

# MountainTop Institute

## The Mask

And other Challenges for  
Entrepreneurs of Color

A Survey Summary

MountainTop Institute  
and  
The Florida Center for Public & International Policy  
University of North Florida



*...historic change through  
values-centered growth.*

# **THE MASK**

## **Summary Report**

***A Survey of Cultural Issues Impacting  
Small and Minority Business owners***

***and***

***A Proposed Strategy for  
Strengthening Business Success***

**MountainTop Institute  
and  
Florida Center for Public & International Policy  
University of North Florida**

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**Historic difference!**

**A MountainTop Institute-UNF Survey (c) 2005**

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# **The MASK**

## **SUMMARY REPORT**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **We Wear The Mask**

***We wear the mask that grins and lies,  
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,  
This debt we pay to human guile;  
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,  
And mouth with myriad subtleties.***

***Why should the world be over-wise  
In counting all our tears and sighs?  
Nay, let them see only us, while  
We wear the mask.***

***We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries  
To see from tortured souls arise.  
We sing, but oh the clay is vile  
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;  
But let the world dream otherwise,  
We wear the mask!***

***Paul Laurence Dunbar – 1896***

This heart-rending poem describes a cultural pattern of dissembling that blacks of the post-slavery era needed in order to survive; never letting whites know the fullness of their anger or pain.

In a broader sense, the poem describes the challenges that many entrepreneurs of color face today, as they attempt, for the first time in the country's history, to enter the economic mainstream as a new class of business owners; as they attempt to overcome powerful dynamics of cultural conditioning in order to operate effectively in a well-established predominantly-white economic system. The price of the ticket is frequently unacknowledged or misunderstood, both by the entrepreneurs and by the white business owners with whom they often seek to do business.

The increased emphasis on entrepreneurial development among African American, Hispanic American and Asian American business owners has generated a new interest in programs designed to support such ventures.

At the local and national levels, there is a renewed focus on expanding opportunities for minority vendors through new purchasing strategies, revolving loan funds targeted to business owners of color, access to venture capital, technical and business training, mentorship programs, access to insurance and bonding, and other strategies.

The results of this survey of minority entrepreneurs in Jacksonville, FL indicates that programs and strategies designed to support the development of a strong and viable entrepreneurial class among people of color may fall short if such efforts fail to address an array of self-limiting socio-cultural and psychological conditions that exist in communities of color and in the mindsets of many minority entrepreneurs. This is especially the case for African American entrepreneurs, according to the findings of this survey, for whom the vestiges of slavery and the concomitant presence of self-limiting attitudes and behaviors is particularly telling.

### **SURVEY OBJECTIVE**

Early in 2004, the Jacksonville Regional Chamber of Commerce engaged MountainTop Institute to conduct a comprehensive survey of the needs of small and minority business owners in Jacksonville, Florida.

This survey was sponsored by the Chamber's Small Business Center under a single source contract from the Jacksonville Economic Development Council. MountainTop Institute and the University of North Florida Center for Public & International Policy conducted technical aspects of the survey and data analysis.

The survey's objective was to identify socio-cultural and psychological qualities and characteristics that support or impede the development of small and minority businesses in Jacksonville. The purpose was to explore the deep cultural material among individual business owners and within communities of color. The survey included black, Hispanic, and Asian American, as well as white, entrepreneurs.

This information is being used to create a strategy for a training and development curriculum that addresses these socio-cultural and community issues. This curriculum will supplement the technical training and business development strategies that are currently being planned as a result of the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Small and Emerging Businesses and the Small Business Ordinance Revision, ordinance #2004-602-E, passed by the Jacksonville City Council.

A core hypothesis of this survey is that certain cultural conditioning among minority business owners and minority communities significantly impacts business development. If left unresolved, these cultural issues will impede the successful implementation of the City Ordinance.

## **BACKGROUND PERSPECTIVES**

As Jacksonville and the United States become more culturally diverse, residents' values and behaviors based on cultural conditioning will have an increasingly significant impact. Moreover, race relations in Jacksonville continue to be vexatious. While blacks, Asian Americans, Hispanics and whites all agree that there has been significant progress over the years, studies also affirm that there is much work to be done.

A 1999 study by the Jacksonville Community Council, Inc. (JCCI), "Beyond the Talk: Improving Race Relations" identified a range of disparities in the economic system, mainly in per capita income and employment. The JCCI study also identified a significant gap in perceptions between whites and minorities around the scope and nature of racial bias. It confirmed earlier studies sponsored by the Jacksonville Human Rights Commission and conducted by the Center for Community Initiatives at UNF, and by the Social Science Research Center at Jacksonville University that whites and blacks, in particular, live in virtually two different worlds. The Human Rights Commission study found that 73 percent of whites believed race relations were good or excellent, while only 19 percent of blacks felt that way. On the other hand, 78 percent of blacks described race relations as fair or poor, while only 35 percent of whites felt that way.

The present survey begins with the assumption that small and minority business owners need technical and other assistance in order to succeed. The need for business essentials such as access to capital and access to markets is well documented. Numerous projects are underway in Jacksonville to provide such technical assistance, including the new City Ordinance on Small and Emerging Businesses. Traditional efforts to support small and minority business owners have focused on the "Big Three": (1) technical assistance to increase access to capital; (2) technical assistance to strengthen outreach to markets; and (3) the development of a viable business practice to provide quality products or services.

This survey also begins with the assumption that historic discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity has worked against the optimal development of mainstream businesses owned by black, Hispanic, Asian American, and women entrepreneurs. There is a position however that historic business discrimination to some extent benefited prior generations of black firms by providing a protected market that excluded the majority of white firms. This position suggests that segregation operated like tariff protection in international trade.

The present survey seeks to go beyond the traditional, to understand the deeper psychological, cultural and social conditions that may exist within the mindsets of entrepreneurs and within communities, and to propose ways to address them. These conditions include cultural conditioning in communities of color that may inhibit or impede the development of successful entrepreneurs.

The questions we have continually asked ourselves, from conception to implementation of this survey are:

- How deep and how significant is the cultural conditioning in our society?
- What are the manifestations of the cultures of blacks, Asian Americans and Hispanics that support or deter their ability to succeed in business?
- Are there lingering effects of history that continue to limit our ability or our desire to create a national identity that incorporates all the diversity of our cultural heritage?
- Why, after 40 years of trying, and billions of dollars spent attempting to create a level playing field in the economic arena, are we still saddled with such profound disparities?
- If material imbedded in personal psyches, group processes, and community dynamics based on our differing cultures interferes with success in business, what can we do about it?

A critical outcome of the survey is identifying key elements for a training and development strategy designed to address the issues identified in the study. The resulting outcome is to strengthen the likelihood of small and minority business owners to enter successfully the mainstream economy.

### **SURVEY METHODOLOGY**

The survey was conducted according to the research and academic review protocols of the University of North Florida. The telephone survey was conducted by the Polling Center of the University of North Florida under the aegis of Dr. Matt Corrigan, Director of the Polling Center, and Dr. Henry Thomas, Director of the Florida Center for Public & International Policy at UNF. The survey questions were developed within the criteria for review under the University of North Florida Internal Review Board.

The telephone polling was conducted on a non-randomized population from lists provided by the Small Business Center of the Jacksonville Regional Chamber of Commerce. These lists are comprised of small and minority business owners certified by the City of Jacksonville under the Small and Emerging Business Program. A total of 980 small and minority business owners were called for the survey, and a total of 181 were reached and completed the survey. Respondents were offered confidentiality in exchange for their responses to the questionnaire.

Dr. Dominik Guess and Dr. Tes Tuason of the Psychology Department at UNF developed the survey questions. The questions were based on survey instruments designed for their research in intercultural decision-making and were modified and revised by the staff of MountainTop Institute, and further refined by the staff of the Polling Center and by the Florida Center for Public & International Policy. Final decisions on the questions and methodology were made jointly by MountainTop and the Florida Center for Public & International Policy. Ultimate responsibility for the final product rests with MountainTop Institute, the prime contractor for this project. The original idea for this project came from a discussion between Bob Baldwin, Bryant Rollins, Shirley Stetson, and Glenda Washington.

MountainTop and the survey team employed the following three-phase strategy:

**1. Telephone Polling:** The University of North Florida Public Opinion Research Laboratory telephoned approximately 980 small and minority business owners. They reached 181 verified business owners. Of this total, 44% percent were black, 44% were white, 1% was Hispanic and 4% were Asian American.

**2. Focus Groups:** A total of 93 individuals were interviewed in a series of nine focus groups, differentiated by race, ethnicity, nationality and gender. The focus groups were in part organized by the First Coast African American Chamber of Commerce, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the First Coast Asian American Chamber of Commerce, and its collaborative partner, the Indo-U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the Chamber's Small Business Center. Focus group participants signed consent forms. A copy is attached in the Appendices. Participants were assured confidentiality and anonymity.

Professional staff from MountainTop Institute and the University of North Florida Center for Public & International Policy conducted the focus groups.

**3. Stakeholder Interviews:** A total of 15 individuals were interviewed. These people play key roles in organizations that support the provision of technical, financial, mentoring, marketing and other resources for small and minority business owners in Jacksonville. Stakeholders were assured confidentiality and anonymity.

## **SUMMARY OF THEMES AND FINDINGS**

The findings of this survey confirm what is generally known from prior surveys about the scope and nature of the gap between whites and blacks. However this study goes deeper into the cultural material of each minority group and discovers that which is internal to each culture that helps to define the nature of the gap. This is true not only for black-white relations, but also for relations between whites and Hispanics and Asian Americans, for relations between blacks and Hispanics and Asian Americans.

Five themes were identified through this survey:

- **The Power of Culture and The Power of Differences**
- **Trust**
- **The Power of Communication, Relationships and Telling One's Story**
- **Cultural Transformation: A New World of Business Acumen**
- **Role of the Macro Business Environment and the Small Business Center**

### **THEME ONE      The Power of Culture and The Power of Differences**

As Jacksonville and the United States incorporate people from a wider variety of cultural and national backgrounds, significant behavioral and values-based differences come into prominence. Among entrepreneurs cultural differences and the cultural conditioning associated with these differences can be a source of

strength and creativity. Business owners interviewed for this survey also identified a range of self-limiting assumptions, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that severely limit the ability of minority entrepreneurs to succeed. These limitations differ for black, Hispanic, and Asian American entrepreneurs.

These self-limiting conditions exist in individual psyches and in community-wide behaviors. They stifle development, and they are largely hidden from view, a kind of family secret, which has a powerful impact on the ability of black and other minority business owners to take full advantage of the growing opportunities available in Jacksonville, and nationally.

The well-documented presence of racial bias among whites, when combined with the self-limiting behaviors among minorities, results in a grand collusion to maintain the status quo. Truly transformative processes are needed to break this historic cycle.

In response to our survey questions and through the dynamics of the process, minority entrepreneurs suggested that the acknowledgement of these self-limiting conditions is key to healing the wounds in the culture derived from historic discrimination.

## **THE CULTURAL MASK**

One of the more significant findings involved the mask that many African American business owners said they wear as they go about their daily business. An example of the mask is the difference between the responses of black respondents during the telephone interviews on the one hand, and during the focus group interviews on the other hand. These differences emerged both in terms of dynamics and substance. In terms of the latter, black business owners responding to the telephone survey provided significantly different responses from those elicited during the focus groups. Dynamically, the data analysis suggests an important cultural and psychological difference between telephone polling methodology and the direct interface during the focus groups. Substantively, African American business owners described a level of anxiety and inauthenticity in their relationships with each other and with the predominantly-white universe of mainstream business.

This masking phenomenon is well documented in African American cultural life. Black poet Paul Laurence Dunbar described it in his 1896 poem "We Wear the Mask":

Remnants of this post-slavery mentality continue to impact African American entrepreneurs today, according to those we interviewed. The mask-wearing not only affects relationships with the white world. Black business owners also said that they wear the mask with each other --- with pretensions of success and unwillingness to admit failure that works against collaboration and fosters intra-group competition. One respondent told us that the mask has become so

endemic to his personality and for his survival, that he sometimes doesn't know who he's become. When he looks in the mirror, he sees the mask. Black entrepreneurs described a felt-need to live in pretension and self-protection from a world they frequently described as hostile to their intentions and insensitive to their struggles. This was the case for highly successful business owners as well as for others, even when interactions with whites go well, and opportunities are present.

The charts that follow indicate some of the differences between responses by African American business owners during the telephone interviews as compared with the responses during the Focus Groups when the interplay of emotion and openness evoked much more honesty within the context of a safe and respectful environment.

## **THEME TWO      The Trust Factor**

Minority business participants indicated a strong desire for leveraging capacity. They readily understand the need for collaboration rather than competition if they hope to gain larger projects. Yet all too often mistrust within and between various ethnic groups prevent them from working co-operatively. These dynamics also interfere with the ability of minority entrepreneurs to take advantage of the disposable income within their own communities. Black business owners, in particular, identified a wide array of attitudes and behaviors within the black community that limit their ability to succeed. For example, black survey participants spoke of a distrust within the black community which has frequently displayed a slave mentality characterized by "white is right," and "if you're black, get back" as well as the "crabs in a barrel" syndrome. A number of black business owners indicated that they stay "below the radar" within their own communities because when they make their success public they are accused of "acting white" or "selling out to the white man". Many black entrepreneurs reported that blacks prefer to do business with whites because of a racial preference they attributed to the aforementioned "slave mentality" or "internalized racism". This was described as a continuing effect of the mistrust generated by the plantation administration. Participants describe this as a contemporary version of the house slave vs. field slave history. All the survey participants, including whites, indicated a desire to understand other cultural groups better and to build trust.

Black respondents also identified issues of low self-esteem, unclear cultural identity, and confusion about cultural heritage as being among the self-limiting material.

Hispanic and Asian respondents also identified an array of self-limiting conditions and attitudes, although they were reported as much less intense and impactful as compared with those of black respondents.

### **THEME THREE      The Power of Communication, Relationships and Telling One's Story**

Both directly and through inference, survey participants indicated a critical need for processes that open communication across traditional cultural barriers, build trust, result in deep and authentic relationships and create sustainable processes of growth and change.

The focus groups, in particular, resulted in a level of camaraderie and healing for many of the participants and that surprised them. They discussed a hunger for a safe and nonjudgmental environment within which life experiences could be shared and the impact of cultural differences understood. It is within this type of environment that participants defined a new quality of business relationship built on shared experiences and authentic trusting relationships.

### **THEME FOUR      Cultural Transformation: Business Acumen In a New World**

This survey confirmed other research indicating the critical need for substantial mobilization of technical and business support for minority entrepreneurs. Mentoring, access to capital, access to the marketplace, basic business skills --- all were identified by survey respondents as significant issues.

However, this survey also suggests that these basic business skills and resources must exist within a transformed cultural condition. Mentoring is optimal in relationships characterized by trust, authenticity, willingness to admit problems, and an awareness of cultural differences. Our research suggests a need for a process that leads to cultural transformation to reframe current relationships and create a fertile ground in which the transfer of technology, resources, information and skills can truly take root among minority entrepreneurs.

### **THEME FIVE                      The Role of the Macro Business Environment and the Small Business Center**

Survey respondents identified the need for processes and structures that work to mobilize the business community behind this effort. They indicated the need for a full-scale campaign by the macro business community to create a sustainable effort. Incremental, piecemeal change will result in continued frustration, and a growth in the gap between minorities and whites.

They see the Small Business Center of the Jacksonville Regional Chamber of Commerce as a natural venue to provide leadership to bring together the resources and create the processes. They proposed a number of general and specific tactics to support this strategy.

Many of these strategies involve collaborations with other key organizations, and the creation of a citywide public-private effort. This effort, the respondents indicated, must also be characterized by trust, high quality relationships, transparency (i.e. honesty, openness, fairness), and an appreciation of the power of cultural conditioning.

## **SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE**

The result of this survey is a series of significant proposals, the main elements of which are as follows:

- **Create a new generation of programs for training and development of entrepreneurs of color**
- **Create a tailored curriculum based on a four-stage Ladder --- a well-articulated Continuum of Personal & Professional Development**
- **Create new learning strategies**
- **Create new structures**

**1. Create new training programs for business development for small and minority entrepreneurs.** This curriculum will focus on two areas:

**a.) Personal development** --- personal and interpersonal skills, including exploration of personal and professional values, time to reflect on issues of self-perception, self esteem the impact of cultural conditioning and the impact of community dynamics.

**b.) Business development** --- facilitated collaboration among key stakeholders to insure a fully integrated curriculum in basic business skills and competencies.

**2. Create a tailored curriculum based on a Continuum of Development** --- that insures a coherent set of developmental activities designed to accommodate the different stages of business development.

**3. Create new learning strategies** --- focused on experiential learning opportunities in small groups/teams designed to building long lasting relationships and break down cultural barriers.

**4. Creating new structures** --- to insure maximum cooperation and collaboration among the various stakeholder organizations.

## **SURVEY VALIDATION AND COMMUNITY ORIENTATION**

Based on preliminary findings in September 2004, the Small Business Center asked MountainTop Institute to extend the original survey with two steps:

### **1. Focus group comment and validation process:**

MountainTop reconvened the original Focus Group participants to share the "Themes and Findings" section of this report and validate conclusions. This was a response to participants' requests for feedback. MountainTop and the Center for Public & International Policy conducted the follow-up sessions for purposes of comment and validation. The material produced through this process is an addendum to the final report. Recommendations for action based on these focus group sessions have been included in the addendum.

The reconvened Focus Groups fully validated the findings of the survey and advocated the recommendations proposed.

Moreover, the groups proposed continued involvement in the design and implementation of programs and projects coming out of the recommendations.

### **2. Community stakeholder information and feedback:**

MountainTop Institute and the Center for Public & International Policy are collaborating with the Small Business Center to conduct informational sessions with key community individuals, elected and appointed officials and community groups. These sessions are for orientation, information and feedback to inform the community. Recommendations arising from this process also will be included in the addendum.

## **A NEW DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL**

MountainTop and the Small Business Center have collaborated to create an innovative developmental program for small and emerging entrepreneurs based on the findings of this survey.

The Jacksonville Academy for Business Leadership has been created within which the Chamber and MountainTop are joint sponsors of a training and development sequence called: Self- Development for Small and Emerging Entrepreneurs. This program is currently being piloted with 20 small and emerging entrepreneurs in Jacksonville. The program focuses on personal and interpersonal skills, assertiveness, motivation, purpose, vision, understanding the rules of the game, the impact of cultural heritage, the impact of community attitudes, personal mastery and other aspects of personal growth. All of these elements are closely tied into the business owners' business strategy, goals and objectives.

# ***VERBATIM FROM FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS***

The following is a sample of verbatim expressions from the Focus Groups conducted with African American, Hispanic American and Asian American entrepreneurs.

The material that follows has been selected specifically and intentionally to support the main conclusions of this report.

## ***Excerpts from the black focus group verbatim:***

- Minorities don't do business with each other
- Asians could teach blacks to go it together
- We have a lot of short term thinking
- Within our culture there's a subculture that blocks us from moving forward
- Jealousy, envy and status issues get in the way
- There's a lot of selfishness within the culture
- Prejudices exist
- White collar vs. blue collar blacks, "house vs. the field"
- It's difficult to be heard because of the color of my skin
- The rules change once you learn how to do it
- If you don't walk and talk like the whites you don't get anything
- Why do blacks begin to oppress one another just like the whites do?
- We have to work against that
- Even blacks see black professionals as incompetent; they emulate the oppressors and reject black businesses
- [Slavery] was designed to get the slave to only trust the master and not to trust each other

- Today: if you're a black man and you give me a quote I automatically don't trust that
- We only trust the white man and that's the slave mentality
- We don't trust each other in the black community
- Divide and conquer is crabs in a basket
- You can't get too big, don't get too much notice. The rug will be pulled out
- When you get to a certain level there are [black] people who will sabotage you because they don't want to see you succeed more than they do
- We want to look like we're there when we know we won't get there
- The mask. We have to wear it all the time
- Wishing we are at a place where we are not
- We don't deal with each other on a true and basic level, our relationships with each other at business and social functions are superficial --- at all kinds of events
- All of us black business owners have to wear a mask and that's one of our biggest threats
- We have to learn to divorce ourselves of that ego and leave the masks at the door
- Everyone experiences that at some level
- It's much more intense for a black person
- Driving a Lexus when we really didn't have much to eat at home. It was all about the show.
- Where is the source of that ego stuff?
- We're first generation, not having anything anyway, we look at what society says success is and our desire to look that way. But never really having the ability to get there is totally debilitating
- We want desperately to be successful, to be where success is, the only thing we can rely on is telling that success story but it's not authentic. We leave those interactions feeling deflated.

- The Mask. You have to tell a story about how great and wonderful you are so you can live in that story
- Some bad experiences have to do with our lack of experience or competence
- We have three projects that “went south” because of our lack of competence
- Lack of knowledge or business plans
- Seems like everything is a futile attempt ... no matter how hard you try you wind up starting all over again
- The process, the rules, keep changing
- It's hard not to become cynical
- You leave an appointment feeling the decision was already made
- Feel totally disenfranchised
- Even if the rejection comes from the black side
- Relationships are dishonest with black professionals
- If you're white you're right
- Grooming issues --- knowing grooming and manners and etiquette: our parents didn't show us how --- lack of knowing the grooming standards ... parents didn't have the familiarity to show us how to dress and look [in order to fit in]
- Inability to trust
- You don't end the psychological ramifications of slavery overnight
- You don't trust people in your own office or outside
- The source of that: slavery was a system and the greatest component of that was psychological. That is still in us at deep, deep levels
- As black people who are just getting into the economic arena, we are critically aware that wealth does not pass from generation to generation in the black community like it does in the white community
- Schools don't teach us how to go for the profit mentality; they teach us how to get a job and earn a wage

- Black people don't learn what it takes to go to work for themselves
- We will never succeed totally until we address the slave mentality of our people

## **Excerpts from the Hispanic focus group verbatim:**

- We don't want to be called people of color; prefer to be called non-Anglo
- Please change the designation on the consent form from people of color
- We were excluded from the City of Jacksonville set asides
- Only blacks participated; women were tacked on
- We were the left out minority group
- Tough to get Mexicans to be involved, they want to keep a low profile because so many are illegal immigrants or involved with illegal immigrants. Hispanics need education on growing businesses and achieving greater goals
- Lots of Hispanics are operating cash businesses
- They don't have checking accounts and credit cards so they don't get credit
- It's important in Hispanic culture to pay their bills, but they use cash, they don't use credit cards. Don't want a paper trail
- Heavy focus on losing our culture, family and family values and the kids losing the culture, language (English only) loses cultural values
- Over confidence
- Reality is that USA is a melting pot and the threat is that our children lose culture and identity
- Younger generation is trying to fit in with American culture and therefore lose their own
- Communication: language barrier
- Lack of business knowledge in general: steep learning curve
- Perseverance

- Lack of know-how in the US
- Farmer's mentality: work too hard but do the wrong work that leads to a lack of sophistication, working harder, not smarter
- Overwork issue: when they work half a day that's 12 hours
- Undercapitalization
- Need to learn the limits of credit and credit cards
- Lack of business knowledge in general: steep learning curve
- Roman Catholicism as a cultural issue: young people are losing Catholicism
- Average small business owner works 14-18 hours a day: no time for education or to sit around like we're doing here

## **Excerpts from the Asian American Group Verbatim:**

- After 9/11, a lot of Asians were killed because people thought they were Muslim. I thought we needed to have an Indian identity so we could communicate that the Indian community is a peaceful community. We are mainly Hindu. But even Indian Muslims are peaceful people, not terrorists. We are vegetarians
- Vegetarianism is associated with karmic theory. You reap what you sow. We come from a tolerant society and we want to understand what you do
- Vegetarianism is linked to spiritualism for us. It is to improve the progress in your spiritual life
- We'll take a penny. That's one of the characteristics of Asian Americans; we'll take anything, any job that makes some money
- I have connected with many minority and small businesses. I have interaction on a daily basis. It is a survival issue to stay in touch- especially in bad times. We need each other. I am in retail
- Filipinos fit everywhere
- Problem for me is business-to-business dealing. A difficult barrier to break through is to get business or institutional – schools, churches, city hall

–business. Even when networking, the barrier is not entirely dropped. They think if you're small, you can't do the job

- They want to sell to us but not buy from us. It's a human tendency to want to buy from one's own people but not from outsiders. Unless there's no alternative, then we'll give you a chance. It's not a complaint, just a reality. Even in India. Some business owners lack sophistication. It will take time. We need to increase the level of sophistication and communication – that is our goal at the Indo-US Chamber
- State law exists to help some groups obtain loans from the State. Here, the blacks have the BBIC to get all the loans. They only want to lend to black businesses. We have tried to apply and were turned down. But the law is supposed to be for us too. We are working to make sure that all are treated equally. We have tried to amend the law and have tried to create our own political group to apply a bit of muscle. Blacks get everything but we are left out. We are taxpayers and business owners but we don't get loans and feasibility studies. We are left out. Example: Moncrief Plaza Center and 3% loan.
- [We're] In between – not white or black so we get nothing. Like the middle child, you can be seen but not heard
- Not assertive, sense of humility, will not brag
- Inferiority complex. Americans have a big "I" in their ego. We have been ruled by whites for 100's of years and we are conditioned to believe whites are superior
- We want identity – to be Asian not "other"
- Lack of visibility even when we excel
- It all adds up to a mentality that very few can rise above. I have to do a lot of inner work, a lot of spiritual work. I pray, my car is a moving library of self-esteem tapes, I have to develop a heightened sense of my surroundings, I have to be very self-aware, I am very technically qualified and very spiritually advanced
- In India, I was upper middle class. My family was very well off professionals. In the U.S. when I walk into a room of whites I automatically feel they're superior to me. It's a subconscious reaction.
- We don't network or know how to network. Even in the Hindu temple, people don't speak to each other. It bothers me
- This is a heaven. This is a land of opportunity for any business as compared to our own countries where there is lots of bureaucracy

- This is paradise – you can own a home and a car
- Lack of knowledge of the system, who to talk to and what to do
- Networking and how it works
- We don't mix like Americans. We don't even speak to each other at the mall
- Professionalism – speaking and dress
- Exposure [i.e. visibility]
- Status – need to be more accepting of each other
- Provide building and land for Asians to meet and discuss business. We need our own wing of the Chamber building to meet and Asian speakers at COC



**Historic difference!**

# MountainTop Institute

Who we are

What we do

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## *About MountainTop Institute*

### **Background**

MountainTop Institute was established in 1999 by founders Bryant Rollins and Shirley Stetson, who wanted to make their 50 years of working on issues of diversity in major American corporations available on a broad basis to individuals and institutions in Jacksonville. They envisioned the institute as a local and national resource that would collaborate with other organizations to transform individuals, groups and, ultimately, the community at large with regard to human differences.

The Institute is in the process of mobilizing local and national resources, assembling benchmark strategies and methodologies, and top talent to do this important work. It is creating a national model. Jacksonville will be recognized as “The City of Reconciliation”. The Institute will ultimately be housed in its own state-of-the-art conference facility, providing a safe and healing space for individuals and groups to engage in the intensive work of personal reflection, community-wide reconciliation and organizational teambuilding.

MountainTop received start up grants from the City of Jacksonville, Wachovia Bank, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Florida, and EverBank to inaugurate its work. It is led by a prestigious board of directors, with attorney Bill Scheu as Chair. After three years of working with a variety of organizations, the Institute has created an impressive track record of successes with community groups in Jacksonville, and with private sector corporations. In addition to grants, MountainTop generates fees from its work with private sector organizations to support its work with community organizations such as Clara White Mission.

The Institute has played a key role in supporting initiatives of other organizations such as the Jacksonville Regional Chamber of Commerce’s Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion, the City of Jacksonville Study Circles Initiative and the JCCI Race Relations Study and its Implementation Task Force.

## **EXPERIENCE**

The principals of the Institute have worked with many organizations, including Shell Oil, Exxon, Aetna, Verizon, Procter & Gamble, AT&T, Polaroid, Texaco, Xerox, Columbia Natural Gas. They have worked with the Department of Defense, IRS, Food and Drug Administration and other agencies of state and federal government. They have worked with community-based organizations, athletic teams, faith-based organizations, colleges, universities, and foundations, libraries, law firms and other organizations, both nationally and internationally.

In Jacksonville, clients have included JEA, Jacksonville Fire & Rescue, The Jacksonville Regional Chamber of Commerce, HabiJax, Clara White Mission, the United Way of Northeast Florida, University of North Florida, Blue Cross Blue

Shield of Florida, Regency Centers, West Side Ministry Community Development Corporation, the Jacksonville Human Rights Commission, the City of Jacksonville Study Circles Initiative, the Neighborhood Services Department, the Community Development Division, the Department of Planning & Development, Fresh Ministries and the Episcopal Diocese of Florida.

MountainTop Institute is known for the depth and quality of its consulting and training. Staffed by experienced professionals, MountainTop Institute is a unique resource for training and development. The Institute works through community-based organizations, the business community, government agencies and faith-based organizations to fundamentally transform individuals, organizations and communities in regards to leadership development, organizational effectiveness,

and teambuilding. The Institute has extensive experience in race relations and cultural diversity.

Working with MountainTop is an investment in individuals, groups, organizations and community. The return on that investment is individuals who are more closely aligned to the organization's mission, higher performing teams, increased energy and morale, greater productivity, and customer/client satisfaction.

## **MOUNTAINTOP OFFERS**

- Experiential Workshops and Seminars
- Leadership training
- Executive coaching
- Diversity Training
- Diversity Consulting
- Organizational development consulting
- Strategic planning
- Intensive Residential Retreats
- High Performance Teambuilding
- Community Building strategies and tactics
- Bridge-building between community organizations and public agencies
- Mediation
- Forums and Conferences
- Creative Dialogue

## **MountainTop Institute Professional Staff**

**Bryant Rollins - President & CEO.** Bryant began his diversity work during the Civil Rights Movement. He has more than 30 years experience as a consultant with Fortune 500 companies, colleges and universities, federal, state and local government, foundations, community organizations and the media. He is a former Editor with the New York Times and columnist with The Boston Globe, where he was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. He worked as a Program Administrator for the Ford Foundation, and administered a major journalism-training program at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. He is the published author of numerous articles, one novel, and co-author of an autobiography,

**Shirley Stetson, M.Ed. - Vice President, OD.** Shirley has 20 years as a manager in the former Bell System where she spent thirteen years in the field as

a manager, and seven years in diversity consulting, organizational development and management training. She established her own organizational development business and has educated diversity practitioners both nationally and internationally. She has focused much of her recent work on issues of women as leaders in corporate and community organizations, nationally and internationally.

**Additional resources** - In addition to the above individuals, MountainTop has access to a cadre of seasoned consultants and trainers, in Jacksonville and around the country, available to work on projects as needed.