



## BOURGEOIS BUSINESS

by Barbara Beebe

Clarence Thomas would have us believe the black middle class owes nothing to those in the black community who still have a difficult time battling the dragon racism. Clarence Thomas evoked the spirit of his grandfather so many times during his Senate confirmation that those of us with no grandfather felt like orphans. (Thomas failed to mention that the reason he lived with his grandfather is because his father walked out on his mother and four children!) Anyway, the 'self-help' philosophy spiralling everywhere is very frustrating. The underlying dragon in the self-help thesis is that blacks have been sitting around waiting for a hand-out; other than this, there is nothing stopping our success but laziness. This is not the case. James Forman, Jr., writing about "Saving Affirmative Action," states: "The emphasis on self-help is not itself damaging, for self-help has a long history in the black community...self help has been a basic survival tool for some time. However, the latest version of the self-help gospel is dangerous, for it seems to carry with it a repudiation of the state's role in creating, and thus its responsibility for remedying, racial inequality."

We must not, in our middle class drone and protection zone, deny the presence of racism and its ability to block economic strength. Racism has effectively enclosed predominantly black metropolitan areas in what Dennis Judd, a professor at the University of Missouri, calls the "South Africanization of American cities." The black middle class, along with the U.S. government, must play a vital role in rescuing our people from this "free-fire zone."

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educational achievement. Because many economic benefits are connected to education, many Chinese and Japanese students strive to do well in school and many hours are dedicated to this pursuit.

If a large percentage of these cultures are intelligent it is due strictly to the cultural imperative itself and not the race of the population. If the same importance was placed on education within any other race for as many years, surely the output would be the same.

### STEREOTYPES SPOIL THE STEW

Now, more than any other time in American history, this country has the

## WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE BLACK MIDDLE CLASS?

The answers to this question have been floating in the black community for so many years that it's ridiculous to express how long. However, all talk and no action make for dull racial upliftment. However, for the sake that some bourgeois brother or sister is still listening, here we go again:

(1) The black middle class and upper class must open *pertinent* businesses within the black community. We do not need any more: liquor stores, hair salons, Cadillac dealerships, Amway distributors, dry cleaners, jewelry stores. We do need: day care centers, production plants, banks, schools, health facilities, affordable housing.

(2) The black churches have to get off their proverbial sexist, classist, homophobic, holier-than-thou butts and sincerely aid the black community. Spiritual development within the church means nothing to the hungry, cold masses if all the church can offer is good singing. Just ask Jesus! When he brought that manna down from the sky, he got an audience! This means opening up those tax-exempt doors to the community regardless of membership or spiritual status. A church that remains empty, except on Wednesdays and Sundays, is an *abandoned* building. These buildings can be used for counseling centers, phone banks, day care centers, food lines, job training centers and a host of other activities. Be creative and get involved in the community.

(3) Black businesses must begin their recruitment of employees the same way whites, Jews and Italians recruited: from the traditional black schools, from the neighborhood and from the family. Film director Spike Lee is one of the few people who have lived up to this principle. Clearly the most successful black director to emerge in America, Spike Lee resides in Brooklyn, in the neighborhood where he grew up. His store, *Spike's Joint*, is in Brooklyn and staffed by neighborhood residents. We cannot expect to be hired anywhere until we hire ourselves. Nor can we expect housing in other neighborhoods when

ingredients necessary to prepare a dynamic stew. The concept of the melting pot is not new. However, America now possesses robust, hearty cultures, all vying to be the predominate taste in the stew.

Well, what exactly makes a good stew? This is surely difficult to say. Each person tastes a stew and obviously has some particular liking for a specific ingredient. However, this particular liking does not mean that the taster wishes to eat only that ingredient.

So, you like the potatoes in the stew. If potatoes are taken out of the stew, the stew tastes completely different. Potatoes alone are not stew.

we abandon our own as soon as we get a dollar in our pockets!

(4) CONFRONT, CONVERSE WITH, UTILIZE and TRANSFORM (CCUT) the drug dealers in the Afro-American community. This is a sore spot for many Afro-Americans, particularly those whose sons and daughters have been slain by the violence inherent in illegal drug dealing. However, to consistently permit the criminal justice system to deal with the problem does nothing to aid the community. It diminishes our men and women - leaving them to die, be killed in or by the prison system. As long as there is a great deal of money to be made in this occupation, our sons and daughters will flock to it. There are strong, forceful black men in the community - grab those policemen, sports players, inmates. Make them roundup *their* sons and daughters. Then bring Sister Souljah, the raptivist of Public Enemy, to the mike: "Listen, we have a job to do. Let's make an empire here. I understand that the money you have was acquired in a particular way. I don't agree with it, but you have it. Let me show you how to make a business that's profitable so that we can save the children." Sister Souljah is not joking on this tip and neither am I. Balzac said, "Behind every great fortune, there is a crime." It is the truth and the absolute foundation of capitalism. I don't like it anymore than you, but I do not see a socialist revolution waiting for me on Main Street. Sister Souljah knocks: "The Kennedys turned bootlegging empires into legitimate businesses, but the black bourgeoisie wants to look at drug dealers and say, hey, they're a waste. Drug dealing is a waste, but their money isn't a waste; their business skills aren't a waste; their potential's not a waste." (4) COMBAT RACISM, DISCRIMINATION, SEXISM, PREJUDICE AT ALL LEVELS. We cannot expect the government or anyone else to fight racism if we sit by when it crosses our path. Silence equals death. Open your mouth and reprimand these evils. Middle class status has dulled many of us - we like our jobs, our cars, our VCRs; but we obviously don't like ourselves, or we would not tolerate the racism that happens to us or our brothers and sisters. NO ONE IS FREE UNTIL WE ARE ALL FREE!

The only way for the potato to have the distinct flavor that it has in a stew is for it to remain in the stew.

It is the hearty taste of the stew - composed of the many cultures/ethnicities - that makes America a unique *cultural* experience. Racial stereotypes spoil the stew that is America. The stereotypes say the potatoes are always large and white. There is no acknowledgement of the various potatoes available and how they are different in taste, shape and size yet still potatoes. The stereotypes leave no variation for the individual cook.

(5) Black multi-millionaires (and there are quite a few) must begin to help develop habitable neighborhoods for Afro-Americans. The multi-millionaires are the only ones in our community that have the massive cash-flow needed to fund private real estate and housing plans. I'm proud of Michael Jordan like everyone else; however, the last thing we need is another *Nike* commercial or another product endorsement. You want to endorse something Michael Jordan/Jackson, Bill, Oprah, Eddie, Arsenio? ENDORSE US!!!

### DEBUNKING STEREOTYPES

When confronting stereotypes, first, let the myth-maker know that s/he has not met all the people of a particular race - nor will they ever. This is perfect for combating *the*. No one has met all *the* blacks, Jews, communists in the world. So, how can they form an opinion or belief system about *all the*?

Secondly, inform perpetrators of the difference between cultural and racial characteristics. For example, the often heard statement "All black people like chicken" is a stereotype. However, there is such a thing as soul food and this is a cultural characteristic of Afro-Americans. However, Afro-Americans are not required to eat chicken! Many may, but, that is all.

Thirdly, it is important to question the person who persists in stereotyping others. Why is s/he saying this? Oftentimes, the perpetrator of stereotypes is trying to mask their own racism under the guise of "knowing how those people are." If you don't ask them why they are spewing this poison from their mouths, you may find yourself listening to some racist philosophy or being encouraged to embark with them in racist actions.

Lastly, find out if race is really the issue at hand. Ignorance of the law may be no excuse to a police officer, but ignorance of cultural values and racial characteristics abound everywhere. Always give the person a chance to explain why before you tear them to pieces. However, if they are perpetrating a racial stereotype, make yourself understood....racial stereotypes cannot be tolerated! The myths must be debunked and the debunking starts with you!