

I was very curious when the speaking invitation arrived from the Emancipation Support Committee based in Trinidad and Tobago. They asked if I would speak at their 12th Annual Trade and Investment Symposium. Mel Foote, president/CEO of the Constituency for Africa

, soon contacted me and encouraged me to participate at this event as he has been going for over ten years. That recommendation was enough for me so off we (myself, two VP's and a board member from the National Black Chamber of Commerce) went to Trinidad and Tobago – it was our maiden voyage.

The hospitality of the people of "TT" is genuine and enjoyable. We were met coming off our plane by an executive of the Airport Authority. She rushed us through customs and took us to our driver. We arrived at the Trinidad Hilton Hotel and Conference Center. The accommodations were just beautiful and I am still missing the wonderful cuisine served in the hotel restaurant. The general manager spent time with us and our waiter gave us the best service we ever had.

We learned quickly that "TT" was different than the rest of the Caribbean. They don't have a big dependence on tourism. They are, in fact, the "Industrial Hub of the Caribbean

". Energy (natural gas, oil and related products) is their biggest industry. Being only seven miles from the coast of oil giant Venezuela

, it is taking advantage of the same shale (underground reserves of gas and oil). The nation is totally self-sufficient on its energy needs and exports the vast majority of what they produce. Unlike many African nations who have oil and gas but no refineries, this nation controls the finished product. Thus, there is a significant amount of wealth among the residents. They are a very educated population with many engineers and post graduate degrees.

Trinidad has a population of 1.3 million and Tobago has a little over one hundred thousand. If you want business you go to Trinidad. If you want beaches you go to Tobago
. The downtown skyline reminds me of

San Diego

. There are two stock exchanges in the nation and business seems to be very brisk.

The local media was very excited about our presence. We did two television interviews along with two radio interviews and a flattering article about my speech in the local newspaper. The newspaper article hit the internet wire services.

Kafra Kambon is the president/CEO of the Emancipation Support Committee and founder of the Trade and Investment Symposium. This brother is a stone believer in the power of the Pan African Diaspora. He is known to many throughout Africa, Caribbean and South America. Also, he is a legend to Pan Africans in the United States

. He has pledged to start a local Black chamber in this progressive nation and I will nominate him for our Board of Directors this year.

The people are empowered by their past. Unlike the United States, they make a very big celebration out of their emancipation –

August 1, 1834

. What we have been doing on our emancipation day,

January 1, 1863

, is party for the recognition of New Year's Day. Listen Black America

; it is time for us to honor our end to slavery by officially recognizing and celebrating our Emancipation Day.

January 1, 2013

, will mark 150 years since we were formally released from slavery. Let's have Emancipation Day celebrations in every city and town in our nation. We can't truly embrace our heritage without noting one of the most important days. As Mel Foote noted, "The people look more African than any place in

Africa

". They were so beautiful during the ceremonies dressed in elegant African designs; dancing to African drumbeats and eating food from old African recipes. We should do the same. The Emancipation Support Committee website is

www.panafricanfestival.org

. Go there for ideas in having your own local celebration.

We had the opportunity to personally meet the President of Nigeria who came to the ceremonies. The Honorable Goodluck Jonathan is very articulate and a fantastic speaker.

Shaking his hand twice was an honor for me. We enjoyed a very elaborate luncheon at the residence of the Prime Minister, the Honorable Kamla Persad-Bissessar. She too is an elegant speaker and exudes pride for her nation and people.

I encourage all of you to go and see this progressive nation. Entrepreneurs should consider the opportunities there. Lt. Governor Jennifer Carroll of Florida knows. She is taking 27 Floridian business owners to the nation on a formal Trade Mission. After all, Trinidad is her birth place. Yes, the people are proud, prosperous and connected with the Diaspora. Therefore, they are blessed.

We can't wait to go back.

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