

Commentary

Practicing Black Economic Development

by Patricia Smith-Deering

With the advent of the holiday season ministers, rabbis, priests, and other members of the clergy worldwide are preparing eloquent sermons on the meaning of the season. Members of the Black community will listen attentively as their ministers deliver messages concerning "peace on earth, good will towards men" and "love ye one another", while choirs make a "joyful noise unto the Lord." Various church groups will sponsor fundraisers so that food, gifts, and money can be given to those less fortunate than themselves at such a giving, caring, festive time of the year. The beauty of Christmas and the traditions to which we have become accustomed will be preserved and sustained.

But, look deeper at those preparations and traditions and all the consumer dollars being spent by our Black communities. Of the \$230 billion income that Blacks annually earn and spend in America it is a distressing fact that we return only 7% or a paltry \$12 billion to our own communities. As often as these statistics have been publicized and discussed on hundreds of radio and television shows and at numerous conferences, meetings, and conventions concerning Black economic development or Black issues, the message is still not getting through to the Black community as a whole.

Why not? We do as we are taught, and as noted Black journalist, Tony Brown, so aptly put it in describing the successes of other ethnic groups recently arrived in this country, "These new immigrants learned 5,000 miles away that Black Americans are a rich cultural market that has been trained to behave as a poor minority."

Who are our teachers? A perception many share is

that more powerful than the educational system responsible for the formal development of Black minds, more powerful than the majority community with its enticements, are our *Black churches*. Their might, if there is any doubt, was seen in the '60's when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other Black churchmen brought the South, and subsequently other parts of the country, literally to its knees with economic boycotts. That omnipotence still exists in our churches. There are some forward-thinking clergy who see the handwriting on the wall for Black minority development in a country where it is projected that the total population of all ethnic groups ten years from now will outnumber the current majority community, but Blacks will still be on the fringes. However, more ministers are needed who preach and teach the gospel of our economic survival as a group while we seek individual spiritual salvation.

While some may view such thinking as bordering on blasphemy or heresy, few can deny that Black America is, as hirley Chisholm expressed it at a recent New Jersey conference, "on the verge of a moral dilemma, asking the government and white Corporate America to do what we don't do and can do for ourselves." We continue to sing and march to "We Shall Overcome", yet 93% of our consumer dollars go to businesses many of which do not support the Black community's economic structure or have hiring practices that are detrimental to our advancement.

Our sermons and other preachments this Christmas must emphasize that loving one another goes beyond the spiritual feeling we get in church or when we give that basket of food and the presents once a year. It means sharing our billions of dollars of economic

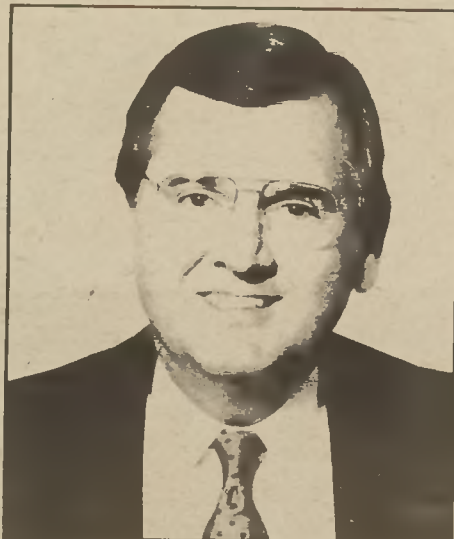
wealth with our own businesses, as well as those businesses in the majority community which return money to the Black community through their consistent hiring of Blacks at all levels within their corporate structure or their expenditure of dollars to support Black institutions, businesses, organizations, and other community activities.

We are losing ground, not believing in and acting on our ability to succeed on our own. Henry Davis, president of Highbeam, Inc., the only 100% Black-owned photocopier sales and service firm in America, wisely perceived the problem when he surmised that it is difficult to look at yourself as a Black person who can do, then look at another Black person and avoid doing business with him or her because you have automatically concluded that he or she *cannot*.

But, we do as we are taught, and as an influential and integral part of the Black community, our churches owe their Black congregations the message that if we are truly to survive economically as a people, we must be the masters of our own economic fate. Those of us who own businesses must be ready to do business in a professional, competitive manner based on the moral and ethical beliefs our churches preach and teach. Black businesses not operating that way must be prepared to suffer the same fate as any other firm that is not ready or truly willing to capture our consumer dollars by providing cost-effective and efficient products and services.

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Happy Holiday Season
and a
Prosperous New Year



Tony Rand
Candidate for Lt. Governor
Committee To Elect Tony Rand
505 Oberlin Road, Suite 148
Post Office Box 11800
Raleigh, North Carolina 27605-1800
919/829-1988

Merry Christmas!



from
**Alderman
Patrick Hairston**



Ann Sumler

On The Seventh Day of Christmas
My True Love Gave To Me A...

Rodney Sumler

