

**Introduction of Speaker Noel Hankin, Sr. VP Multicultural Relations,  
Moët Hennessy USA  
by Lisa Skriloff, President,  
Multicultural Marketing Resources, Inc.  
at the [BDI Multicultural Social Communications Forum](#),  
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When Steve asked me to introduce Noel Hankin, Sr. VP Multicultural Relations for Moët Hennessy USA, as our first speaker of the day, I was delighted to have the opportunity to reconnect with him, as we had first met in 1997.

I had asked Steve, shall I just read his bio? No, see if you can find out his hobbies and such.

I had his official bio, which all of you have, but some of the history I read stood out as intriguing and I wanted to find out the story behind the story.

I see, in his bio, a casual mention of “appointed by President Clinton...” How did that come about?

I saw “ran his own company, called The Best of Friends -- a pioneering minority-owned entertainment business in the 70s.” What was that about?

So we scheduled a conference call, I channeled my inner newspaper reporter and the story I heard would actually make, not just an embellished introduction, but a screenplay. You are looking at the man who may have invented disco.

And that was impressive news to me, as someone who, slightly embarrassed to admit, knows how to dance the hustle.

We'll get to President Clinton in a moment but listen to this—

Back in the 70s, Noel was at his first job at Y&R, and after work he and his friends would go out for a drink they noticed there were not many places that had music they liked and there were not many African Americans. So he saw an opportunity to create an environment where he and his friends would want to go. How can I put it? They liked the nightlife. And that was a club called Leviticus, which was at 45 w 33rd. They charged \$3 to get in and the price included a drink and the buffet. It was enormously successful; Noel told me, “the disco boom hadn't started anywhere in this country, and we started it.” There were no other African American clubs in midtown; they were the first black organization to get a cabaret license, (to pour liquor and dance) and they created a disco boom, enabled by new technology which allowed djs to play music with no break. They also found that this enabled them to control the crowd, as far as when people would go to the bar. They'd pump the music then put on a slow song and the bartenders braced for the rush.

Everyone in the entertainment world knew of the club. Elizabeth Taylor came, Andy Warhol came, Stevie Wonder, Iman. Harlem elected officials, David Dinkins, had fundraisers there and it was the first time they had them in midtown. And this was before Studio 54 opened which wasn't until 1978, and as Noel told me, "they came late to the game."

And then what happened? As was widely reported disco died. But not the creativity, ideas and foresight that has continued to serve Mr. Hankin well with his success at Miller Lite and now Moët Hennessy where he is responsible for community relations and multi brand sponsorship of events. He's been an architect of a long list of programs that have resulted in sales success for the brands, including their participation in the Essence music festival, ad campaigns, promotions and the Hennessey Privilege Award presented to African American, Hispanic and other achievers important to their consumer base. Among the recipients, Magic Johnson, Marc Morial, Mario van Peebles.

They also target, because of their location, the English speaking Caribbean population, sponsoring the Mayor's cricket tournament and the West Indian carnival, on Labor Day weekend.

Noel was born in Kingston, Jamaica, but he was raised in NY. He came to NY when he was only 3 and grew up in a Jamaican home and was familiar with the culture but since his mother did not like to fly, he never went back to Jamaica until his honeymoon.

Noel is one of the founders of the Thurgood Marshall College Fund which has raised over \$80 million and provided scholarships for over 8,000 students.

And, he currently serves as Chairman of the New York Urban League, which provides services to thousands of needy New Yorkers in the areas of education and employment services.

If you'd like to support his cause you join him at their annual fundraising gala on May 10 at the Mandarin Oriental. Go to [nyul.org](http://nyul.org) to buy your ticket.

Now about President Clinton. The president's office contacted him after they noticed his involvement in education and appointed him to the Board of Advisors on Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Noel says, "I've always been involved in education. It is such a powerful tool."

Which brings us to the moment where we will now be able to learn from our speaker Mr. Noel Hankin.