

What will (y)our legacy look like?

Written by Ron Busby, Sr.

Thursday, 13 February 2014 19:37

As America begins the annual ritual of "celebrating" the countless achievements of African Americans during the February observance of Black History Month, I think it makes sense to remind each other that the things we do every day will be the historical recollections for future generations.

There is no question of the value of recounting the daring exploits, the against-all-odds battles won, or of revisiting the horrors and brutalities that marked our journey through this country's history. I just don't believe that enough of us approach our daily commitments with an eye on how our actions (or inactions) will impact the lives of Black Americans in the future.

I could fill this space with the names of prodigious Black inventors, from Jan Matzeliger to Norbert Rilleaux, Garrett Morgan to Dr. Mark Dean. We all know the contributions of Samuel Cornish and John Russwurm and their *Freedom's Journal*, the Sengstackes, Murphys, Vanns and Scotts, the John H. Johnson and Earl G. Graves and their heroic struggles to make sure our stories were told - accurately. We know of Madame C.J. Walker and A.G. Gaston and Alonzo Herndon and Oprah and Bob Johnson and Herman Russell and the empire builders of the business world.

But today I want to give a Black History "shout out" to the millions of nameless, faceless business women and men who rose before dawn and got home long after everyone was asleep. The barbers, hairdressers, shopkeepers, brick masons, carpenters, café owners, mechanics, painters, printers, shoe shine and repairmen. The tailors, grocers, ice, coal and wood deliverymen.... All the folks whose toils paved the way for us, paid the tuition to Howard, Morehouse, Johnson C. Smith, Fisk, Xavier, Dillard and all the "A&M's" across the south!

After nearly fifty years of successfully aspiring to "good jobs," we are witnessing a boom in the numbers of Black Americans returning to our roots as entrepreneurs and business owners, and this boom couldn't have come at a better time. When it's clear that government solutions to income inequality fail to factor for or include us; when Black un- and underemployment threaten the nutritional health and educational opportunities for our children; when globalization of markets consigns our participation to the role of consumers... that's when it should become clear the key role that Black business plays in our communities.

The U.S. Black Chambers, Inc. (USBC) is acutely aware of the battle that African Americans face in the marketplace today. When online purchases of clothing eclipses the purchases made inside actual stores, the opportunities for Black retailers practically disappears. Despite the obvious love affair Black folks have with hats, suits, shoes and boots, it is Nordstrom, Macy's, Neiman's and local designer boutiques that get their share of our income inequality, not Black-owned clothes sellers.

We struggle to find a Black-owned grocery chain, even though African Americans spend a disproportionate share of their disposable income on food. Black-owned restaurants are an increasingly endangered species, even as national chains pad their bottom lines with the lion's share of our discretionary spending on food...including sushi!

Black automobile dealers fare a little better, though the 80s and 90s wreaked havoc on the

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number of franchised dealerships owned by African Americans. Without question, we continue to provide the comfortable profit cushion, particularly for luxury brand automobiles. (Remember, every dollar earned without advertising/marketing effort to earn that dollar is *FREE MONEY!*) Telecom companies, high-end electronics, "luxury" liquors, condo sellers and jewelers all positively salivate when their coffers fill up with Black dollars.

Among the goals of the USBC, Entrepreneur Development is the loftiest, and most elusive, but we believe if we are successful at reigniting our passion for business ownership, we have the best opportunity to solve the challenges faced by Black America. The historical record of our ability to build colleges, insurance companies and hospitals proves that when necessary we can achieve monumental "wins" through *collective* entrepreneurial activity. And -- in today's terminology - joint ventures, mergers and acquisitions provide the context for our next *collective* steps in business growth.

So, we at the USBC and our affiliates across the country encourage you to be more mindful, and more intentional as you pursue your dreams. Understand that 20, 50, 100 years from now someone will read the record of your contribution to life as they know it, and the fact that you made a lot of money won't be enough to get your name in the record book. Business ownership opens doors of opportunity, not just for you and your family, but the families of your employees, associates, customers/clients, vendors and suppliers. That improved quality of life affords access to opportunities for education, earning, travel and the new worlds they discover will create future generations of inventors and history makers. Black History is made and celebrated every day... make sure that your everyday actions pave the way.



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