

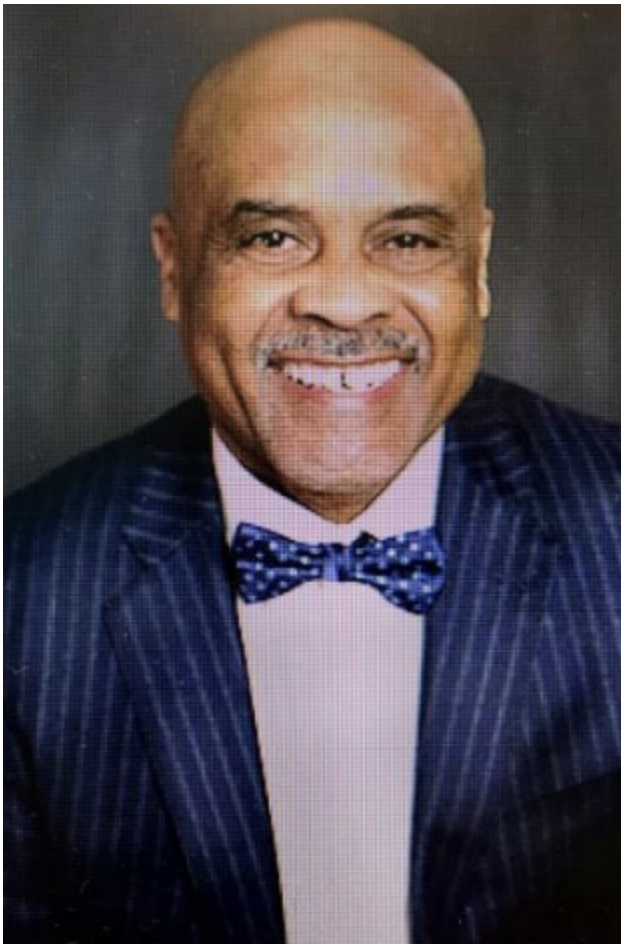


Opinion: The Politics Of Race Appears Still Alive

by Luther Simmons

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The politics of hypocrisy and back room double dealing may not be dead in Alton, that is the politics of race that an old Alton guard has practiced to the detriment of its black population for nearly a hundred years. I have hoped that we've put such things behind us, but maybe we haven't. Let me explain. The Alton School Board has a long history of rejecting better qualified black candidates in favor of less qualified white candidates: witness the racially motivated rejections of Dr. Ed Hightower and Dr. Davis. Now the board again has a decision to make on a new superintendent. There are two leading candidates - one black, one white, both long-time district administrators.



I was advised that recently both appeared and presented their cases to a so-called community advisory group, as well as the board itself. This so-called advisory group that was designed for the board to hide behind in the event it decided to make an old school Alton type decision that reeks of racial tribalism.

It was a group that was racially skewed and handpicked for the board to hide behind in the event it chooses (chose) the least qualified candidate. The white candidate who appeared had a single master's degree, and said she didn't want the job of superintendent, and what's more, she had to be "talked" into applying. Can you imagine the hutzpah it took to tell that to a hiring committee? This should have automatically disqualified her. Seems as though this "candidate" already knew she was a lock no matter what she said, and that this whole interview thing was a sham. In addition, this candidate presented no plan for her vision for the district.

The black candidate appeared and told the committee she has two master's degrees and a PhD. That she previously worked for four years in the widely respected Edwardsville district to observe how they administer education.

In addition, she presented the committee with a detailed written ninety-day plan for her first three months should she be chosen. This candidate said her entire life has been designed to prepare her to lead the Alton district. In effect, she did not have to be coerced into applying. Ben Golley was a previous member of the Alton school board that called out duplicitous backroom double-dealing that promoted the interests of old-line Alton conservative whites. He insisted on open sunshine transparency. He was not popular with the board's entrenched old-line conservatives. In short, he rejected the tribal politics of race. His presence is sorely missed. I smell a rat. What decision will come out of the board's smoke-filled room reminiscent of the 1950s we shall soon see.

I believe I already know. I fear that history is about to repeat itself. That a woman who had no interest in the job is about to have it hand-delivered to her, and not to a black female who is imminently more qualified. I hope Alton's passion for peaceful civil protest is not dead. We may need it.

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