



Pan African Global Trade and Investment Conference Celebrates HBCUs and Explores Transatlantic Collaborative Opportunities

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In a remarkable gathering across three distinguished venues in Atlanta, Georgia, the recently concluded Pan African Global Trade and Investment Conference shed light on the invaluable role Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) play in the United States. Distinguished speakers from both Africa and the United States, including myself as the President of the Africa International Chamber of Commerce and Industry, had the opportunity to present our visions for collaboration between Africa-based chambers of commerce and HBCUs.

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Atlanta City Hall Atrium



Russell Innovation Center for Entrepreneurs

The conference, held at the prestigious Mayor of Atlanta's City Hall, the conference hall of Clark Atlanta University, and the Russell Innovation Center, brought together scholars, policymakers, and visionaries from both sides of the Atlantic to celebrate the rich history and contributions of HBCUs to American society. The discussions centered on their significant impact on the American economy, education, and social progress.

Historical Roots of HBCUs



HBCUs have a storied legacy in the United States, dating back to the 19th century. The first HBCU, Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, was founded in 1837. It was followed by many others, including Howard University, Morehouse College, and Spelman College, which have provided higher education opportunities for Black students. These institutions have not only educated and empowered their students but also driven innovation, research, and entrepreneurship, thus contributing to the economic vitality of their communities.

Relevance to Black Communities

HBCUs have played a crucial role in preserving and celebrating African American culture. They have been centers of cultural expression, fostering pride, identity, and

a sense of belonging for generations. Through their emphasis on African American history, literature, and art, these institutions have contributed to a deeper understanding and appreciation of Black culture.

In terms of education and opportunity, HBCUs offer quality education and provide opportunities for African American students, often in fields where they have been historically underrepresented. These include STEM, law, medicine, and the arts. By opening doors to educational and career opportunities, HBCUs empower Black individuals to break barriers and excel in various professional domains.

Social mobility is a hallmark of HBCUs. These institutions have been pathways to social and economic mobility for countless African Americans, producing graduates who excel in various professions and contribute to society at large. HBCU alumni include civil rights leaders, prominent politicians, and influential figures in various fields, showcasing the transformative power of these institutions.

Additionally, HBCUs boast robust alumni networks that provide mentorship and job opportunities for current students, facilitating their successful transition into the workforce.

Economic Impact

HBCUs can be engines for economic growth within African American communities and the larger economy:

1. **Job Creation:** HBCUs are significant employers, providing jobs to thousands of people. Faculty and staff are often deeply embedded in the local communities, contributing to local economies and benefiting surrounding neighborhoods and cities.
2. **Entrepreneurship:** HBCUs foster entrepreneurial spirit and innovation, with graduates often creating businesses that employ community members and contribute to the economic landscape.
3. **Community Development:** HBCUs are community hubs that attract investments in the form of campus infrastructure, local businesses, and real estate development. The presence of an HBCU can rejuvenate neighborhoods, attracting businesses and increasing property values.
4. **Research and Innovation:** HBCUs engage in research that can address specific challenges within African American communities, such as health disparities, urban development, and social justice issues. This research not only advances knowledge but also has the potential to lead to practical solutions that benefit the broader society.

5. Professional Training: HBCUs produce a skilled workforce, contributing to industries vital to economic growth, such as healthcare, education, and technology.



Empowering the African Economy

To harness the full potential of HBCUs for growing the African American economy and fostering collaboration with Africa-based chambers of commerce, several steps can be taken:

1. Investment in Research: Increasing funding for research and innovation at HBCUs can lead to discoveries that address community-specific challenges and contribute to economic growth. Research grants and partnerships with governmental agencies and private industries can be vital in this endeavor.
2. Public-Private Partnerships: Encouraging partnerships between HBCUs, government agencies, corporations, and Africa-based chambers of commerce can lead to job creation and economic development within African American communities, as well as foster transatlantic collaboration.
3. Entrepreneurship Support: Establishing incubators and business development programs at HBCUs can foster a culture of entrepreneurship and economic self-sufficiency. These programs can provide mentorship, resources, and funding to support students and alumni in their entrepreneurial endeavors.
4. Scholarships and Financial Aid: Expanding scholarship and financial aid programs for HBCU students can ensure that talented individuals have access to these institutions, furthering the development of a highly skilled workforce. Scholarships can help ease the financial burden on students and attract a diverse and talented pool of applicants.

In conclusion, the Pan African Global Trade and Investment Conference served as a beacon of hope, celebrating HBCUs and their invaluable contributions to American society. It was a collective recognition of the remarkable resilience and determination of those who built and sustained these institutions over the centuries. It was a testament to the enduring spirit of the African American community, one that has thrived against the odds and continues to illuminate the path to progress.

The conference underscored the immense potential for international collaborations, lighting the way for brighter futures on both sides of the Atlantic. It served as a reminder that the journey to empowerment and prosperity is not undertaken in isolation but rather through the bonds of cooperation and shared vision.

With a vision for collaboration between Africa-based chambers of commerce and HBCUs, we are not merely celebrating the accomplishments of the past; we are building bridges to a future where opportunities are boundless, and challenges are met with unyielding determination. This vision embraces education as a powerful catalyst for change, research as a beacon of knowledge and innovation, and entrepreneurship as a path to economic vitality.

As we look to the future, let us remember that the conference was not merely a reflection on history but a call to action. It is a call to invest in the research that can address community-specific challenges and foster economic growth. It is a call to seek public-private partnerships that lead to job creation and development, both within African American communities and beyond.

It is a call to nurture the entrepreneurial spirit that lies within these institutions and their graduates, fostering a culture of innovation, economic self-sufficiency, and self-determination. And finally, it is a call to ensure that access to HBCUs remains open to all through expanded scholarships and financial aid, offering the promise of a brighter future to a diverse and talented pool of aspiring individuals.

The journey ahead is one of boundless potential and limitless opportunity. By collaborating across the Atlantic, we embrace the notion that together, we can create a more equitable, prosperous, and united world. As we move forward, let's remember that the celebration of HBCUs is not confined to the walls of a conference venue but extends to the classrooms, the neighborhoods, and the hearts of countless individuals.



Mr. Alfonso Washington



Madam Gala Fary



Darryl Baylor and
Dr. George French, Clark Atlanta
University President



Charles Barlow Sr, Dr. Matthew
Gichille | President and Founder of
New Generation University | Ethiopia,
Desalegn Mesele Fetene, Anthony
Hunter

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Mr. Al Washington, Madam Gala Fary, and the entire PAGTIC Team for organizing this extraordinary event. Your dedication and hard work in bringing together a diverse group of voices and ideas allowed us to celebrate HBCUs and envision a future of collaboration and empowerment. Your commitment to fostering positive change is truly commendable.

The torch has been passed, the stage is set, and the possibilities are endless. Together, we can continue to illuminate the path towards social, cultural, and economic empowerment for Black communities and the world at large. This is our shared journey, and the time to embark on it is now.