

Reflecting on a Potluck Gathering with stakeholders of Haitian descent in Hyde Park on January 19, 2020

I like the topics that were brought up as well the intergenerational nature of the participants and the presence of three elected Haitian American officials, a number of lawyers and professionals. I believe those of us outside of Boston in my case, the Metro North area should have a conversation as well. Blacks outside of Boston are not conversing at all though we are the most unheard, marginalized groups in mid-size cities and towns. Black children and youth are in need of more nurturing and attention.

As I have been saying in my former Cambridge Haitian church committee since the 1990s, I believe we need to build up our communities in the diaspora as well. A disconnected generation is not good for the future of a community. The older generations who migrated here in the 1960s and 70s like my mom and dad are dying. Many of us current generations of Haitian immigrants barely know or have any relationship or rapport with any Haitian born in the United States in the 1960s or 70s or those who have migrated here in the 1950s. While we are focusing primarily on Haiti, Haitian young adults born in the United States during the mass migration of 1980s, 1990s, or the teenagers born in Western countries at the turn of the 21st century are not part of helping build Haiti or the Haitian diaspora either.

We URGENTLY need some inter-generational, interdisciplinary face to face conversations to determine how we are going to move forward as generations of people of African descent. We need to develop collective voice(s) and advocates, to make sure our people are receiving the resources they need to succeed. We are in a precarious situation in the United States, Canada and Europe as well.

We also spoke about elected officials. One speaker lamented to the fact that no Haitian had replaced the two elected officials we had in Beacon Hill.

One could hear the chagrin and sorrow in another speaker's voice about the regressing factors in the Mattapan/Dorchester community despite of the individual successes through higher paying jobs or more prominent positions. One speaker alluded to Haitian physicians who have retired and have no replacements. Several Haitian nonprofits have closed which mean less services by Haitian professionals to the Haitian community.

I believe the disappointments lie from expecting too much from elected officials or people in white collar positions. We tend to expect our elected officials to be our advocates, our organizers, to know our problems and be able solve them. I believe elected officials need help from their constituents too in order to assist them. An elected official is not an expert in everything. Moreover, some of them may not have the time to research and understand certain issues themselves. At the state or federal level, legislators may have aides or consultants. However, at the municipal level, they don't have that kind of staffing. I believe "Personality worshiping" is an issue we have to work with in the Black community.

From volunteering for over 25 years in state, municipal and national presidential campaigns, I learned to be heard by politicians, we need to be organized at a grassroots level. Those in Boston and two or three cities North of Boston are lucky to have liaisons working at City Hall. However, many cities with significant presence of people of African descent don't have liaisons or a voice. The lack of liaison staffing is unfortunate because many of us tend to listen more or believe in someone who has a job, in position of authority, or is visible in a church. Professionals with experience and knowledge are not often heard if they don't have a fancy position.

As an active voter, given that my people are not organized, we Black folks in the North of Boston area don't have a voice in the State house. We are not represented or have a voice either in most municipal institutions, i.e, schools, police and fire departments as well city hall offices. Except for Cambridge Health Alliance (CHA), we don't have that much staffing of African descent in hospitals and clinics either.

A solution to these concerns is to look among ourselves for leaders. If we are not organized and talking with each other, 'we are not going anywhere.'" As I have said numerous times, we need an intergenerational come together face to face in the Metro North Region to assess, respond, pick each other's brains and see how we are going to go forward in a country that three to four generations of Haitians have called home.

Nekita - January 20, 2020