

The Empowering Role of the NAACP

In 1957, the NAACP created the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights — a coalition of civil rights organizations. This institutionalized broad-based support for the struggle was crucial to the Association's drive to win passage of civil rights legislation, which ensured government protection for legal victories going back some 75 years. In one decade, a non-violent social revolution and transformed American society.

The NAACP has wrought other changes through public pressure and raised consciousness. The NAACP has long fought to end the racial stereotypes that create misunderstanding and prejudice. The NAACP has worked to change attitudes, laws and institutions for the good of all Americans. It has repeatedly rejected the voices of hate and separatism, seeking to bind old wounds and unify our nation. Today, after more than 89 years of unrelenting struggle, the NAACP remains steadfast in its commitment to the true American Dream — an integrated society rich in diversity and open equally to all.

On Feb. 2, 1998, Dr. Kweisi Mfume, president of the NAACP, announced an Economic Reciprocity Initiative that will review the policies and practices of the telecommunications industry to determine their impact on African Americans, including employment, purchasing, service deployment and infrastructure development. The goal of the NAACP is to establish a consumer movement to encourage African Americans to do more business with companies that have good diversity policies, and create economic boycotts of companies that do not.

Following are the remarks made at the Feb. 2, 1998, press conference by NAACP President Kweisi Mfume. This preceded the NAACP board meeting naming Julian Bond Chairman of its policy-making board and successor of Myrlie Ever-Williams. At that meeting also, the new economic/political role of the National Black Leadership Roundtable, the legislative and community action arm of the Congressional Black Caucus, and its official interorganizational, not-for-profit publication, the "National BLACK MONITOR" were set forth.

"Today, we are here to advance the economic initiatives of the NAACP. As one of our established pillars of activity, economic empowerment remains the 'new frontier' for civil rights activism. As we approach the 21st Century, we are increasingly operating in an information

economy. This is an economy that social advocacy groups must master, and one that must respond to us in turn as a consumer base.

"Technology is an area of commerce and trade that will be pivotal to any effort toward economic empowerment of racial minorities. For those and many other reasons, we have selected and are announcing the roll-out of our economic reciprocity project into the telecommunications industry today.

"Joining me today are representatives from the more than [60] African American organizations and publications that support today's message. We at the NAACP are deeply appreciative of their support as partners in this effort and they will be available to share comments and take questions in just a few moments.

"But first, as a coalition of organizations we wanted to give you an update on the economic reciprocity hotel initiative and put into context our next industry review.

"In February 1997, we stood before many of you in this building and announced the results of an almost year-long review of the lodging industry. Then, in June of last year, we issued the first NAACP consumer choice guide and our report card on the hotel industry. Suffice it to say that much has happened since then.

"Over 40,000 consumer choice guides and report cards have been distributed. Over [60] national African American organizations and publications have officially signed-on to the initiative.

"Members of our respective organizations have embraced the principles of economic reciprocity and are making informed consumer choices about where they spend their hotel dollars. The participating organizations, both nationally and locally, are leveraging their collective consumer strength when negotiating contracts for meetings, conferences and other events. The feedback has been significant.

"There has been positive movement within the lodging industry over the last 12 months. We'd like to share some of that preliminary information with you.

"We know for example...

That hotel chains have launched aggressive minority franchise recruitment initiatives such as Cendant Corporation (formerly HFS, Inc.). With

one of our cosponsoring organizations — the National Urban League.

That hotel chains have secured the services of African American marketing agencies to advise them on developing marketing and advertising strategies aimed at the African American consumer segment.

That a consortium of companies have created the Multicultural Foodservice and Hospitality Alliance to promote diversity within that industry.

That African Americans have been promoted to officer level positions and in at least one instance, to the board of directors.

That there are transactions underway for African Americans to own and operate hotels.

"We must caution, however, that while preliminary reports have had some positive developments within the industry, only an ongoing and thorough review will yield credible results.

"As such, and in accordance with

project guidelines, we are again collecting data and surveying the hotels included in the lodging initiative to determine what, if any, additional progress has been made since February of last year.

"The results of the ongoing survey of the hotel industry will be published in the July report card, as well as the annual update of the Hotel Consumer Choice Guide. We will keep attention focused on the track record of the industry and the track record of the individual hotel chains.

"In addition, we would also like to announce, today, the formation of a Lodging Industry Advisory Task Force to the NAACP to advise us on ways to affect even greater change and to identify opportunities.

"As such, volunteers are providing their time, expertise and resources to this council to help ensure long-term implementation of the hotel effort.

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