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# Let's Make The Crenshaw/LAX Light Rail Line a Race ... For Anything BUT Race

Details Written by Ken Alpern  
24 Jan 2014



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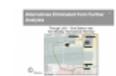
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**ALPERN AT LARGE**-Two events just occurred last week, and perhaps they were coincidental...and perhaps they were not. We just had the annual Martin Luther King holiday, and the Crenshaw/LAX Light Rail Line just had its **ceremonial groundbreaking ceremony**.

With respect to both events, the question of whether to immerse our society in the thorny issue of race relations, or to move past that to create a post-racial society, necessarily comes up and deserves to be confronted.

As a dermatologist (skin specialist), and as someone who's made a point of it to teach other dermatologists the fundamentals of skin disease of all specialties, and as someone who's spent the majority of my life working for non-Caucasian physician leaders (and not really giving a rip about it), count me in as

someone who is entirely FOR a post-racial society.

A quick digression, then let's talk about the Crenshaw/LAX Line: Eye color, hair color, skin color...isn't it obvious that these are little things that mean so much to so few? And that it's repugnant when someone makes his/her living off of exploiting those ridiculous differences?

With all due respect to President Obama, his recent comments that those who oppose him just don't like a black President is a slap in the face for all of America who voted for him...yet might find legitimate sources of concern with his policies surrounding the NSA, Obamacare, the economy, etc.

In contrast, Richard Sherman, a young African-American man who had some very **unpleasant optics** (screaming, ranting, verbal chest-pounding) is someone who's life story is amazing, and someone I'd like to hear from more.

The older, and certainly more experienced, President Obama might have much of the media and the left behind him, but ask Millennials and brown/black Americans how well they're doing and it's not so great. I see and care for them as patients every day, and since skin disease correlates with stress, personal finances frequently comes up. Even those who are proud to have a black President aren't necessarily too thrilled with his record.

In contrast, again, is Richard Sherman--graduated from Compton with a 4.2 GPA, and is a Stanford grad who (when he's not pumped up on adrenaline) is extremely articulate and probably has virtually nothing to hide.

I think that it's reasonable for society to allow a 20-something young man to say something over the top when he's caught up in the moment, but it's not reasonable for society to be so forgiving for a President who is doing everything BUT uniting the nation with respect to race, communities, politics and ideologies.

Unfortunately, I suspect the media will be much tougher on this emotional yet absolutely brilliant and accomplished young black man in dreadlocks than they will a sitting black President with a rather mixed record and a rather secretive background.

So...to reiterate...count me in as someone who favors a post-racial society. In other words, consider the individual as an individual, rather than as someone of a given race. And as for the Compton that Richard Sherman came from? Like adjacent South LA, Inglewood, and the Crenshaw District, it once was white, then was black, and is now brown.

So what does this have to do with the Crenshaw/LAX Line? Well, as with the Drew/King Medical Center in South Los Angeles, which was promoted as a hospital to primarily serve the medical needs of local black residents, this light rail line has been promoted for years as a "black community's light rail line".

Which is prima facie ridiculous, and leads to a combination of corruption, mismanagement, and bad feelings all around. The Crenshaw/LAX Line is a wonderful north-south rail line that can and should someday connect the Purple Line/Wilshire Subway in the north to the Torrance Transit Center in the south.

With most of Metro's focus on the east-west Purple, Foothill and Eastside Gold, and Expo Lines, this initial creation of a north-south rail connection between the Expo and Green Lines, with LAX in-between, is critical to creating a true rail network to serve the entire county of Los Angeles...and not just a bunch of separate lines oriented towards Downtown.

Too many of the talking points and media focus has been on how this will serve the black communities of Crenshaw Blvd and not enough on the true **RACE** that the creation of this line should fight for.

**This rail line is a RACE to preserve local businesses and jobs...and to expand the economy of this region (regardless of ethnicity).**

The expensive underground station of Leimert Park was a good idea, if not a great idea, but those being taken for a ride (light rail or otherwise) that making the entire line as a subway are not being told the truth about the real price...which is hundreds of millions of dollars that other regions and projects need more for their own projects.

The hundreds of dollars for this unnecessary subway would cost could go for an improved LAX connection, or an extension of this line to the Purple Line Subway or the South Bay.

However, the focus on preserving any adjacent businesses, and creating more, while establishing this region as a job creation zone (why, oh why, was this not a Promise Zone for L.A.?) is what we should RACE to by investing in this rail line. Certainly black and brown Americans would benefit from this approach, but the only color we should focus on is green...as in money and economic opportunities for that entire region.

**This line is a RACE to get to LAX.**

The name of this light rail line is the Crenshaw/LAX line, but we've only addressed the former and not the latter. We still really don't know what should be the right land use and layout at Century/Aviation, and the light rail line is 1.5 miles east of the central LAX airline terminals, so while the LAWA offer of paying a billion or more for a connecting People Mover is both welcome yet two years late.

A fast-track of discussions and arrangements to create a Crenshaw/LAX and People Mover scheme, with a huge business district created to the east of LA, is part and parcel of what a proper LAX connection means to our City, and to our County, and even to our State and Nation.

Lots of questions to answer, and the ethnic strife must be downplayed (not ignored, but minimized to an appropriate perspective) to focus on making LAWA and Metro Rail upgrades something that historians will talk about as a moment when LA visionaries made our City and County great by creating a Crenshaw/LAX line that really connected the Westside, South Bay, LAX, the Southeast Cities and the Mid-City.

**This line is a RACE to preserve transportation funding and construction.**

Surprise! The drive to expand or promote a new sales tax for transportation may have the support of many a staffer or Board member at Metro (LINK: <http://thesource.metro.net/2014/01/14/metro-board-to-consider-beginning-development-of-ballot-measure-for-2016/>), but it's losing ground among voters.

The results of a **recent survey done by Metro** show that transportation ranks as a topic that is now lower than education, crime, the economy and other issues (LINK: , and with rail/subway transportation at rock bottom of interviewee responses and prioritization.

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This does not bode well for a society that wants better mobility, and perhaps is now seeing our current transportation projects as costing too much while benefiting too few.

So having our transportation issues get clouded over by issues of ethnicity is not good for those of us promoting a better Economy, Environment and Quality of Life through public works/transportation projects.

We need to move on, and do better, to make sure that Metro and transportation advocates don't lose the credibility of taxpayers and voters, and that we learn that we should use first-rate opportunities like the Crenshaw/LAX Light Rail Line to enhance local and national support for these types of projects.

And that means that this project, and other public works projects, are running the race towards popularity and efficiency...but that I am certainly not the only person that wants this project to race away from "race", and that our society craves more than ever to move on beyond the issues of race and on to the issues of personal substance and trust.

Which is, I'm certain, what the late Dr. King would have wanted all along.

*(Ken Alpern is a Westside Village Zone Director and Boardmember of the Mar Vista Community Council (MVCC), previously co-chaired its Planning and Outreach Committees, and currently is Co-Chair of its MVCC Transportation/Infrastructure Committee. He is co-chair of the CD11 Transportation Advisory Committee and chairs the nonprofit Transit Coalition, and can be reached at Alpern@MarVista.org . He also co-chairs the grassroots Friends of the Green Line at [www.fogl.us](http://www.fogl.us). The views expressed in this article are solely those of Mr. Alpern.)*

-cw

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