

Buy Black. Resist Oppression.

Written by Nekima Levy-Pounds, Esq.
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By supporting Black-owned businesses, we hold the keys to our own economic prosperity.

When reflecting upon the day to day struggles and hardships of African Americans, the words of rapper, Tupac Shakur come to mind: "Trying to make a dollar out of fifteen cents. It's hard to be legit and still pay your rent." This quote symbolizes the dilemma that many African Americans face while trying to survive and support their families in today's global economy. Here in Minnesota and across this nation, African Americans are under-represented amongst those who are gainfully employed and over-represented amongst those who are incarcerated in local jails and in state and federal prisons. What it boils down to is the fact that Black people need jobs, not jails.

According to a report by Algernon Austin of the Economic Policy Institute, Minnesota leads the nation in the gap in unemployment between Blacks and whites by a ratio of nearly 3 to 1. While some may choose to attribute these racial disparities to a poor work ethic or moral deficiencies amongst African Americans, I propose that the limited access to employment opportunities contribute most to these intolerable disparities. Too often we are the recipients of charity rather than the beneficiaries of economic justice and equal opportunity. Charity cripples and creates a cycle of dependency, while a focus on economic justice uplifts and empowers.

When people lose hope in their futures and see few opportunities to become successful through legitimate means, they may be more likely to commit survival crimes or other petty crimes to get ahead. Moreover, people who lack hope and opportunity may also be less likely to value their own lives or the lives of other people. When this happens, our entire community is in jeopardy,

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as we have seen recently with some of the senseless gun violence that has occurred in our most economically depressed neighborhoods.

One way to reverse these alarming trends and to restore hope to the hopeless is to strategically use the power of the Black dollar to support Black-owned businesses in our community. There are literally thousands of Black-owned businesses in Minnesota, but very few have the resources to expand their businesses and to hire workers from the community. When Black-owned businesses are unable to hire Black workers, this limits our ability to develop economic and social capital and to improve the conditions within our own community. As African American business owners are able to hire more workers, families and communities will reap numerous benefits as there will be more money in the home to meet a family's basic needs and will reduce the likelihood of involvement in illicit activity to supplement a family's income.

Making a conscious decision to spend our dollars in Black-owned businesses will cause our dollars to circulate multiple times within our community, which will give us more leverage, will increase our economic prosperity, and produce a feeling of self-determination and the power to resist oppression. We have at our disposal what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. called "the weapon of cash" to use in this fight against racial discrimination and economic injustice. How and where we spend our money will either positively or negatively affect future generations to come. Currently, the money that is flowing into our community is flowing through our hands and right back out of our community.

Although Black buying power has increased dramatically in recent years, our money cycles out of the Black community in a matter of hours, compared to multiple times over weeks and months in white and other racially and ethnically diverse communities. This is a travesty of justice and keeps us in a perpetual state of disempowerment. To put this into perspective, take a moment and think about where we buy our groceries, toiletries, beauty supplies, vehicles, insurance, pharmaceuticals, cell phones, electronics, and clothing. Chances are, not from a Black-owned business. And herein lies the problem. It is not a stretch to believe that many of the problems that plague the Black community have a direct correlation to how and where we spend our money.

Times are hard for our people, but they will only grow worse if we continue depending upon others to solve our problems. Being intentional about buying Black puts the power to address the issues within our community in our own hands.