

Black Votes Matter

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Black Lives, Black Poverty and Black Votes Matter

From The National Civil Rights Museum, Memphis, Tennessee

I am writing my column for this issue from historic Memphis, Tennessee. On April 3rd, 1968 Martin Luther King came to Memphis at the invitation of my old friend Rev. Billy Kyles. King was in Memphis to support the strike and conduct a March for the African American sanitation workers who were working under dangerous conditions, discrimination, the death of two black workers and attempts to unionize. King was returning because a month before, a protest March was suspended after violence broke out. He was assassinated by James Earl Ray, the next day, April 4th, while standing on the balcony of the Lorraine Hotel.



While here in Memphis I visited the Hotel, which has been converted to the **National Civil Rights Museum**. Hundreds of visitors flocked the Museum including many on tour buses from all over the world. My wife and I spoke with many, including a lady from Denmark with her son. We watched them stare at the historic artifacts at the museum as well as the window where the fatal shot was fired. Emotional. There were celebrations and services at the site on the 4th, with speakers including my historic colleague Rev Jesse Jackson.

Also, while in Memphis my wife and I attended a national business meetings for the Church of God In Christ (COGIC). My wife is Supervisor of Women for the Nebraska First Jurisdiction and as such, attends and participates in the national matters of the church. The Church's membership is estimated to be 6.5 million. Memphis is the national headquarters for the church founded in 1907. The meeting we are attending is call the "Annual Call" meeting. The national headquarters is located at the very iconic and historic Mason Temple, named after the founder Bishop Charles Mason.

There is a historic relationship between the King assassination at the Loraine Hotel and Mason Temple. On the night of April 3rd the night before his assassination, King who wanted to rest was "forced" to come to Mason Temple to speak to the 3000 attendees who came not to hear Rev. Ralph Abernathy (King Chief Associate) who was scheduled to speak, but to hear King. He relented after a pleading phone call from Abernathy. He came and gave his awesome, "I've been to the mountain top" speech. Less than 24 hours and about an 13minute drive from Mason Temple King was dead.

That leads me back to my trip. I too traveled the short distance from the Mason Temple and the Loraine Hotel several times during this trip to Memphis. As a man of God, I too was spiritually uplifted in the presences of Mason Temple. We prayed in the sacred prayer room. I too felted the sting of the bullets, (Metaphorically) of the city of Memphis.

The African American community in Memphis is dying, it's decaying. Its people are drowning in poverty, unemployment and total lack of economic vitality and inclusion. Sound familiar? It should! Memphis blacks make up 65% of the population of the city, the plight of the Black community in Memphis is in fact the plight of entire city of Memphis. The plight of the blacks in Memphis is an "enlarged mirror" of North Omaha, including the lack of community engagement, as discussed in my book *Economic Cataracts* and in this column repeatedly.

While in Memphis a \$310,000 Disparity Study was released. The study unearths the systematic unfairness as to the county contracting practices. It is a sad report of public institution's treatment of our black businesses. Many of us have been advocating the need for a disparity study right here in Omaha. Black Memphis is north Omaha times ten.

Read this article, register, vote and hold yourself, our community, and our leader's accountable for the progress we should be demanding, now.

Note: Attend this month's Empowerment Network meeting (9:00 am at North High) and hear my briefing on the plans for our community to combine our efforts to show that in fact, Black Votes Matter. Deputy Registrar training will also be held after the meeting at noon. Preston Love Jr. 402-812-3324

*To review previous Black Votes Matter column articles visit ***Omahastar.com***. Or ***prestonlovejr.com***. Column began September 11, 2015*