

New Migration Needed for African-Americans

When two million Blacks moved from the rigidly-segregated South to the North, West and Midwest from 1910 to 1930, it was called the Great Migration. When another five million African-Americans fled the South between 1940 and 1970, many seeking good jobs and a better life in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Cleveland and Detroit, it was called the Second Great Migration.

U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk thinks it is now time for a Third Great Migration, this one to far-flung cities around the world. He advanced that argument in his office, which is directly across the street from the Old Executive Office Building.

"Whether you're Black, White, Brown or whatever, the No. 1 concern of American families is: 'Where am I going to find a job?' More importantly, where is this kid that I just spent x amount of money getting out of college going to find a job?"

The job market has undergone a global revolution.

"I don't know why my friends are upset when I say to them, 'If all your kids do is what we've been doing, we haven't advanced the ball,'" said Kirk, who served as mayor of Dallas and Texas Secretary of State. "Our kids are going to live in London, in Shanghai, or in Abuja (Nigeria). It's just as likely they'll be stationed in Johannesburg as Detroit

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or New York."

That migration to London, Shanghai, Abuja and Johannesburg has been propelled by new opportunities opened up by advances in technology and the international removal of quotas, tariffs and outrageous export fees.

And there's also Sutton's Law. When bank robber Willie Sutton was asked why he robbed banks, he reputedly replied, "Because that's where the

money is." Sutton's law dictates that one does not ignore the obvious.

"One way to create wealth and a better life – assuming you make something – is to think about selling it to the 95 percent of the people who don't call the United States home," Kirk advised. "If you look at the Fortune 100 companies, the absolute common denominator among them right now is that they, for the most part, are singularly looking at how they are going to access these hundreds of millions of young people who are growing up in Africa, Asia, India, and Latin America and are hungry for something called, 'Made in America.'"

Kirk believes America can profit from that sentiment.

"If you want to attack the job growth problem – and the president firmly believes in this – whatever we can do to empower and enable small businesses to grow faster is a great way to grow our economy," he explained. "And, so a big part of our trade work has been targeting, first, those small businesses that already export and learning more about them, what their challenges are and trying to remove them.

"And secondly, that universe of people that have never exported, either because they are afraid or they're saying, 'How am I going to find customers?' That's why we're putting out more information about the Export Import Bank. The bottom line: they finance your sale."

Kirk said African-Americans have not exploited their special connections to Africa and the Caribbean.

"Corporate America realizes, 'If I am going to go to

Brazil, I better find somebody who speaks Spanish and understands the culture,'" he said. "If I am going to Africa, I am much better served by having somebody who understands the values, reflects the culture and knows the ropes in Kenya, Ghana and West Africa. I want our young people to realize, 'You're more marketable now in a global, competitive society than you might have ever been.' But you got to think globally."

Black businesses must also look beyond the shores of the United States, the trade official said. He said the Commerce Department and his office provides assistance to small businesses trying to engage in international trade.

"The generation that grew up on the Web – where they live, breathe, educate and shop – is a little less intimidated," Kirk said. "I tell people, once you put up a Web site, you're

global. On the Web, nobody knows whether you're a woman, Catholic, Black, tall or straight. All they want to know is, 'I see you got a product. I think it might be able to help me. How do I get at it?' If you're not intimidated by doing business over the Web, I don't think it's that much of a leap to begin thinking about global trade."

Despite anti-American sentiment in some countries, Kirk said the U.S. is still a strong brand.

"They'll complain that maybe our products cost a little more," Kirk said. "They will complain, 'You preach to us too much. You come over here and tell us about corruption, democracy, rule of law and, frankly, if we do a deal with China, we don't have to go through all of that.'

"But at the end of the day, there is an implied value proposition that if I buy this from George and Ron, it'll probably work the way they say it will. It's not counterfeit. If something goes wrong, America has a legal system that can help me hold them accountable.' That's a huge advantage for us."

Kirk strikes a cautionary note about international business. "It's a huge opportunity," he said. But don't rush into it."

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