

Giving Up Our Institutions
by
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It would appear that there has been an unfortunate generational disconnect in the AUSA (Afrikans from the United States of America) community. Instead of the respectful intergenerational communication and transmission of information and wisdom that was (and frequently still is) standard practice in Afrika and even among AUSA in America many years ago, there is a divide and mistrust now that threatens our existence.

Many people, especially "baby boomers", in discussing this situation, tend to be dismissive and want to point fingers and play the "blame game"-blaming "those disrespectful children". But, as my grandmother frequently said, when you point a finger at someone, you have at least three fingers pointing back at you.

The "baby boomers" and the previous generation have made several significant errors. The first mistake was when we "fell for" integration. As I understand it, what we initially asked for was desegregation. We wanted to be able to go wherever we wanted and to be able to take advantage of all the opportunities available to everyone. We wanted the facilities that were ours to be at least equal to those intended for non-AUSA. We didn't want to be forced to integrate, initially, any more than the non-AUSA people who fought tooth-and-nail against integration. What we wanted was to make separate truly equal. To make the lie told in 1857 with the Dred Scott Decision become true.

The myth of the perfect world that integration was painted as being, made us make sacrifices from which we've never recovered.

During legal enslavement, our Ancestors created institutions and organizations that supported the AUSA community. These institutions thrived even through the enslavement period as well as the vicious massacres and lynchings of AUSA by whites that occurred all over the country. The literal dozens (if not hundreds) of these savage acts have been hidden and ignored by historians and with the current ignorant and

hypocritical furor against CRT are likely to remain hidden unless we learn about them and keep them in the public attention ourselves. The Tulsa massacre and destructive riot (called Black Wall Street) is the best known of these barbaric demonstrations of savagery but all AUSA should know what has been done to us.

Despite this viciously repressive treatment during that period (American Apartheid or segregation and what Howard University historian, Rayford Logan called "The Nadir" of race relations), AUSA thrived.

Then came the Civil Rights Movement, which, in my understanding was initially an attack on legal segregation and unequal public accommodation. As previously said, the initial goal was to make separate truly equal. Then, somehow, the idea of forced integration entered the discussion and was apparently adopted. As a result of the legal success of integration, many of the institutions, businesses and organizations that sustained the AUSA community during enslavement, during the Nadir and during American Apartheid were abandoned for the "greener grass on the other side". We lost schools, as well, with the assumption that the non-AUSA schools gave superior education. It was felt that the non-AUSA ice was colder and their sugar was sweeter. I can personally attest that the non-AUSA schools were better financed and endowed with more and better materials but that the AUSA schools did more with less.

So, with the promise of "pie-in-the-sky", "the grass is greener on the other side" and "theirs is better than ours", we gave up the things that had sustained us during our lowest times, our institutions, organizations and businesses.

Another mistake made by the "baby boomers" and their parents was not teaching the children their true history. Whether we trusted the school system and the teachers (many of whom had fought integration) or just celebrated the "brand new day", we dropped the ball.

As a result, the few organizations and institutions remaining today are struggling to survive. They are slowly dying because of the apathy of young people. This is especially seen in professional organizations.

Generations ago, for example, the overwhelming majority of AUSA physicians were graduates of Black medical schools, primarily Meharry Medical School in Nashville Tennessee and Howard University Medical School in Washington, DC. Incidentally, before the Flexner report in 1910, there were more than ten AUSA medical schools but all but these two were closed as a result of that report. These AUSA physicians, dentists and pharmacists were unable to join the American Medical Association so they created the National Medical Association with local chapters that have done so much for the AUSA community.

Fast forward to today, The National Medical Association and many other organizations are finding it difficult to attract young people so the memberships are dwindling.

Too many young people don't see the necessity for these organizations and consider them to be irrelevant. This is especially dangerous because in the political and cultural climate of America today, the trends are to go back to the "good old days" that were only good for non-AUSA. As this backwards slide gains momentum, it is made even more dangerous because the organizations and institutions that protected us in the past are being rendered impotent.

Again, we Elders have only ourselves to blame. However, there is hope. There are some young people still willing to benefit from the lived experiences, memories and observations (wisdom) of the Elders. They are willing to join these venerable organizations and make them relevant to their peers. We must welcome them and trust them. We Elders have to understand that we cannot dictate everything to our youth but we must be available to render advice and even warning when needed. Things must change and our ways of doing things may not be appropriate in many of today's scenarios and situations. Again, we have to trust them to do the right things. As my elders advised me when I verbalized fear in rearing my daughter before she was born, we have to do the best that we can do and then let the Creator and Ancestors guide them.

Some of us have the opportunity to positively influence our grandchildren.

It has always been the youth who have led the way in liberation movements. We Elders must support them. If we don't agree, we can advise but never allow them to think that we are not with them. We have a foundation in our organizations. There is no need to reinvent the wheel.

Food for thought.