

Connecting the past toward our future

Written by William Reed

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We study history to learn valuable lessons and to avoid tragic mistakes.

For all the divisions that rend the U.S., there is at least one point of agreement between today's Blacks and Whites, Democrats and Republicans, young and old: factually, Blacks are inattentive to America's system of capitalism. Amid American capitalism 98 percent of Blacks are consumers, not producers. Black Americans are dependant on other groups for feeding, clothing, culture and language and need organized participation in ways of America's wealth.

In the main, modern-day African Americans avoid active participation investing in, and ownership of, the national means of production and distribution. Under America's system of capitalism, individuals and groups capitalize businesses in hopes of making a profit. In the nation's "private sector" individuals and groups own the means of production. From colonial times to the present, enterprising Blacks have experienced significant successes in American capitalism. Yet, among contemporary African Americans "Black Capitalism" is not considered a legitimate "movement" or protocol. Since the Civil Rights Movement, Blacks in America have improved their social and economic standing significantly; nevertheless, African Americans as a group remain at a pronounced economic and social disadvantage relative to European Americans. Rather than promoting and participating in wealth building processes, today's Black "talented tenth" are more attuned toward planning how to dress for job interviews than how to do a business plan.

Blacks in high public and private sector professional and managerial jobs tend to balk at anything outside mainstream interests and stay in accord with "politically correct" and post-racial concepts. Before "going mainstream," Blacks built big enterprises in banking, insurance, cosmetics, and retailing. The most hardy times of Black business were during the century of Jim Crow (1870 – 1970s). The Golden Age of Black Business occurred from 1900 to 1930. This era produced Black legends such as: Carter G. Woodson; Booker T. Washington's National Negro Business League; the Universal Negro Improvement Association and Marcus Garvey's Black Nationalist movement; Madam C. J. Walker; S.B. Fuller; A. G. Gaston and John H. Johnson.

The period started a Black Wall Street and bastions of Black business in townships in Mississippi and Oklahoma. During times the races were officially segregated There were Black inventors, Charles Richard Patterson started the world's first Black owned automobile manufacturing company, and Black companies made products such as embalming fluid, hair care, and toothpaste. Black-owned funeral and newspaper businesses were staples of their communities and commerce.

Today's Black Americans expect politics to revive their lives and communities. Many believe that Blacks' empowerment will come from "registering and voting". But, Booker T. Washington postured that voting had noting to do with succeeding in economic development. Capitalism makes economic production occur, yet rarely can aspiring Black entrepreneurs rely on revenue, or draw on entrepreneurial experiences of relatives and friends. Going forward, more respect should be given to Black entrepreneurs and more support is needed that will increase their participation in public and private sector procurement processes. The advocacy and legacy of Booker T. Washington is needed among contemporary African Americans to "advance human

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progress through an economic, political and social system based on individual freedom, incentive, initiative, opportunity, and responsibility". Going forward, African Americans need to organize around issues of their economic empowerment. Such organizing creates formats that foster growth and networking opportunities for Black business. In the tradition of the "Wizard of Tuskegee", the National Black Chamber of Commerce is a 21st Century movement economically empowering Blacks. The NBCC is a leading voice for Black business interests before Congress; at the White House, regulatory agencies and the courts.

Similarly, the National Business League is another organization educating, training and connecting Blacks around American capitalism. In a "Time to Raise the Issues" campaign, the NBCC is leading an array of advocacy groups holding field hearings in 25 US cities. The Arthur Fletcher / Parren J. Mitchell Free Enterprise Tour will enable local business operators to present testimony that the NBCC, et al will convey to Congress. Information about the Tour and city listing is available by contacting kdebow@nationalbcc.org.

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