



Fannie Lou Hamer Democratic Coalition of St. Louis County

“The Electorate for Freedom and Equality”

Declaration

“Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will”

-Frederick Douglass

We are united and determined to end the political forces that have never recognized our humanity, nor cared about our welfare. We are committed to put in place true inclusion and effective participation in the political process.

The history of disparate treatment of the African American citizens of St. Louis County dates back to the first African American residents of St. Louis County. There exists in St. Louis County a disrespect for African Americans. Nowhere is that more evident than in the political system of St. Louis County. In every area of civil society we have examined, we have found the relationship between the African American community and St. Louis County to be both inequitable and unjust. African American political leaders can no longer be oblivious to the obvious.

Any superficial examination will lead even the most casual observer to the conclusion that there is a systemic, structural hostility to the very idea of African American participation as full citizens in the civil society of St. Louis County. There are many exceptional individuals who are not of color, who have been on the frontline in the fight for social justice. Our charge is made against the structural nature of this situation which mitigates these individual efforts.

The Criminal Justice System

The most egregious power of any government is the power to deprive citizens of their freedom. The civil justice system has been designed with the intent to disenfranchise African Americans and rob them of their hard earned income. Some St. Louis County municipalities have criminalized not only driving while Black, but also being Black and poor.

Also, the gross underrepresentation of African Americans on the county and municipal police forces is the enforcement mechanism by a judicial system that oftentimes resembles a system of corruption more than one of justice. Relative to policing in those areas, the African American community is neither protected nor served.

In the larger criminal justice system we are overrepresented in jails because we are underrepresented on juries. Visiting any jail on any given day, the only conclusion one may draw is there are very few white criminals. Many African Americans are there as a result of misdemeanor offenses resulting from the criminalization of being too poor to pay fines.

Economic Development

The underdevelopment of areas of St. Louis County in predominately African American communities is overwhelming. This is not an accidental oversight or an unintentional slight. This benign neglect was done with malice of forethought. White flight has been well documented for many years. With the absence of funding comes the absence of much needed services, resulting in an underserved African American community. A review of employment and income data for African American vs. Caucasian St. Louis County residents shows disparities that cannot be explained by random chance. These disparities exist in every area of economic activity in St. Louis County.

In the area of housing, the failure to develop a strategic housing policy for St. Louis County that addresses the long term housing needs of the people across income categories has resulted in devastating consequences for African Americans in the inner ring municipalities of St. Louis County. The highest rate of foreclosure within the boundaries of St. Louis County has taken far longer to rebound than any market in the region.

Health Care

The recent comprehensive report "For the Sake of All" says it all about the health status of African Americans in St. Louis County. To sum it up, to be African American in St. Louis County is to be condemned to increased morbidity rates and a lower quality of physical health for a lifetime.

Education

The crisis that exists in educating African American children requires a re-thinking how education is structured and funded. Addressing the educational needs of our children in St. Louis County must be a priority. It is clear that the reason that all options are not on the table for African American children is because the status quo in education works for Caucasian children. So much for, "These are all our children."

There are daunting challenges facing the African American community of St. Louis County, but they all have solutions. We can and must solve this. There can be many responses to this Bill of Particulars, however any effective solutions require changes in public policy, and changes in public policy require political will. As African American elected officials, our responsibility is to develop an appropriate and effective political response.

Any political party really has only one mandate and that is to support candidates and advance governmental policies which advance the interests of the people and/or groups whose support make the party possible. There is no group more important to the viability of the St. Louis County Democratic Party than the African American community. Yet, there is a total absence of any political consideration for the African American community, whether it is in the party leadership, the development and support of candidates for elected office or advocating for public policy solutions that speak to the needs of the African American community in St. Louis County.

Which brings us to this place, at this time. Just like the legendary civil rights and political activist Fannie Lou Hamer, "We are sick and tired of being sick and tired." Today we announce the formation of a new political organization whose mission is to protect and advance the political interests of the African American Community of St. Louis County. To that end, we have formed the Fannie Lou Hamer Democratic Coalition of St. Louis County. We draw on the inspiration and memory that produced the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and its iconic and historic leader Ms. Fannie Lou Hamer.

There are people who say we need to come together, to find common ground; that we are all one community. The fact is that St. Louis is at least two communities, one black, one white, separate and unequal. As African American political leaders, we will no longer play political games that allow certain political leaders to pretend that St. Louis has joined the civilized world of urban, inclusive regions.

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