



SAMUEL DEWITT PROCTOR CONFERENCE, INC.

*With Vision...By Faith...Through Action
Strengthening Churches...Empowering Leaders... Transforming Communities*

Reflections Reclaiming Our Narratives

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In the wake of the domestic acts of terror that claimed nine Black lives in the historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, SC; there has been a rush to accommodate religious protocol to thank public officials and dignitaries from the pulpit in order to demonstrate our civility and to make the uncomfortable space more bearable for white people that have flocked to our pews and sacred spaces. The calling of the names have been liturgy and ritual as if to demonstrate a remission of sins or absolution.

In participating in the many services held to remember and celebrate the life of the Charleston 9; the clergy took caution to thank the mayors, the governor, the police, and a list of other important figureheads that made their way to the front pew in perfect trajectory with the cameras.

We must be careful not to romanticize the actions of public officials or their motivations behind doing the very job they were elected or appointed to do. We should consider the global spotlight is on Charleston and South Carolina. With upcoming elections that may impact the Governor's office and North Charleston's Mayor's office (remember Walter Scott), too; we must remain conscious of the comprehensive politics of all officials and not be distracted or persuaded because of one act of removing a racist symbol of a flag that was long overdue.

Moreover, it should not just take the deaths—the brutal murders and execution of nine human lives for public officials to be awakened from their slumber to realize the grotesque dangers that emblems such as the confederate flag present to members of their constituency, but further humanity as a whole. Let us not make South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley a hero or the face of the "Bringing Down the confederate flag." She did not put the wheels in motion to bring down the flag. The people did.

Lest we forget those grass-root organizers and collective Black lead organizations of South Carolina that led the boycott of the state for decades. Lest we forget the martyred that made the greatest sacrifice when their bodies were beaten, raped, lynched and terrorized under the banner of the confederate flag. We are the ones we have been waiting for and we are our own liberators.

I suspect Governor Haley is no more vested to the cause of bringing down that racist flag than Abraham Lincoln was about the liberation of enslaved people. I pray I am wrong. When Election Day comes for Haley, Mayor Keith Summey (North Charleston), Senator Tim Scott, and all of our officials of the Palmetto State, shall we consider the fullness of their engagement in the communities that are often ignored and invisible?

We are not bound by a protocol to thank public officials fulfilling an oath to serve and protect. As a member of one of the families directly impacted by the shootings; I adamantly assert, "Don't use our grief to build an image of solidarity that has not been there."

What about the public schools of South Carolina, among the poorest performing schools in the nation? What about Charleston's School District 23? A largely African American, mostly Sea Island, rural community that goes without the same quality resources as public schools in more affluent communities.

What about the evidence of discriminatory and racialized police violence against Blacks and people of color throughout South Carolina and the claims brought against North Charleston's police force long once was exposed by the murder of Walter Scott?

What about the displacements of historic Black communities as gentrification and downtown development expands the poaching of Black land and exploitation of Sea Island culture and traditions?

What about public healthcare benefits limited due to racist policies and legislation imposed by Republicans in the state? The Affordable Health Care Act (Obama Care) in South Carolina is still beyond reach of citizens with great need because of restrictions imposed preventing full access to benefits.

The people have been consistent in their lament and outcries for change. Sadly, as we have seen throughout the course of history in this stolen nation; it takes the blood of the slaughtered to bring attention to the cause of the oppressed and to "inspire" and motivate the convenience of political action amidst an inconvenient truth.

This is a Kairos moment calling us to be brave, bold and bound by our love for each other. Instead, we often romanticize an oppressive system's allegiance to our freedom while sacrificing the revolutionaries unbinding the chains. Audre Lorde said, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."

Shall we affirm the young leaders offering their bodies, talent and love for their people to the movement and dismantling systems of oppression? Shall we acknowledge and join their dedicated actions, organizing and witnessing? Shall we make space on the front pews and room in the pulpit for their creative and prophetic calls, too? Shall we hear their voices and engage their platforms for justice and freedom?

It is the defiant ones that sustain the movement for Black lives as prophetic voices in the margins, in the public square and in the diaspora. The streets become their sanctuaries where narratives are reclaimed. The streets become their pulpits, where the voices at the bottom emerge boldly speaking truth to power.