

### **“BEYOND THE RHETORIC”**

**By: Harry C. Alford**

This caught us by surprise. The Washington Post quotes Barack Obama, “In Chicago, sometimes when I talk to the black chambers of commerce, I say, ‘You know what would be a good economic development plan for our community would be if we make sure folks weren’t throwing their garbage out of their cars’”.

First of all this sounds very derogatory ala Amos ‘n Andy or Stepin’ Fetchit. Our chambers have sound and progressive economic development plans and they are far more intricate than stopping litter. Second and most importantly, Senator Barack Obama refuses to meet with any and all Black chambers of commerce. There are 21 Black chambers of commerce in the state of Illinois which is the most for any state in the nation. They are well run, hardworking and dedicated to the economic development of Black communities throughout the entire state. They are respected by their Governor, the entire Illinois Legislative Black Caucus and the powerful Chicago political machine. But they get no props from Senator Barack Obama. He appears to despise Black chambers of commerce.

There are 100 senators on Capitol Hill and the National Black Chamber of Commerce can make appointments with 99 of them. “Brother Man” refuses to allot time while we interact with the leadership of the Senate on a daily basis. I guess it’s the syndrome “The white man’s ice is colder”. Yes, I think it is clinical. The best example of his problem happened in New Orleans last July at our 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference. It was co-incidental that three US Senators were in the area, Senators John Kerry, Mary Landrieu and Barack Obama. Two of them, Senators Kerry and Landrieu, jumped at the opportunity to visit our conference. In fact, Senator Kerry gave an inspiring keynote address while Senator Landrieu was eloquent with her welcoming remarks. They stayed one and a half hours networking with chamber executives and entrepreneurs from around the nation. Where was Barack? He refused to come. He actually peeled off from their touring party while the other senators met with us. He just couldn’t do it even though 15 Black chambers from Illinois were there.

At first we thought it might be a heritage thing. He isn't a descendent of slaves, sharecroppers and victims of Jim Crow like us. But no that can't be it because he will run from the Kenya National Chamber of Commerce and Industry, an affiliate of ours, in like fashion. The next time he goes to Kenya he might want to allot 15 minutes with them. They will tell him that the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act, AGOA, is flawed with serious loopholes. China brings in raw materials such as cotton and produces fabrics to be sold to US companies tariff free under AGOA. This assault has killed jobs for hundreds of thousands of African workers and has decimated agri-business in various nations including Kenya. It's kind of insulting to go over there, smile and give out some cheers but be brain dead on the economic issues.

If Senator Obama ever decides to really speak to any of the Illinois Black chambers, he had better come correct. The topics will be Tax Incremental Financing, TIF, for neighborhood developments; the \$280 million in annual contracts the Chicago Housing Authority denies local Black owned businesses; the front scandals at O'Hare Airport that denies real Black owned franchises; the terrific job the Black chambers have done in Central Illinois by employing every Black contractor at 100% capacity on Illinois highway projects (this should be expanded state wide); the opportunities along the rebuilding of the Dan Ryan Expressway in Chicago; restructuring and improving our dismal school system. It can go on and on but be assured it will be real business. It won't be about "throwing their garbage out of cars".

We don't need him! We are doing fine and making great strides. The NBCC accounts for more Black dollars in the Gulf Rebuilding than the federal government. We are providing opportunities at every level of the American economy. The NBCC is the largest Black business association in the world and no one senator who has a phobia about meeting a group of Black business persons is going to stop us. The Illinois State Black Chamber just took 60 Black business owners to the capital, Springfield, and met with the Illinois Legislature to discuss a business agenda. We are having proud moments and great successes. He has a problem but it is his problem not ours. Let's pray for him.

Senator, you don't have to meet with us. But don't say you do, when you don't. We don't need the lies or the jive.

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