

The 15% Buy Black CHALLENGE



By Nolan Rollins and B. Michael Young

We've all heard the statistics and sound bites: The Jewish dollar is recycled 10 times within their community before it leaves. The Asian community — six times. In the black community, less than one-half a time. We've heard this so often that we don't even pay much attention. The message fades in the background — thus bears repeating:

In the black community, our dollars are recycled less than one-half a time before being spent outside of our community.

This is outrageous! Now is the time to take action to change the story. According to *Target Market News*, the buying power of African Americans was \$679 billion in 2004. The top 5 categories of our spending were: housing (\$110.2 billion), food (\$53.8 billion), cars/trucks (\$28.7 billion), clothing (\$22 billion), and health care (\$17.9 billion). Only 6% of those dollars were spent within black communities.

Through its Economic Empowerment component, the National Urban League is developing and supporting entrepreneurs, particularly within the African American community. We're creating hoteliers, gas station franchisors, and electronics store owners, among others, through the Urban Entrepreneurs program and the new markets tax credits initiative. But how will these new entrepreneurs thrive if the black community does not support them? How can their viability be ensured?

Consider this your call to action! Add to your list of goals for the year:

- 15% of my total purchases in 2006 will go directly to black-owned businesses.

Mike Practices What He Preaches:

When I began purchasing properties in the metro Washington, DC area, I started with a black real estate agent. He connected me to a black-owned construction company and contractor. An email sent to my Urban League network identified a black mortgage broker and a

black settlement attorney. I proudly completed the entire procurement loop using 100% black-owned businesses. However, sometimes it isn't easy and requires sacrifice. You might have to pay a little more, or go out of your way. But those of us in a position to endure that small sacrifice should make it a habit. Last November, I needed to get my annual eye exam. None of the doctors in my healthcare plan were black.

My dilemma: Find a black optometrist and pay the "out of plan" price; or save money by using one of the doctors in the healthcare plan.

My solution: I found an optometrist outside of the plan and was rewarded with superior service and a sense of pride for supporting a doctor who was thriving in a gentrifying area within the city.

Nolan's Blue Print for Success:

There are other creative ways to support our own and commit our dollars within black communities. Assess your expenses each month — are there opportunities to re-direct some purchases to black businesses? Are there bookstores that you can support rather than purchasing your books on-line or at mega chains? Perhaps you can frequent black-owned restaurants. Do you seek out black-owned hotels when traveling? At the very least, when shopping and selecting items on your own, tell the cashier that the black salesperson helped you so that they can receive the commission.

Remember that many of our favorite celebrities are business owners who have delved into fashion, restaurants, night clubs, beverages, sports franchises, and other enterprises — sometimes as majority owners, and other times as minority investors. I encourage you to support these enterprising African American businesses.

Let's orient our thinking around supporting business in our community. Join us in tracking expenditures, and we'll check back with you in December to see if you met the 15% challenge. We have total confidence that you can do it! **UIM**