" in the mental health care that U.S. ethnic and racial minorities receive, according to a "broad and comprehensive" supplemental report to the 1999 "Surgeon General's Report on Mental Health." According to the report, the disparities are due in part to the "fragmented, costly and inadequate mental health services" available to minorities, as well as to the high number of minorities who lack insurance. Those findings mirror the experiences of ethnic minorities and the poor within the Dayton region. The local experience following the closing of the Dayton State Hospital demonstrated the need for greater collaboration and planning for clients discharged with little or no follow-up case management services for many who needed medication and housing. Within the Dayton region housing for the mentally ill continues to be a challenge that must be addressed.

Preventive health care and medical service access continues to be a challenge for a significant population within the local region. These disparities are due primarily to the lack of affordable health care coverage for the working poor and unemployed. Preventive health care services have been proven to reduce total health care costs, by reducing the incidence of preventable major illnesses. In the absence of a national health insurance program, the local region must find reasonable ways to bridge the gap between the need and the access to health and mental health services for all citizens.

Balanced population growth and reduce/eliminate sprawl

The region's approach to planning and community development has, no doubt, created a serious population imbalance within the region. Transportation and infrastructure systems have afforded developers an opportunity to create markets in housing, industry and commerce. The development of transportation and infrastructure is occurring significantly outside the inner core of the region, creating a range of issues. While there has been some growth in the region, we see decay and disinvestment in the urban center and central cities. For example, the population of the City of Dayton has declined by approximately 35% since 1970. Most of the African Americans in our community reside in the western quadrant of the county. The planning and use of infrastructure development for the western quadrant must be given a high priority if this trend is to be reversed. We need to make better use of brownfields in the inner city and be sensitive to sprawl as it erodes critical farmland and creates balkanization of government.

Increase in racially and economically diverse communities

The United States population continues to be divided by race and class, however, over the past few years in selected parts of our country we find segregated living patters slowly diminishing for lower and middle class Americans. Unfortunately, Dayton's residential desegregation is moving much slower. The racial dissimilarity index in Dayton decreased slightly from 79% to 76.2%. The dissimilarity index is the measure of segregation between two groups. In this case, it is the measure of segregation between Caucasians and African Americans. An index of 0 means there is complete integration and an index of 100 means complete segregation. The majority of local African Americans continue to reside west of the Miami River no matter the economic strata. Fair housing laws have enabled the black middle class to expand to Trotwood, Jefferson Twp., Clayton, and Harrison Twp. over the years in increasing numbers. The migration south and east of Dayton is proceeding much slower. Barriers of exclusionary zoning, lack of affordable housing, and un-welcomed attitudes in these communities need elimination.

Equitable distribution of public services within the region

As the discussions unfold regarding the regional delivery of public services, safeguards must be in place to ensure that the center cities are not shortchanged. Center cities have provided a higher level of basic governmental services than those jurisdictions in the rural and suburban areas. This is due to the density of the population and greater services requirements for needy citizens within the center city areas. Therefore, it must be recognized that the equitable distribution of public services does not necessarily mean that all areas of the region receive the same service levels, but rather, that services are distributed in a manner that meets the current and future needs of the population of a specified area. It is important that the each affected governmental unit and their citizens have input into what services they believe are most important to provide. In this region, one size does not fit all.

Sustained efforts throughout the region to address human relations, civil rights, and social/ racial justice

Various studies, initiatives and evaluations have been undertaken in our region to address and monitor human and race relations along with civil rights and social/racial justice. While energy and resources have been expended in these areas there is still much to be done.

The region must strategically focus on policies and programs that address human and civil rights issues and work on achieving social/racial justice. There are organizations in the region that work in these areas, but these issues need the involvement of the total community. We need to get more organizations involved to address these issues as there must be a clear plan of action to improve human and race relations and address social/racial justice throughout the region.

Education

All schools produce top performing students who can successfully compete in tomorrow's global economy

In its recently released report, "*One Third of a Nation: Rising Dropout Rates and Declining Opportunities*", The Educational Testing Service reported that the nation's high school dropout rates are rising in all but seven states and that even more students have begun to drop out between the ninth and tenth grades. What was once viewed as an issue isolated to inner cities is now a challenge for slums and suburbs.

Three criteria, none of which are limited to core cities, were identified as primary causal factors: "*Socioeconomic issues, number of parents living with the young person and a history of changing schools frequently*".

The nation's commitment to "Leave No Child Behind" fails miserably in the wake of this study.

The educational system must change if it is to be successful in its mission of preparing young people for self-sufficiency. Only in the purest of circumstances is the educational process strictly a function of academics. In order for young people to learn, the schools must be able to skillfully address issues of nutrition, family dynamics, housing and economic stability, among others, as conditions for readiness to learn.

All schools produce top performing students who can successfully compete in tomorrow's global economy (*continued*)

These challenges are all present on the local level as well. For far too long, our school systems have continued to conduct themselves as if we remain a part of an agrarian society. School hours, coursework and cultures fail to take into account the myriad of familial and other changes, which have occurred in society. The tools necessary for success upon high school graduation in 1951 are no longer the primary keys for similar success in 2005.

Along with technical and technological training, including access to state of the art computer equipment and teachers, youths must be exposed to relevant courses and experiences that prepare them for navigating the new multicultural and diverse communities in which they must learn to work and play.

Additionally, the equality of public education is a major factor in attracting businesses to relocate to the region. If the Miami Valley is to stem a two decades old brain drain, the improvement of education (both traditional district and charter) must become a central pillar of any future regional planning. Prospective corporate relocates must know that there is a prepared workforce here in the Miami Valley that will enable their companies to compete globally.

Housing

Affordable housing for all economic classes

Today nearly one in three Americans spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing and more than one in eight spend upwards of 50 percent on housing costs. Locally, the percent of homeowners who spent 35 percent or more of their income on housing costs increased from 14 percent to 19 percent. A significant number of African Americans make up those persons who cannot afford housing because of the increasing costs of housing (owned or rented). Homeownership rates nationally are approximately 69 percent. The homeownership rate for African Americans is approximately 47-49 percent. Housing affordability is becoming increasingly difficult with personal incomes remaining stagnant and fragile in our economy.

Elimination of predatory mortgage lending throughout the region

A contributing factor to the increased cost of housing for African Americans is predatory lending. Predatory lending or high costs mortgage loans are targeted towards communities of color at the national and local level. Local efforts to prevent these lending practices which also includes payday lending, rent to own, car title borrowing, etc… have been halted by industry efforts and state lawmakers. The community needs stronger local, state, and national laws to prevent predatory practices and the consequences of foreclosure.

Criminal Justice System

In recent years policy attention regarding the crisis of the African American male has focused on a variety of areas in which African American males have suffered disproportionately from social ills. These have included education, housing, employment, and health care, among others. Perhaps in no other area, though, have these problems been displayed as prominently as in the realm of crime and the criminal justice system. African Americans have been affected in this area in two significant regards. First, African Americans are more likely to be victimized by crime than are other groups. Second, the dramatic rates at which African American males have come under some form of criminal justice supervision has created a complex set of consequences which affect not only individual victims and offenders, but families and communities as well.

- According to a report by the Justice Policy Institute in 2002, the number of black men in prison has grown to five times the rate it was twenty years ago. Today, more African-American men are in jail than in college. In 2000 there were 791,600 black men in prison and 603,032 enrolled in college.

- For Montgomery County, in 2004 of the 8,664 juvenile delinquencies referrals 4,057 were African American.

Since 1980, the "war on drugs" has been the most significant factor contributing to the rise of prison and jail populations. Drug policies have also had a disproportionate impact on African Americans and have exacerbated the racial disparities that already existed within the criminal justice system. This has come about in two ways: first, drug offenses overall have increased as a proportion of the criminal justice population and, second, the proportion of African Americans among drug offenders has been increasing.

There must be a multi-prong approach to address some of the systemic problems. Some of these efforts could be the following:

Jurisdictional commitment to reducing disparity

Efforts to reduce disparity will only succeed if there is a jurisdiction-wide commitment to address the problem. Otherwise, efforts to reduce disparity at one point in the system may be offset by countervailing actions within other components of the system.

Equitable representation

Much of the hostility between minority communities and the police can be traced to the under-representation of minorities in law enforcement. Police departments and prosecutors' offices should redouble their efforts to recruit minorities. This diversification should also address all levels of employment and elected/appointed positions within the criminal justice system.

Improvements in alternative programs

African American male first exposure to the criminal justice system starts at the juvenile stage. If proper alternatives to confinement are not fully utilized and developed then there is a high probability the African American youth will move onto the prison system. Once an African American has a prison record it becomes a barrier to employment. This in turn contributes to the instability of their families and their communities. We must focus our efforts to have positive intervention at the African American youth level.

Leadership Opportunities / Development

Equitable power holding and participation in all forms of regional governance

Within this region, most African Americans in elected offices and in administrative positions of authority service primarily in two political jurisdictions, Trotwood, Jefferson Twp., and Dayton. Both jurisdictions enjoy a significant African American constituent base. Over the next few years, the concept of a consolidated regional governance structure will, no doubt, be discussed and considered. Unless steps are taken to prevent it, a consolidated regional governance structure could have the effect of reducing, or even eliminating, the participation of African Americans in the public governance structure. This cannot be allowed to happen.

Corporate Governance

Decision making that affects the region's economy, employment and facility citing, occurs largely within the region's corporate boardrooms. Typically, there are few, if any, members of the region's African American community represented on the region's corporate boards. In order to provide greater focus on the effects that corporate board decisions may have on the African American community, the composition of the region's corporate boards should better reflect the demographic composition of the community and the customer base the corporations serve.

Philanthropy

Foster philanthropic awareness & activity that equitably impacts the entire region

Conclusion