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Emerging Issues for North Omaha

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Black Votes Matter
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Black Lives, Black Poverty and Black Votes Matter

Emerging Issues for North Omaha

In the book *Economic Cataracts* (Love, 2015), the author discusses the residuals of poverty-stricken communities and in particular, North Omaha. The book list and discusses 10 of the reasons poverty-stricken communities are not engaged, a few of the reasons: Poverty, Over-abundance of non-profits and low voter turnout.

To fully address the problems that are stated as reasons above, there needs to be solutions in order for north Omaha to fully rise. May I say, that there are signs of a rising North Omaha. Some estimate nearly \$1million in investment is occurring; The 75 North Development, the Fair Deal Development, Walmart, the Learning Community office, Over \$200,000 of the OPS bond issue construction, Metropolitan Community College's(MCC), three new building complexes, a Contemporary Arts facility and many new discussions for more development.

What north Omaha needs, what poverty needs, is to develop jobs, wealth development from our for-profit businesses, and major public and private responsible investment.

With that said, three emerging issues that will impact north Omaha and require collaboration and engagement with the community, are:

1. The financial crisis of community base non-profit organizations

In a poverty-stricken community there are massive numbers of non-profits, who do a great job in supporting the needs of a poor community. Those non-profits come in two forms (simply stated). First, we have the larger organizations, the Hope Center, the Urban League, Girls Inc, Family Housing, for example. Then we have the smaller and, in many cases, small community-based organizations, owned and/or run by community members. In this category we have many; my own Black Votes Matter, The Love Center, the Empowerment Network, 100 Black Men, Malcolm X Foundation, North Omaha Neighborhood Association and the individual Neighborhood Associations, and many more.

The emerging problem is with the smaller and much needed non-profits, have a continuing and growing financial crisis. We need the smaller organizations as well as the larger ones. But we need the grass root nature and specialized service delivery, that only smaller non-profits can offer.

The smaller organizations are struggling financially and are fighting to stay afloat. The non-profits are assisted in several ways, there is the African-American Unity Fund, Omaha Gives option and the possible blessing from a foundation. There is a tremendous need for the expansion of the funds available and an increase of the funding options. I am observing growing desperation of the organizations, not only to stay afloat but to maintain their service level. Many of the organizations raise money from annual dinners. The dinners reach out to the same corporate audience and create an environment where our organization are vying against each other for the corporate dinner dollars, not good. There needs to be a new collaboration developed to study and develop a comprehensive strategy to save our non-profits. The real solution is to empower and create more community based for-profits.

2. Responsible Economic Development

Most of the community economic development to date have brought jobs, some have not brought a lot of jobs but, all jobs contribute greatly to the community. To make a greater impact the developments must provide other elements; contracts to community businesses, contractors and for-profit service companies, indirect investment into the community, contributions to stated community needs. This is responsive and responsible development. Many cities are addressing this with what is called Community Benefit Agreements. CBA's. A CBA specify and codify a set of specific agreements as to how the developer will commit to providing the range of benefits to the community it is about to develop. When Walmart came to North Omaha we got jobs (great), but we didn't get contracts and other commitments. Going forward we must demand CBAs. Community leadership must begin to demand some form of CBAs. Leadership and community must collaborate with the public and private sectors to not just focus on development but responsible development.

3. Loss of voting leverage

Voting leverage is the power of a bloc of votes to command respect and action from politicians as it relates to the needs of the voting bloc. North Omaha is a voting bloc. The larger the voting bloc the greater the leverage. Historically, north Omaha has been a dependable and powerful voting bloc. In 2008 that voting bloc made history, voting strong enough to drive the Congressional District 2 (CD2), voting, high enough to win CD2 for the democrat (Obama)and split the Nebraska electoral vote, making national history. Since 2008 the "bloc" has continued to decrease. I formed an organization to address the decline, called Black Votes Matter.

Voting leverage will give the community power in all things relating to the community, especially with the public sector. A strong voting community can make political demands. By the way those demands can be directed to the two previous emerging issues described above.

The community, in this case North Omaha, will lose its leverage if it doesn't increase its voter turnout. The community needs to bring leadership together (collaborate) and devise joint strategies and plans of action to maximize the vote and therefore maximize the leverage

*To review previous Black Votes Matter column articles, visit **Omahastar.com**. Or **prestonlovejr.com**. Preston love can be reached at prestonlovejr@gmail.com*

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