

Letter to the Seattle Times by prominent African-American politicians Smith, Ron Sims, and Norm Rice concerning South African granite issue, March 9, 1989. Folder 11, Box 12, Norm Rice Subject Files, 4674-02. Seattle Municipal Archives.



RON SIMS, CHAIR
King County Council
District Five

March 9, 1989

Herb Robinson
Editorial Page Editor
Seattle Times
P.O. Box 70
Seattle, WA 98104

To the Editor:

In a recent editorial, the Seattle Times harshly criticized our profound anger at Metro's purchase of South African granite for the Metro Tunnel. The Times seems to be saying that while Metro staff erred, too much was being made of this error and the resignation of Alan Gibbs was a high price to pay for it.

The Times is wrong. As Black elected officials, we have a special responsibility to the Black community to stand up to racism and to condemn "errors" that lead to the purchase of products produced in a racist nation. Metro's policy forbids the purchase of South African products. This is a matter of principle and it is a moral imperative as well. South Africa is a country with national laws which define Blacks and mixed race persons as genetically inferior to Whites. Surely the Times can appreciate our utter loathing of the policies and actions of South Africa. Surely the Times can appreciate that if we as Black elected officials in Seattle, Washington do not stand up on behalf of Black people everywhere to condemn that policy in every way that we are in fact abandoning our people.

We were born and raised in a community of people whose fear of losing human and civil rights was matched only by its ardor to preserve them. So our voices joined others to free Soviet Jews. Our voices joined others to fully repay Japanese Americans for the injustice of internment. Our voices joined others to celebrate the democratic victories in Argentina, Chile and the Philippines. Our voices joined others in supporting the freedom fighters of Afghanistan. Our voices were among the first and the loudest to free neighborhoods from gangs, drugs and to free children from self-indulgence and despair.

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Seattle Times
March 9, 1989
Page 2

Does the Times understand that we too must bear witness on behalf of Black people in South Africa who are suffering even as we write this? Does the Times know that when we see White officials who are puzzled by the depth and breadth of our outrage that it is a knife in our hearts?

It is for us, as Black elected officials, to carry the message to young Black men and women that our society welcomes them, and supports their strivings and their hopes and their dreams for a better tomorrow. This is their moral right.

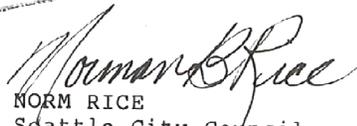
We cannot carry that message if at the same time we remain silent when their government purchases products from an outlaw state which condemns Black people to lives of despair and suffering. The paving stones of South Africa echo with their footfalls; we gather their spirits to our hearts and we ask God to protect them. We do bear witness for them today and tomorrow and forever.

Sincerely,

RON SIMS
King County Council



SAM SMITH
Seattle City Council



NORM RICE
Seattle City Council