

THURSDAY, MARCH 13, 2008

Why Did Spitzer Have A Beef With Black Self Help???

Why Did Spitzer Destroy BUFNY?



Not A Team Of Rivals: BUFNY Founder Kermit Eady(left) & Eliot Spitzer

[On The Spot]

Harlem, New York, is a place known to many across this country as the Black Mecca.

Harlem has some of the truest and richest stories, and some you don't want to talk about at all. There was the time when the people in Harlem witnessed Freedom National Bank being closed down while its customers wrapped around both corners of 125th Street to retrieve their savings; or when Hale House, a place used as a safe haven for crack moms and their babies was closed down; or the hostile takeover of the Apollo Theatre, a place where many African Americans displayed their musical talent.

The story behind the destruction of another great institution, the Black United Fund of New York (BUFNY), hasn't been adequately told. Many New Yorkers, including a New York City councilmember, are now asking questions and demanding answers from Governor Eliot Spitzer.

BUFNY, a non-profit institution, was designed to decisively break the status quo of dependency and control by forces and resources outside the Black community. It was the pioneer in allowing Black workers, through payroll deductions, to finance community empowerment.

In the interest of justice, a special independent investigator should be appointed to determine what went down with BUFNY, which ceased operation when its leaders Kermit Eady and Larry Barton were ousted five years ago when then State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer launched an "investigation."

Many questions remain unanswered.

What was the outcome of that Spitzer "investigation"? Where are BUFNY's books and records covering 24 years? What about BUFNY's assets, including buildings?

What of priceless personal property including awards belonging to Eady and Barton?

Ironically, the takeover of BUFNY took place at a time when all of Harlem's elected officials were African Americans. They were and still are absent without leave raising the question: does the Harlem community vote count?

BUFNY was founded in 1979, by Eady, President and CEO and Barton, Vice-President and General Manager. Both say they were fired by Spitzer, now New York state governor. "Using his Black Republican agents, he began his investigation in November 2002, based on an anonymous complaint that has not resulted in any official findings and not generated any charges," says Barton, referring to Spitzer.

Both Eady and Barton say their reputation has also been soiled and they've lived under the cloud generated by an "investigation" that resulted in no charges of wrongdoing and no actions against the BUFNY founders. "It's been nearly five years after we were taken to Long Island and deposed for hours, and we haven't heard a word since," adds Eady, considered by many to be a business visionary.

Dr. James McIntosh, a well-known activist, has followed the BUFNY saga from the beginning and is very knowledgeable about the history. In May 2003, Spitzer "strong armed" BUFNY into dissolving its board and in its place appointed Hempstead Republican Briding Newell, Republican Judge Lance D. Clarke, Betty Anderson Easley of Baldwin, LI, Delores Kershaw also of Hempstead, and William E Davis, Jr., McIntosh, who has documented BUFNY's ordeal, notes.

This newspaper has also kept the story alive and through the relentless campaign by Eady and Barton to get the word out, the pair have garnered strong support from a bold politician and from the community.

Late last year, scores braved a bone-chilling day to appear at a news conference on the steps of City Hall where City Councilmember Charles Barron joined the BUFNY founders to demand answers from Spitzer.

Did Spitzer use his office as Attorney General to conduct a bogus criminal investigation into the day-to-day operations of BUFNY in order to take over?

“For 25 years, we practiced the principles and concepts of self-help,” Eady notes. “Then in 2002, the Attorney General came along and decided to continue the practice of killing another Black self-help movement. It must be noted that every Black self-help movement in this country has been destroyed.”

At the December 18th news conference, Barron said Spitzer should provide answers and that BUFNY be reconstituted either with a new board or with the founders. Barron followed up shortly with a letter to both Governor Spitzer and to current Attorney General Andrew Cuomo.

“As is it stands today, however, the landmark headquarters building of the Black United Fund that was on Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard is now a bar,” Barron wrote, in the letter dated January 14, 2008. “Both of the technical centers are closed, the radio broadcasting station purchased by BUFNY is now dismantled and silent, and the two ATM machines operated by BUFNY are gone....” Barron goes on to request a meeting with the Attorney General and Governor to discuss the BUFNY matter.

The Black Star News has contacted the offices of Governor Spitzer and Attorney General Cuomo, and was able to confirm that the executives received the Barron letter. As of publication time, this columnist hadn't received a response to the contents of the letter. Readers will be updated when and if the responses arrive.

The Black male unemployment rate in New York is estimated as high as 50%; African American families are suffering disproportionately as a result of the sub-prime mortgage collapse. BUFNY's economic empowerment projects, including affordable housing, were meant to alleviate such crises.

BUFNY had rehabilitated abandoned buildings, one-to-four family houses, and acquired existing properties for development along with contracts for underutilized businesses and had already enabled some buildings with wiring for high-speed tech.

BUFNY had contracts that would have offered work for thousands, including ex-offenders and trainees in the construction industry, college interns and select high school students.

In addition to Inez Barron and McIntosh, other notables braving the elements were: Leroy Baylor, City College Radio host of “The Communicators,” Dr. Glen Vickers-Bey, an attorney, and over two dozen BUFNY supporters.

As the BUFNY saga continues to unfold, Eady remains busy, offering lessons of economic empowerment through his website www.kermiteady.com.

He can also be heard on blog talk radio every Saturday from 6-8 PM. Callers to the show can get involved by dialing (646) 716-7472.

More to come.

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