

## The tragic travesty in trade and transactions

Written by Ron Busby, President U.S. Black Chamber, Inc.  
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The positive demonstrations of support for the family of Trayvon Martin following his tragic death, and the nationwide evidence of unified response (hoodies everywhere!) in the call for justice are inspiring signs of a renewed spirit among African Americans and others committed to correcting the obvious inequities exposed in the wake of this travesty.

Clearly, nothing we encounter in the world of business can be equated to the senseless slaying of this young man, but as Dr. King taught us in his Letter from a Birmingham Jail, "... injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere..."

We are clear that there is no way the shock, hurt and grief Trayvon's family endures because of the absolutely inhuman conduct of one misguided individual can be compared to the struggles of businessmen and women. We can't help, however, but draw parallels to the inequity Black business owners must contend with each and every day.

When the deck is stacked against you... when the courts rule against you... when financial institutions refuse to extend credit to you... when even the governments you support through your tax dollars can't bring themselves to provide equitable access to opportunity... well, you get the picture. As a class, the businesses we work hard to represent face odds NO other group faces in this country.

And just as there are - incredibly - voices that somehow defend the series of bad decisions that resulted in the senseless snuffing out of a young life, there are those who believe there is nothing wrong with a marketplace that delivers fractional percentage points of opportunity to Black-owned businesses.

You've seen the numbers in this space before. According to the Census Bureau, there are 1.9 million privately held Black-owned businesses across every industry sector in the United States. We employ over 921,000 persons, and generate \$137.5 billion in annual revenue. Per the Nielsen Company, African Americans spend over a TRILLION hard-earned dollars in the U.S. economy. Tragically, even this record spending does not translate to reciprocity in the form of contracting/vendor relationships from the corporations that benefit from our spending. Tragically, the giant loopholes in regulations guiding federal, state and local utilization of ethnic minority suppliers allow for interpretations that boggle the mind - and devastate our businesses and their hope for a brighter future.

It is beyond unfortunate that it takes the senseless slaying of a future businessman, a future lawyer, a future elected official, a future husband and father to cause us to take stock of all the inequity around us, but it is the re-awakened sense of outrage that will fuel our commitment to correct the wrongs we see around us.

And though our commitment to improving opportunities for Black-owned businesses across this country is solid and sincere, the outpouring of support for justice in Florida fortifies us and

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strengthens our resolve to "... stay on the battlefield..." There is no doubt that the same energy that awakened so many of us to Trayvon's murder is the same energy that will drive our achieving economic parity in America's marketplace.