

IBBMEC

International Black Buyers and Manufacturers Expo and Conference

1995 - 2009

HISTORY 1995-2009



IBBMEC founders & Producers
Alexander W. Medley, Jr
(aka Nana Owusu Agyemang)
Rev. Tonyia M. Rawls
Sala Damali

“Welcome to IBBMEC. Move to the right for on-site registration - This line if you have pre-registered. Please have your business credentials and ID ready. Is your business at least 51% Black owned and operated? Great! Here’s your badge and program book. Enjoy the Expo and Conference!”

A buzz of activity. Wholesale exhibitors and retail buyers, all Black owned and operated, convening from across the U.S.A. and around the world to conduct commerce and share information. A trade show featuring home décor, greeting cards, stationery items, apparel, fashion accessories, cosmetics, toys, games, art, books, magazines, paraphernalia, and more. A conference with sessions on finance, advertising, merchandising, technology, and international trade. Always studying the past to appreciate the present and build for the future. Building relationships, examining possibilities, growing businesses. That was IBBMEC.

The vision for IBBMEC sprang forth from seeds planted by the Ba Papyrus magazine. The Ba Papyrus, which was published by Aziza Gibson-Hunter, Alex Medley, Jr. and Sala Damali, provided a communication link between Black manufacturers and retailers. It promoted the ideals of cooperative economics, self determination and progressive action within the industry. The folding of the magazine in the spring of 1995 left a huge void.



In February of 1995 Alex and Sala (Co-owners of Kuumba Kollektibles, a DC-based Black manufacturer of African-centered greeting cards and stationery items) retained the marketing services of Tonyia M. Rawls (President/Owner of International Concepts Group, a Washington, DC-based marketing and advertising consulting firm) to help the business reposition itself and increase sales.

As the trio began exploring venues where Kuumba Kollektibles’ line of products could be exhibited along with other Black manufacturers, it became frightfully clear that despite the many strides made by Black manufacturers and retailers, there was no place they could go to buy from and sell to others like themselves. In the tradition of Africans in America, what does not exist...we create. Kuumba Kollektibles, with the help of ICG, held a trade show for Black retailers and manufacturers in April of 1995.

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The show was held in the basement auditorium of Northeastern Presbyterian Church in Washington, DC and boasted 50 businesses in total. From the very start the three realized that trade alone was not enough; that if these businesses were to gain maximum benefit from this gathering, then education would also need to be tied in. Since space was limited and the show was only for one day, they decided to hold workshops (which covered marketing, finance and display/merchandising) on the stage of the auditorium where seats had been placed for attendees. Business owners would sit in on the sessions they needed and would then return to the expo. That show became the model for IBBMEC.



Word quickly spread about the great success of this Black trade show that was held in the nation's capital. By May of 1995 Sala, Alex and Tonyia responded to the requests from New York, California, Arkansas, Africa and London by becoming business partners in the development of the International Black Buyers and Manufacturers Expo and Conference (IBBMEC).

The first thing they did was to establish an Advisory Board which was comprised of leaders in retail, manufacturing, bookselling, import/export, finance, technology, and fine art/crafts. This core group helped to ensure that the needs of all attendees could be appropriately addressed as this forum evolved. Their other partner was God who continues to inspire and encourage these trailblazers.

The first show as IBBMEC was held October, 1995 on the Campus of Howard University and guests stayed at the now closed Black-owned Howard Hotel. Three hundred and fifty (350) businesses responded to the call which was made exclusively through Black media and networks, to buy, sell, learn and network. The show had grown from one day to three and the theme, "Common Goals...Varying Paths," dealt with issues of separatism and conflict which have long frustrated the efforts of those who have tried to pull the corporate, grass roots, cottage, manufacturing, store front, mall-based, large, small, central city and suburban businesses within this arena together.



With another huge success to their credit, the trio had to decide what the next steps would be for this self-funded venture. The next step was a spring show that would help teach Black entrepreneurs in the retail industry how to survive and thrive in the traditionally slow spring and summer months. The theme for this show was "Strategies for Growth" and focused on basic strategies for summer survival and development of products that served bridal, holiday and vacation markets. This was a bit risky since most of the manufacturers focused more on Christmas, Kwanzaa and Black History month.

Well, success again. More than 600 businesses came to Howard to buy, sell, learn and network. Many who had attended earlier sessions had already begun to see great benefit from the things they had learned, the relationships they established and the revenue they generated from sales related to the show. IBBMEC was later held in other venues, including the University of the District of Columbia (UDC) and the Washington, DC Convention Center.

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International participation grew over the years. Businesses came from many countries including Ghana, Senegal, Mali, Cote Ivoire, Namibia, South Africa, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, Madagascar, Kenya, United Kingdom, Barbados, Jamaica, Bermuda, Canada and Brazil. The IBBMEC mailing list grew to more than 5000 businesses.



Rev. Tonyia Rawls left as co-producer in 2001 to serve as pastor of Unity Fellowship Church in Charlotte, NC. Although her dynamic presence was missed, she supported IBBMEC from afar.

In an effort to further organize, strengthen and broaden the base of businesses in the IBBMEC family, the Alliance of Afrikan Cultural Enterprises (AACE pronounced ah-shay) was launched at IBBMEC 2002. Brother vernard gray accepted responsibility as the first executive director. This outgrowth of IBBMEC dealt with issues and concerns including increased exposure of the businesses, standards, protocol, surveys and statistics.



IBBMEC celebrated its 10th anniversary (September 16-10, 2005) by partnering with Nex Generation Magazine to produce **SPICE: A Special Presentation of International Cultural Enterprises**. The SPICE trade show and conference was held in central London, UK. There was also a presentation of US/UK artists held at the Brixton Art Gallery and a wonderful kick off reception at Fahrenheit Restaurant in North London.



IBBMEC went on to publish another issue of SPICE magazine in cooperation with NexGeneration Magazine. It then transitioned into an E newsletter format and remained available to assist businesses to connect for the greater good.

IBBMEC closed the last of its operations, the website, in June 2009.

We thank ALL the people who contributed to IBBMEC by exhibiting, advertising, presenting at conferences, buying, attending, sharing, organizing, spreading the word, strategizing, providing services, and in other ways we may not know.

The world is changing rapidly, but it remains essential that Black people move forward in solidarity. Never underestimate the power and magic that manifests when individuals come together with common vision and strength of purpose. IBBMEC is a testament to that. It was fueled by the positive energy, love and determination of all who participated. We pray that you maintain the courage to follow your heart's desires and stay open to receive God's richest blessings.

Asante Sana – Thank you very much.

Sala Damali & Nana Owusu Agyemang (Alex Medley, Jr.)



IBBMEC Mission Statement

The International Black Buyers and Manufacturers Expo and Conference was created to provide Black retailers, manufacturers, importers, exporters, artists, craftspeople, clothiers, booksellers, technology professionals and service providers from throughout the Diaspora an opportunity to gather for technical training, general business education, trade and networking opportunities. It is understood that the natural outgrowth of this effort will be stronger Black owned businesses in the retail/wholesale industry, increased employment opportunities, stronger communities and a brighter future for many within the Black race.

IBBMEC Senior Advisors

vernard r gray
Jacqueline Hawkins
Selma Jackson
Tendai Johnson
Marvin Sin
E. Diane White

IBBMEC General Advisors

Rafiki Cai
Mori Diane
Barbara Garnes
Aziza Gibson-Hunter
Jamal Mims
Kevin Washington PhD

IBBMEC Operations Support

Beth Brooks
Ngozi Harewood
Stan Changa Harewood
Kenwin Adams
Sami Washington
Jill Wilson

Special Asante Sana to:

Lee Hairston: Initiated and coordinated the "IBBMEC Booth Awards"

Roy Lewis: Photographer

Papastye Adas: Videographer

Michael Johnson: Display Artist

Tendai Johnson: Fashion Preview Coordinator

Aza Donna Smith: E-newsletter manager/editor

20th Century Expo Group

Silhouette Media



For three years, starting in 2000, IBBMEC presented awards of excellence in several categories.

The Nguzo Saba Award was presented to an individual that had been a guiding light for our industry by practicing the principles and providing philosophical direction.

The Nguzo Saba (Seven Principles):

Umoja (Unity), Kujichagulia (Self Determination), Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility, Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics), Nia (Purpose), Kuumba (Creativity), Imani (Faith).

The Nguzo Saba award has been presented to:

Dr. Maulana Karenga, creator of the Kwanzaa holiday, scholar, and esteemed elder who actually introduced the Nguzo Saba to us.

Iyanla Vanzant: author, teacher. Iyanla's work has provided people with tools, information, products and services that facilitate healing of the mind, body and spirit.

Dr. Kwaku Ofori-Ansa: has published charts on adinkra symbols, goldweights, and kente cloth. He has helped to spread the philosophy of ancient African thought through symbolism.



Booksellers Award

Love and respect for books seem to be a part of our genetic memory. The libraries of ancient Kemet informed the world. Their plunder caused a dark age that has not been fully overcome. There was a time in the United States when it was against the law for Black people to read. Despite this they learned, they read, and they passed it on. The booksellers award was a tribute to those among us who have carried forth the legacy of making available books by and about people of African descent.

Tabia & Nati, Kamau Nataki - Afrikan World Books: Opened in 1988, Afrikan World Books came as a response to the lack of Afrikan owned book wholesaling companies. Their endeavor came out of their personal commitment to the spiritual, social, political, and economic liberation of Afrikan people worldwide.

W. Paul Coates - Black Classic Press: His experience with the purchase, sale, collection and publishing of books by and about Blacks is a love affair that has continued for more than three decades.

Haki Madhubuti - Third World Press: poet, teacher, essayist, and publisher of Third World Press (1967), one of the oldest independent publishers of Black thought and literature in the US.

Fine Arts Award

IBBMEC recognized artists who, through their work, have been interpreting the African existence on this planet for the inspiration of our people. It is critical to our evolution to see greatness, hope, and emotion in tangible objects. Through art we see the past, validate the present and design the future. It is important work.

E.S. Jones - Waxcast: has created a fabulous line of contemporary African jewelry. Earl has also designed and is manufacturing bench top wax injection machines and systems to produce wax patterns for the lost wax cast industry.

Henry Osaygefo Colby - Timbuktu Art Colony: Timbuktu Art Gallery, in Milwaukee, WI, designs copper, silver and gold jewelry for wholesale and retail. Timbuktu Art Colony trains and supports aspiring Black artists and qualifies them to start and grow businesses.

Albert Fennell: posthumously 1950 – 2002. Among his credits, Albert Fennell's artwork has been featured on "The Martin Show", "Living Single", "The Jamie Fox Show", and "Hangin' With Mr. Cooper". He did the cover design for the book Fatherhood ... The Black Male's Guide to Parenting and the logo for the "African Women On Tour" series.



Manufacturers Award

As African people we have a long history of production. These days, when needs arise, we too often think outside of ourselves for remedy. There are some people who see a need and begin to calculate how they can meet it. Manufacturing takes more than basic skill with raw materials. Much has to do with management. Many elements must be coordinated in order to facilitate production and then get products to market. IBBMEC has been proud to recognize businesses that have successfully taken on the challenge of manufacturing products that uplift our sensibilities.

Gregory Perkins - African American Expressions (formerly *African American Greetings*): A leader in publishing Afrocentric products, African American Greetings is committed to developing the highest quality items through creative strategic alliances.

Warren Dobson - Dobson Products: Dobson products started in 1991 with a line of plastic stadium cups printed with kente cloth patterns. From this evolved a product line that has included more than 100 creative items from fine glassware to sorority mouse pads.

Victor Gellineau - Carole Joy Creations: Starting with only six Christmas designs in 1985, the company has steadily increased its offering to over 600 items. After years of working from their home in Connecticut, the couple now leads a team of 20 dedicated people who contribute to the day-to-day success of the business.

Apparel Award

As African people, we are serious about our clothes. It is uplifting to the spirit to look good. Whether it is traditional African attire from head to toe, a funky tee shirt with uplifting messages, or sleek silhouettes with whispers of home, we are walking billboards. When we wear our African culture with dignity and pride we are winning.

Renford Hines - *Underwraps*: Established in 1990, his line centers around Afrocentric chic designs done in linen and other natural fibers for women and men.

Kebe Mouhamadou - *Stranger*: Stranger wholesale manufacturing is based in Los Angeles, Mali and Senegal. Most of the fabrics come from Ivory Coast. This international businessman has developed a line that is cultural and trend setting.

R&B Authentic African Fashions: This husband and wife team, Ronke and Babs, are natives of West Africa. Through R&B Authentic African Fashions, many people in the west have adorned themselves in high African style.



Import/Export Award

It takes vision, heart and a wide angle lens to cross oceans and cultures to do business. This work is not for the faint of heart. When you know you have something of quality and substance to share, determination makes a way. Our awardees have brandished the machete and cut a path for others to follow.

Fota Ishaq, Washington Liaison - *Sankofa Designs, Accra, Ghana*: In 1999 six apparel manufacturers from Ghana participated in a program facilitated by AMEX International to help grow their individual businesses. After a lot of hard work and willingness to press past self to achieve greater good, Sankofa Designs was rewarded with clients in the US and abroad.

Julius Aboagye - *African Heritage Collection*: Since 1994 African Heritage Collection has been presenting African culture to America through art and creative African talent. He has found his niche in the selection and presentation of unique cultural artifacts.

Jean Francois - *Jean Francois Enterprises*: Born and raised in Haiti, Jean Francois came to the United States in 1985. For five years he maintained his regular job while working the festival circuit on the weekends marketing Haitian imports. In 2000 he left his job to expand his business and has not looked back.



Technology Award

If it's new, innovative, rockin' and poppin' – someone of African descent had something to do with its creation or is right up on it with a scalpel and probe. Don't let anyone tell you different! When it comes to digital technology there are some cool geeks that have tapped in and come on like gangbusters. What is most outstanding about them is that they have recognized their genius as a tool for the greater good. IBBMEC has recognized them for that.

Eric Williams - Information Brokers, Inc.: Eric Williams is a recognized leader in implementing open solutions and internetwork security. His projects and technological initiative have been featured in government and private industry forums internationally. Whether it is local, national or international, Eric is committed to insuring that people of color get tied to technology.

Bill G. Neely - Singleshop.com Posthumously: 1971 –2001. Singleshop.com was a multi million dollar e-commerce shining star. The website featured new technology that was a “universal shopping cart”, a way for on line consumers to buy items from several e-tailers, then exit through one checkout.

Derek Allen - Silhouette Media: a creative communications firm specializing in print design, web design, and film and video production. Silhouette Media services a variety of clients including non-profit organizations, corporations, trade organizations, and government agencies.



Retail Awards

Retailers. They are the front line. They are the final stop between the product and the consumer. Products find success or failure on their artful displays. Retailers stake their territory, set up shop, advertise, and lure in the passersby. They smile, talk, and listen. Black bookstores, boutiques and variety shops offer merchandise not available in general market stores. For the artists, distributors, and manufacturers, the retailers offer a pathway to the hearts and minds of our people. They are information hubs, community centers, and healing spaces.

Nzinga Kimbrough, Jackie Ryan, and Alden Kimbrough - Zambezi Bazaar African Crafts and Gifts, Los Angeles, California: Opened in 1992 by siblings Nzinga, Jackie and Alden, Zambezi specializes in rare and out-of-print African and African American books, magazines and pamphlets. Also included are vintage jazz, blues and spoken word albums. Their gifts are beautiful, unique and reflective of African culture. They host cultural events in the store and are active in the cultural life of the community.

Sandra Evans - Panaché Ethnic Collectibles & Fine Art, Burlington, New Jersey:

Established in 1988, Sandra travels the world in search of new and unique home furnishings, fine art, collectibles, and gifts. She is not afraid of change or innovation as she regularly reinvents her business so that it better serves the community and allows her a healthy family life.

Nisey Baylor - Nisey's Boutique, Mt Rainier, Maryland: Nisey has owned four stores: Second Stop of a Second Kind, City Kids I & II, Vintage Alive (all in Washington, DC), and Nisey's Boutique. She keeps everyone on their toes by demanding excellence from herself as well as others. She wears many hats including wife, mother and community activist.

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“One of the greatest changes in our business came from our participation in IBBMEC,” said Ngoma Ali of Harambee Mfg, Los Angeles, CA, manufacturers of kinaras, wooden home accessories, incense and apparel. “IBBMEC’s ability to bring buyers and sellers together in the cultural market has been a wonderful success for us.”

The Following Article is from RISE Magazine

(formerly Afrikan Business and Culture Magazine). Summer/fall 2004 Premier issue



Since 1995 the International Black Buyers and Manufacturers Expo and Conference (IBBMEC) has been doing their part to connect Black businesses to share information and conduct trade. The event, held annually, brings together hundreds of Black retailers, manufacturers, importers, exporters, artists, craftspeople, clothiers, booksellers and service providers from across the US and around the globe. This year’s expo and conference theme is “Connect Our Forces – Project Our Power” and will be held September 17-19 at the Ramada Inn, New Carrollton, just outside of Washington, DC.

IBBMEC has been a hub for networking, deal making, trade and education. There you will find purveyors of the most unique and wonderful home décor, greeting cards, calendars, apparel, fashion accessories, art, fine crafts, collectibles, body & bath products, publications and more. Businesses have grown and partnerships have been forged. Resources and money have flowed. IBBMEC creates an important space for people to come together who often feel they work in isolation. They meet others with similar challenges and share strategies and solutions. “IBBMEC has given me, a designer, the opportunity to connect with people who have offshore capabilities” said Barbara Garnes of My Fathers House, manufacturer of African inspired home fashions and decorative accessories. It is a place where business is viewed not only as commercial enterprise but also as a vehicle to forge and maintain relationships.”

A venue for Black wholesalers to present their wares in a professional atmosphere, IBBMEC has enabled a mix of veteran businesses like Artful Greetings and Carole Joy Creations (greeting card companies), Dobson Products (gifts), Stranger (apparel), and African Heritage Collection (imports) along with businesses that are trying wholesale for the first time to test the waters. Selma Jackson, owner of 4W Circle of Art and Enterprise, a boutique and business incubator in Brooklyn, New York said, “I am always in awe at the talent that exists in communities of color – attending IBBMEC only confirms that when I see the creative products on display.”

It is an education, a gold mine, and a fantastic experience for all who attend. Significantly, it is a feast for retailers looking for new and different merchandise to present to their customers. Sessions on marketing, finance, display, customer service, and technology have helped many businesses to the next level. The aim is to increase the visibility, respect and success of the African culture market.



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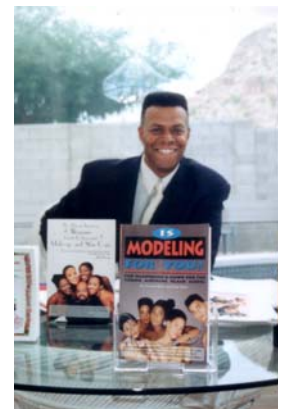
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In 2001 the Alliance of Afrikan Cultural Enterprises (AACE - pronounced "ah-shay") was launched at IBBMEC. This membership organization creates another level of support. Working cooperatively there is much that can be done. Increased and sustained exposure of these businesses to the general public is a top priority. Many people simply do not know that they exist. AACE has broadened the base from retailers and manufacturers to include service providers, organizations, and interested individuals. Beginning in September 2004, AACE will assume the responsibility for management of the IBBMEC conference.

Individuals representing enterprises from across the African Diaspora bringing with them goodwill and positive energy are what have made IBBMEC the powerful event it has become. "It is an emotional and inspiring adventure to come to IBBMEC", said Barbara Garnes, "You are meeting people of African descent from all over the globe who have come together with the same mind set: to do business." Exhibitors from places including Washington, DC, Connecticut, Atlanta, Chicago, Missouri, Wisconsin, New York, Los Angeles, England, Barbados, Canada, Jamaica, Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, Namibia, Rwanda, Uganda, Mali, Gambia, Haiti, and Brazil have all sold their products at IBBMEC. "We do not know of any other event dedicated to wholesale trade specifically for Black people", said co-producer Alexander W. Medley, Jr./Nana Owusu Agyemang.

When you do business with a Black owned establishment you are also supporting the many Black owned businesses and service organizations that they patronize in order to serve you. It is a mindset that must be put in place to channel money and resources where they will work to your benefit. We must unapologetically practice the principle of cooperative economics. We must nurture a profound love for our culture and commitment to the advancement of our people. The end results are relationships steeped in trust, strong communities, and the accumulation of great wealth. These principles form the foundation upon which our ancestors built empires.

Seek out Black businesses. Wherever you shop, ask about the origin of the merchandise you buy – especially cultural products. Greeting cards, calendars, home décor items, apparel, fashion accessories, incense, oils, jewelry, art, cosmetics, hair care products, and fabric are among commodities that are being produced with excellence by businesses that are black owned and operated. Many items with African style and motifs are also produced in Asia. You want to know if the products you buy are authentic. Black manufacturers in the US will usually identify themselves as such on labels or hang tags. Imported items should be tagged with their country of origin. When in doubt ask the sales person. If they cannot answer they will at least know that authenticity is important to you and be more prepared the next time. We must be savvy consumers and make informed decisions. Your dollar is powerful. Think about where it is going before you pass it on.

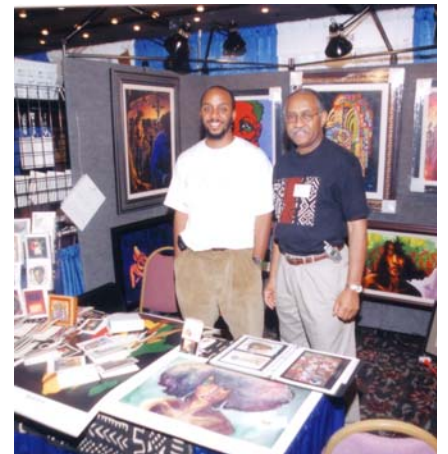
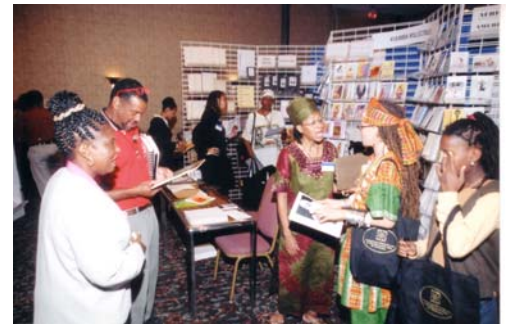


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