

'Occupy the Dream' Aims to Grow Black Businesses

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A national group of Black clergy, led by former NAACP Executive Director Benjamin Chavis, is aiming to reverse the Black unemployment rate by changing the economic mindset of Black people.

"You'd be surprised that a lot of people ask why we are the most unemployed. They say we need jobs," Chavis said, in an interview with the Trice Edney News Wire. "But, the truth of the matter is that in order to get jobs, we have to have employers. We need more Black business people to hire Black people. If we are waiting for somebody else to hire us, it's the consciousness, our mindset has to change. Empowerment means what you do for yourself; not what somebody constantly does for you.

The mission, which is being called "Occupy the Dream", will start on Monday, Jan. 16 in commemoration of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. birthday holiday. On that day preachers, who are part of the "Occupy the Dream" movement, will connect with the well-known "Occupy Wall Street" group to hold protests at Federal Reserve Banks in 10 cities around the nation, Chavis said.

The strategy will be to raise the conscious level of African-Americans starting in church pulpits by spreading the message of income equality, economic justice and empowerment leading up to Jan. 16. "It starts in the pulpit and then we're going to go to the community at

large," he said.

Then, the ministers will grow and sustain a movement with monthly activities focused on transforming the Black mindset from consumer to owner, he said. "And so, I see 'Occupy the Dream' as first – and to some extent, challenging the mindset of over 40 million Black Americans who various stats show will spend a trillion dollars in 2012. So how is it that we're spending a trillion dollars on the one hand, but we are the most unemployed on the other hand? Our children are not finishing high school on the other hand. We're losing homes; we are the most foreclosed on the other hand. That's a contradiction," Chavis said. "And so, Occupy the Dream is going to challenge that. That's something internal in the Black commu-

ly hold the balance of power. Chavis said the Occupy the Dream movement will simply take that message to the next level by activating the reversal of that 1 percent vs. 99 percent power – especially in the Black community, which is most affected by poverty and unemployment. "We have made tremendous progress politically in terms of Black elected officials – we have more Black state legislators than ever before, at one time we had Black people who were mayors of just about all the major cities, we have over 40 members of the Congress– and so politically we've made some significant gains, but economically, we have not," Chavis says.

When Dr. King was assassinated on April 4, 1968, he was planning a poor people's march and campaign because of economic inequity and economic injustice across America. That movement never fully took off. A former foot-soldier of Dr. King who was a South Carolina state wide youth coordinator for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in the 1960s, Chavis said the Occupy Wall Street message reminded him of Dr. King's vision.

Occupy Wall Street was started by mainly White youth who were not only conscious of the economic inequities, but has specifically called attention to the suffering of common people while those largely responsible for America's disastrous economy appear to benefit by bail outs and business as usual. The movement started in September with protests on Wall Street in lower Manhattan and has since spread into cities across the U. S.

Chavis, who will turn 64 on Jan. 22, has been a mentor to the 40-year-old Bryant, who served as NAACP national youth coordinator during Chavis tenure as NAACP executive director in the early 1990s. Chavis, who has worked the past 15 years for Russell Simmons' Hip Hop movement, says the Occupy the Dream movement will combine older seasoned leaders and youthful leaders to assure that people

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nity that we need to face. And the Black preacher is strategically placed to meet these challenges because we meet with the Black community every week."

The new group has set up a website for more detailed information: www.occupydream.org. It is also on Facebook and Twitter.

Chavis and the Rev. Dr. Jamal-Harrison Bryant, pastor of the 10,000-member Empowerment Temple AME Church in Baltimore, are working together along with a list of other clergy and participants in the Occupy Wall Street movement which has held protests in cities across the nation for the past eight months. The focus of Occupy Wall Street has mainly been, "We are the 99 percent", meaning the community of 1 percent wealthy in American appear to wrong-



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