

A Time for Black Business Cohesion

My wife, Kay, and I started a local Black chamber of commerce back in Indianapolis in 1991. People said we were crazy and would end up with immediate failure. They just didn't understand that the time had come for the business interactions of Indianapolis to transform into complete integration. There were battles but in the end Indy had become a very progressive city. We are proud of what we accomplished.

Soon after, as my late mentor Dr. Arthur Fletcher would always say of us, "The slope isn't slippery enough anymore for you two". He would be amazed as to how much we would take on and when completed we would look for more to do. We started the National Black Chamber of Commerce, Inc. in Washington, DC on May, 1993. Next year we will be having our 20th Annual Convention, July 19 – 21, 2012 in Atlanta, GA. We started with 12 local chapters and have exceeded 160 today with more under construction. Our journeys have taken us to Europe, Caribbean, South America and, of course, the continent of Africa. We have generated billions of new dollars for our communities.

It is the increased interaction with business associations and direct contact with foreign Black entrepreneurs that is now leading us to a new "slippery slope". Pan Africanism is not a new theory. It was first popularized by champions such as Marcus Garvey, Prince Hall, Martin Delany, Edward Wilmot Blyden and Henry Highland Garnet. Uniting Black business as one big organization was first implemented by the great Booker T. Washington (National Negro Business League). Washington and Garvey started collaborating together and the established power bases of America and various European nations provided serious pushback. They even formed rival organizations that mellowed the focus of most Black Americans.

Well, Brothers Washington, Garvey and the others; we still hear you! Last week, as I was meeting with a group of visiting French entrepreneurs the idea hit me. They were complaining that they have had many meetings with Black businesses in Brazil, the Caribbean and many of the 23 Francophone nations in Africa but it appears that they are just going in circles. Then the leader of the group made a sincere request, "Harry, will you bring cohesion to us. Can you form an international organization for businesses of the African Diaspora.?" I paused for about

a half a minute and said “Yes!”. They responded with “When?” I retorted with “Now”. I left the meeting with full blown commitment and informed Kay when she picked me up that we have a new big assignment. She welcomed it (as she always does).

We came up with the name **PanAfrican Entrepreneurs Conference, Inc.** We have secured the Federal Tax ID number, the proper website URL and have reserved the name with the DC Government. Our formal incorporation and application for 501©3 status will be completed during October. The website will go up first week in November and we will begin collecting a massive database of Pan African entrepreneurs within the Diaspora. We and the organizing principals will have a worldwide teleconference in early December. Oh yes, it is going down.

Seed money for organizing will come from a chamber subsidiary, NBCC – Free Trade Initiative. We will have one giant conference per year beginning in the fall of 2013 with the intention of setting an agenda for the next twelve months (accountability of the agenda will be reported at the next conference and so on). The first venue will be in Miami, Houston or Atlanta. We will move it to another nation each year.

We will begin taking memberships this December. There will be only one type of membership – business owner. Each member will have one vote at the conference as we vote on which issues to focus on the next year. There will be no political or social initiatives whatsoever. It will be straight out business. If we do it right, each member will have an international network for market expansion, joint venturing, capital infusion and effective marketing. Best practices will be shared for the benefit of up and coming business owners and to take successful businesses to the next level.

If we do it right, and we always do, this will have a big, positive effect on the quality of life and economic well being for all descendents of the African Diaspora. 70% of all new jobs come from small business ventures and we are about to multiply exponentially the number of successful businesses within the Diaspora. The more businesses; the more jobs and greater economic vitality for our people in a global fashion, in other words the NBCC will grow; our chapters will grow and our people will benefit from our efforts.

It has been a long time coming but the time is now. Look out world, Black business is about to take off to another level!

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