

February 8, 2009

Governor M. Jodi Rell  
Executive Office of the Governor  
State Capitol  
210 Capitol Avenue

Dear Governor:

I am a 66 old African American, born in Hartford, Connecticut, one of four children, born to William and Elizabeth Shepard, also born in the same city. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to express my concern regarding the African American Affairs Commission.

The African American experience in Connecticut and the Nation is unique. Their presence in all 13 Original Colonies predates the formation of the United States. They have been discriminated against, vilified, crucified, and exploited economically for the benefit of the nation. All groups shared in the wealth generated from their enslavement. African American fought in every war, including the Revolutionary War. They occupy a significant part of America's landscape and I do not believe we can understand ourselves as a nation without understanding African American experience. If we are to move successfully into the future, we must understand how the nation's existence is informed by African American experiences. The way Connecticut or the Nation makes decisions about domestic and foreign affairs are realized through institutions formed and shaped through historic experiences with African Americans. All institutions, including churches, participated in shaping America's worldview ordered by origin and color. This view is so embedded within the culture where color is an unspoken factor in the decision making process. Africans Americans being of darker complexion within this paradigm are often viewed as outsiders in their place of birth. This system clearly disenfranchise one while enfranchising the other. This legacy is reflected when examining our educational, health, welfare and economic systems.

Parts of America's legacy against African Americans were well documented in the Hartford Courant Special edition, "Complicity". Complicity was a two-part 80 - 90 page series that documented Connecticut role in the enslavement of African people. But this is not the place to document how Connecticut and other groups benefited from the enslavement of African Americans in the past. Complicity does that quite well. My task here is to show you how Connecticut legacy continues to hinder the development of African Americans and the State of Connecticut and nation. I would remind you, that the problems of African Americans are not particular to a certain decade or century, but problems created by our governing institutions over a sustain period time. Journalists, Ann Farrow, Joel Lang, and Liz Petry of the Hartford Courant who authored Complicity, produced some brilliant work in order to help our residents and Connecticut Institutions rethink their frame of reference. Million of documents about African American lives in Connecticut over the century lay in institutions, such as our State Library. Because we are addressing voluminous amounts of material covering over 400 years of history, a

substantial effort would have to be made to understand it. Often, information gleaned from the past offers solutions to our current problems.

There are others groups that compete for the States resources, and in no way do I mean to belittle their concerns. But, the problems of African Americans were four hundred years in the making. Our experiences have shown that solving the problems African Americans go a long ways toward solving the problem of others. I believe that we can reduce Connecticut's cost by solving the problems of those entrapped within our educational and penal systems. In addition, there are other institutions, such as; health and welfare, if right-sided can become net gainers and a stimulus to Connecticut economy. Not only will this reduce the cost to the State of Connecticut, but would contribute to the wellbeing of neighborhoods and African American families.

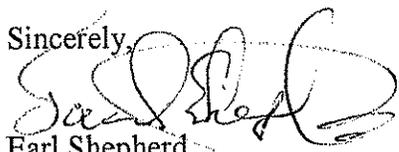
There are those that claim that the election of Barack H. Obama ends that dastardly period for Connecticut and our nation. Sadly we must agree, no matter how wonderful and inspiring the election, it won't resolve problems of 400 year legacy. Some would have us believe that you solve the problem by avoiding it or pretending they never existed. As leaders of our institutions, I know you understand better than most how they shape the lives of our citizenry. Yes, there are those, both black and white who would rather have us forget about the past and all of the pain. Simply put, we can not have clarity of the present nor a clear path toward the future without correctly rendering our past. In reality, sad as it might be, we can never solve or resolved these problems of the past without intention. I believe that we can overcome.

I believe that the Governor M. Jodi Rell, should not only restore the African American Affairs Commission, but strengthen it. In addition, she along with the legislative body should consider giving some additional marching orders. Examples of the kind might suggest the following:

- a. How will you assure the success of African American Students?
- b. How do we repair the health of African Americans?
- c. How do we remove the large numbers of African American from the penal system?
- d. How much time do you need to accomplish the above?

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

  
Earl Shepherd

101 Ridgefield Street  
Hartford, CT 06112

860 549-0587 or 860 525-9460  
Tchaka@sbcglobal.net