

It is official! The Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture on the National Mall will be about Blacks, designed by Blacks and the construction managed by Blacks. This \$500 million project will be totally unlike the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Monument which was manipulated and profited by behind the scenes white interests. I am so proud I get “choked up” every time I dwell on the beautiful process.

Let's first look at the Design/Architectural Team. The Lead Designer is David Adjaye. This brother is a native of Tanzania and now lives in London. He is arguably the best major designer in the world. His portfolio is full of popular buildings from around the world. Some of the work includes the Museum of Contemporary Art in Denver, the Nobel Peace Centre in Oslo, Norway, and the Skolkovo Moscow School of Management in Russia. Mr. Adjaye is giving the museum a classic Yoruba (West African) design. They picked one of the best through a competitive process and he happens to be one of us.

Next is the Architect of Record. That distinction belongs to Philip Freelon, CEO of the Freelon Group - a Black architectural firm based in Raleigh, North Carolina. Some of the projects the firm has performed are the Center for Civil & Human Rights, the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of African American History and Culture and the Museum of the African Diaspora.

The other principal in the Design/Architectural component of the project is Max Bond who worked with the firm of Davis Brody Bond. Unfortunately, Max Bond died of cancer shortly after receiving the award. However, his firm continues to be active in the major undertaking.

The above reality is proof positive that the age old tradition of architecture and design that began with the erection of the pyramids (which still stand today) continues on as a fine African tradition. They couldn't take it away from us and we just keep getting stronger.

Now, let's look at the Construction Management side. Here, too, we find actual bona fide and qualified African American participation. The Sherman R. Smoot Construction Co. is one of the three partners on the Construction Management Team. Smoot is headquartered in Columbus, Ohio with satellite offices in several locations throughout the nation. Another partner is the H.J. Russell & Company based in Atlanta, Georgia with various offices throughout the nation. These two Black and family owned giants are teaming up Clark Construction, based in Bethesda, MD.

This isn't "window dressing". These two firms have put up the bonds for the project and bring their financing to it. It is a "real deal" and we should be so proud. The National Black Chamber of Commerce has had a very positive and enjoyable relationship with these two firms and is absolutely confident that Black contractors will get at least their fair share in the building of this giant project provided they bring their "A" game to the competitive table. They will!

The engineering, contracting, sub-contracting opportunities for the project are immense and transparent. Interested up and running businesses should go to this website: [www.nmaahcproject.com](http://www.nmaahcproject.com). This website is established for this project and there is a very sincere effort to include small businesses including minority owned firms who are bona fide and qualified. There will be no "fronting" like on the Dr. King monument. This is the biggest single project in terms of Black participation. That is fitting in that the subject matter is our history.

The funding for the project will be provided via 50% from the federal government (secured by President George W. Bush) and 50% by private donations. That is where we come in. I encourage all of you to become Charter Members of the National museum of African American History and Culture. Membership levels are: \$25, \$40, \$100, \$250 and \$1,000. Please go to: [www.AfricanAmerican.si.edu](http://www.AfricanAmerican.si.edu) or email for a membership form at [AAHCmember@si.edu](mailto:AAHCmember@si.edu). Please give and spread the word to all your friends.

Special thanks and recognition should go to the Honorable John Lewis (D – Georgia). Congressman Lewis was the "Most Valuable Player" in getting this project accepted and funded. He was there at the beginning and he drove it to the finish line with daily devotion and commitment. His proud face was a beautiful sight as he held a shovel at the Official Groundbreaking on February 22. The NBCC is so thankful for his successful efforts that we plan to formally recognize him for that devotion. You know, we ought to build a statue of him right in front of the museum.

Our children and grandchildren will read about this powerful fact of Black business acumen taking place day to day. They will see our legacy and fill their "chests" with pride. God is great!

Mr. Alford is the co-founder, President/CEO of the National Black Chamber of Commerce®.  
Website: [www.nationalbcc.org](http://www.nationalbcc.org) . Email: [halford@nationalbcc.org](mailto:halford@nationalbcc.org) .