

This is how success looks: Maynard Jackson International Terminal at Hartsfield-Jackson International A

Written by Al McFarlane

Thursday, 14 June 2012 14:49



6pm:

We are sitting in the 2nd floor food court at the new international terminal at Atlanta's airport. We are glad to be here because this is what Ambassador Andrew Young talked about when he addressed the Minneapolis Urban League annual gala on May 31st.

We just flew in from Montego Bay, Jamaica. Apparently most inbound international traffic is being routed in to this New Age looking terminal. We have a four-hour layover. When our departure time nears, we'll take the elevator down two floors to get the train to Terminal C, where AirTran has a bunch of gates.

Both now and when we had a layover here on the way to Montego Bay, the dominant image capturing our attention is/was the number of Black people working in every conceivable field. We just ordered food from Pei Wei Asian Diner. Two Asian guys are cooking. They seem to be calling the shots. They seem to be chefs. But the cooking line includes a Black woman, a Latina, and a guy that could be Afro-Latino, if looks mean anything. The front line, the order takers and servers are Black. The young woman who took my order is African or Haitian. I didn't converse long enough to catch the accent and I didn't want to be rude and tie her up with my curiosity conversation. She is working. I respect that. Along side her, a young brother and a young 20-something sister work packaging and handing orders to customers, they answer customers' questions, and they make sure everybody gets what they ordered.

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I'm going to go to Pei Wei in St. Louis Park when I get home. I'll take a census there.

To the right, vibrant voices chant, "What do you have? What do you have?" That's how they greet customers at the Varsity, an old school hamburger shop. Here, the ring leader, you could also call her the lead cashier, presides over a chorus of order takers, each with her own cash register. The four women call out their orders to tenor and basso responses from the fry cook chefs in back. Between the two lines...the order takers and the cooks, executioners keep everything flowing. Long lines shrink quickly as customers walk away with arms full of Varsity box dinners.

If perchance the lines dissipate completely, their quasi melodic refrain wafts airborne, as if in search of the undecided hungry. Heads turn. A smile greets. "What do you have? What do you have? This line, no waiting."

At the Varsity, all the workers are Black.

Next door, el Taco's workforce is as diverse as Pei Wei's. One guy who looks to be chino-latino, is managing colleagues who are Black. The operative idea here is: out of four workers, three are Black. Similarly, the neighboring shop, The Pecan Bistro, is presenting with a Black manager and cashier, and an Asian cook.

What's the headline here? Ambassador Young said "We put this \$2 billion deal together guaranteeing the developer they would cover all construction and development costs and earn a guaranteed 10% profit. They had to agree that 60% of the workforce, and 60% of sub-contracts would go to Black owned-businesses."

Ambassador Young said some of the corporate leaders balked at the idea of handing over 60% of the business and workforce to Blacks. But, he said, they came on board when they were reminded that 40% of \$2 billion is still a whole lot of money.

And so what does it mean for Twin Cities? Black businesses, Black legacy institutions, and Black business and job developers must collaborate in a mission to grow the city and region

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with our businesses and capabilities as the driving force. We must set a new direction for public policy and public spending that ensures contracts and jobs for our communities, as the gateway to the region's development and fulfillment.