Which Way Forward

What is Which Way Forward?

Which Way Forward: African Americans, Immigration and Race is a national network of African American/black leaders committed to addressing the impact of anti-immigrant activity and anti-immigrant supported public policy on the African American community and on U.S. civil rights. Which Way Forward: African Americans, Immigration and Race will lead a coordinated response to any attempt by anti-immigrant organizations or elected officials to undermine the economic and political agenda of the African American community.

Who Makes Up Which Way Forward?

Which Way Forward: African Americans, Immigration and Race is made up of African Americans leaders who are diverse in thought and opinion regarding the subject of immigration reform in the United States. We are deeply troubled with the willingness of leaders and elected officials within the African American community to associate themselves with anti-immigrant organizations with ties to political extremists—including some with ties to white nationalist’s organizations, publications and leaders.

More than forty African American bring their expertise and concern for justice to Which Way Forward, including Tanisha Bowens, Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.; Carol A. Brown, National President, United Black Christians, United Church of Christ; Gary Flowers, Exec. Director, Black Leadership Forum; Andrew Grant-Thomas, Deputy Director, Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity; Benjamin Jealous, President, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; Alan Jenkins, Executive Director, Equal Opportunity Agenda; Gerald Lenoir, Exec. Director, Black Alliance for Just Immigration; Donna G. McDaniel, Assistant Director, Minority Advancement Dept., International Laborers, Union; Elmira Nazombe, Women’s Div., United Methodist Women; Jerry Pennick, Federation for Southern Cooperatives, Land Assistance Fund; Valora Starr, Program for Women, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America; Robin Williams, Associate Director, Civil Rights and Community Actions Dept., United Food and Commercial Workers; and more.

What Are The Concerns of Which Way Forward?

Which Way Forward is deeply concerned about the ongoing attacks on immigrants—attacks increasingly fueled by bigotry and opportunism. Additionally African American leaders must carefully monitor the impact of anti-immigrant public policy and activity on voting rights, access to social services, education, and the rights of citizenship—key victories of the Civil Rights movement. We believe that the national discussion on migration should be honest and sensible. Which Way Forward believes that the voice of African American leaders and elected officials is necessary to pull the debate back from the intolerant fringes.

REJECT THE FALSE NOTION OF IMMIGRANT AND BLACK COMPETITION FOR JOBS

While we recognize that throughout the history of the United States there have existed tensions between the African American community and immigrant communities, Which Way Forward rejects that any past, present or future frictions between “Blacks and Latinos” or “Blacks and immigrants” grant permission to ignore our responsibility in building an America free from political, economic and social discrimination based on race.

We rebuke the fraudulent assertion by anti-immigrant elected officials and organizations that the African American and immigrant communities must compete for the lowest paid jobs, and we call for the construction of an economy that secures a living wage, upholds worker safety and protects the right to organize.

- Renowned economist David Card has unequivocally stated that nationally “the evidence that immigrants harm native opportunities is slight.”

- The Pew Hispanic Center, examining census data between 1990 and 2004, concluded “employment prospects for native-born workers do not appear to be related to the growth of the foreign-born population.”

- There are localized examples of job competition between immigrants and African Americans. However, according to Dr. Steven Pitts of the UC Berkeley Labor Center, it is important for African Americans to remember that the job crisis in the Black community—unemployment and low-wage work—stems from a number of causes, including continued racial discrimination in the labor market, the impact of mass incarceration policies, substandard education at the K – 12 levels, and the decline of unionization.

Anti-immigrant organizations and their elected allies have pioneered multiple legislative, electoral, and judicial tactics that seek to negatively impact the relationship between Latino, Immigrant and African American communities. Through numerous Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) front groups and “coalitions” an agenda harmful and divisive to the African American community is being advanced.

- “The Coalition for the Future American Worker” seeks to lure African Americans and labor into its ranks and sway African Americans to the anti-immigrant agenda by painting a false picture of severe economic tension between African Americans, Immigrants and Latinos.

- Disturbingly, the Center for Immigration Studies—a FAIR offshoot—has parlayed its “think tank” role into a key source of questionable data and analysis on immigration issues to members of the U.S. House of Representatives.

ATTACKS ON THE 14TH AMENDMENT TO U.S. CONSTITUION ARE UNACCEPTABLE

Throughout our country’s history, small but vocal groups of narrow-minded individuals have sought to divide Americans. Fortunately for our nation, Americans of all stripes have stood up to strengthen our commitment to unity, hard work and opportunity. Whatever your views on immigration policy, it’s hard not to be disturbed by increasingly scornful attacks by anti-immigrant groups and their elected allies. These groups and their leaders seek to turn back the clock on hard-won civil rights, going so far as to advocate the repeal of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution. National anti-immigrant organizations such as the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) have made clear their intermediate goal: the destruction of the 14th Amendment, which acts as a constitutional guarantee of citizenship rights. The amendment also recognizes the fact that every native-born person is automatically a first class citizen.

- African American elected officials should oppose H.R. 1940 introduced in the 110th session and sponsored by 103 members of congress. Passage and implementation of H.R. 1940 would require eviscerating the 14th Amendment, a question of insurmountable import to black people whose citizens’ rights have been historically guaranteed by the this amendment.

- African American elected officials must oppose legislation similar to H.R. 1940 that seeks to undercut national unity. Attacks on the 14th Amendment serve no purpose other than to score political points with vocal anti-immigrant organizations, some who have ties to extremists including white nationalist organizations.

- The understanding that African Americans and immigrants share common interests in defending the 14th Amendment is heightened as the link between the white nationalist movement and the anti-immigrant movement is exposed. Turning back the clock on civil rights is at the heart of anti-immigrant activity. For example, the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) has deep ties to the white nationalist movement.

- African American elected officials must publicly challenge outside organizations with anti-immigrant agendas that seek to speak for the Black community within the halls of congress. Neither these organizations nor their so-called leadership represent the full viewpoint of the African American community. African American elected officials should highlight that these organizations claiming to represent us have no past or present programmatic or legislative work that seeks to expand social and economic opportunities for all Americans, including African Americans.

"PROOF OF CITIZENSHIP" LEGISLATION DISENFRANCHISES BLACKS

Radio hosts, politicians, and media figures are escalating their attacks against immigrants with the goal of slamming the door on America’s historic commitment to establishing inclusion, opportunity and uplift for all members of our

society regardless of race, nationality and ethnicity. By standing against any reform not grounded in exclusionary practices, anti-immigrant elected officials have undermined civil rights and the expansion of democracy in the United States. Acting in such a manner, these elected officials have purposely or inadvertently disenfranchised African Americans from the basic rights of citizenship— including the right to vote. The passage and introduction of legislation that requires “proof of citizenship” to register to vote, vote on election day, access government social services, or travel, unfairly impacts African Americans and addresses none of the reasons that immigrants come to the United States without documents.

- Currently in the United States, 8.9 percent of African Americans (18 or older) have no means of documenting their citizenship, according to a national survey conducted by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

- Sam Shapiro, Professor Emeritus of John Hopkins University, found that an estimated one-fifth of African-Americans born between the years 1939 and 1940 were never issued birth certificates mainly due to segregation.

- Rutgers University professor Tim Vercelloti found that African Americans were 5.7% less likely to vote in states that required voter identification.

We need long-term solutions to the issue of migration that are realistic. While answers are sought African American elected officials must ensure that members of congress do no harm.

- The Federal Election Integrity Act of 2006 will by 2010 disenfranchise African Americans from the right to vote if unable to produce the “required” documents.

- The Real ID Act of 2006 prohibits federal agencies from accepting state-issued driver’s licenses or identification cards unless such documents are determined by the Secretary of Homeland Security to meet minimum security requirements. When the Real ID Act of 2006 comes into effect it will reduce the ability of African Americans to travel by public transportation outside their state of residence.

- The Draft Reduction Act of 2005 requires those who apply or reapply for Medicaid to show proof of citizenship with “required” documents. This will negatively impact African Americans, especially the elderly.

African American elected officials must oppose all legislation that disenfranchises the Black community.

Articles:

- Anti-Immigrant to Blacks: Go back to Africa

- Murder in Brooklyn Latest Hate Crime Against Immigrants

- African American Student in Russia Stabbed by Neo-Nazis

- There is no Promise Land without Black America

- Are African Americans Missing the Point on Immigration?

- Attacks against Immigrants, attacks Black America

- Black America Chose