

# EDITORIAL/OPINION

## Black Businesses Deteriorating

Last October the U.S. Census Bureau reported that Black-owned firms increased 47 percent between 1977 and 1982. This report is very misleading, a closer analysis of the report reveals that the condition of most Black businesses actually deteriorated during this period.

The Joint Center for Political Studies concluded in its study entitled "Recent Changes in Black-Owned Businesses", that the average annual receipts of Black-owned firms fell from \$37,392 in 1977 to \$36,685 in 1982. When inflation is taken into account, the decline is actually from \$37,000 to \$23,000 in constant 1977 dollars.

Although the increase in the number of Black-owned businesses are important, what really is important is whether those businesses are making any money, and whether they are making more now than they were several years ago.

A deeper analysis of the census data reveals that the vitality of Black businesses is declining. The number of firms with paid employees declined more than 3 percent between 1977 and 1982 after increasing by 63 percent in the 1972-77 period.

The percentage of Black firms with paid employees dropped from 17.1 percent of all Black firms in 1977 to 11.4 percent in 1982.

The number of people employed by Black-

owned firms increased barely 1 percent from 1977 to 1982, a marked contrast to the 15 percent growth in overall business employment by Black-owned firms.

The rate of growth in receipts of Black-owned firms fell from 56 percent in the first period (1972-1977) to 44 percent in the second (1977-1982), while receipts of all businesses grew by 65 percent. The aggregate receipts of Black-owned firms with paid employees increased in real terms during the first period but declined during the second period.

The most telling statistic concerning the plight of Black-owned businesses can be seen in gross receipts. Of 108,000 firms added since 1977, 63,000 or 58 percent, had gross receipts of less than \$5,000; 85 percent had receipts of less than \$25,000.

Overall Black-owned businesses remain a very small part of the total business sector. While Blacks constitute 12 percent of the total population, Black-owned firms still account for only 1 percent of small-business receipts and less than .2 percent of total business receipts. The small level of Black businesses could shrink farther if the Reagan Administration rescinds an executive order guaranteeing minorities a percentage of federal contractors.



## "Reagan's 'Negro Problem'"

Along the Color Line by Dr. Manning Marable

Last month's celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday as a federal holiday gave the media a golden opportunity to project the view that America had transcended its racism. The stalwart voice of American capitalism, the *Wall Street Journal*, announced with smug satisfaction that "the nation has come a long way" on race relations. Indeed, since King's assassination "racial integration has ceased to be an issue." The *Journal* noted that "a 1980 survey showed that 90 percent of whites favored integrated schools, compared with 64 percent in 1964 and only 32 percent in 1942. By 1972, 97 percent of whites favored equal opportunities for Blacks, compared to only 45 percent in 1944."

The *Wall Street Journal* added with hopeful enthusiasm that Blacks were also "becoming more independent in their voting patterns, and whites are showing no hesitancy to vote for Blacks." The later statement is, of course, a gross distortion of reality, despite the recent election of Douglas Wilder as Virginia's first Black lieutenant governor. Statistically, less than 28 percent of the white electorate votes for a first-time Black mayoral candidate. Whites are far more race conscious in their voting behavior than Afro-Americans. But most disturbing to conservatives is the lack of support Blacks show toward President Reagan, who currently has at least a 66 percent approval rating among whites. According to the *Washington Post/ABC* poll of early January, only 23 percent of all Blacks approve of Reagan, and a decisive majority are convinced that the President "is a racist."

Why don't Blacks like Reagan, when nearly all other Americans seem to love the old boy? Didn't Reagan sign the law which made Martin Luther King's birthday a federal holiday? Shouldn't we be grateful to the conservative chief executive?

These are the wrong questions to ask. We recall that Reagan personally opposed the legislation which King and thousands of desegregation advocates supported — the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. We remember that Reagan fought against the renewal of the Voting Rights Act provisions, and has packed the U.S. Civil Rights Commission with the enemies of Black freedom. We know that Reagan tried to smear the memory of King with red-baiting, anti-

Communist lies, and that he and his administration are fully committed to backing the illegal and immoral system of South African apartheid.

But if one single reason should be identified to justify Black antipathy to Reagan, it would be this: the President and his administration do not treat Black Americans as human beings, they relate to us essentially as a series of **problems**. There is no recognition of the Afro-American cultural and social heritage, no comprehension of our political perceptions, our economic status and educational goals. There is no interest in understanding that Blacks are a group of Americans with a collective history of oppression, and a unique political vision of social justice. Rather, we are identified, labeled and stereotyped as a group of public policy problems — unemployment, welfare, housing, education, urban crime, healthcare, apartheid.

When Reagan contemplates the Black experience, he sees no humanity — only "problems" to be tinkered with, or relegated to obscurity. Apartheid's systematic murder of African children, its brutal pass law system, its daily use of terrorism and violence, are crimes against humanity. But to Reagan, the deaths of Black children are a problem of "crowd control." The overall Black unemployment rate exceeded 14.5 percent in 1985, was over 12 percent for Black adult males and 13.5 percent for Black women. Yet the Reagan administration claims that we have a "full employment" economy, and charges that all those who truly want to work can find jobs. The economic "problem" of Blacks is that they lack the self-discipline and motivation to work!

Reagan's "Negro Problem" is that we refuse to accept second-class citizenship, poor schools, non-existing medical facilities, high unemployment rates, and U.S. support for South Africa. The creation of a new federal holiday cannot obliterate the absence of complete democracy, economic opportunity and social justice in this country. So long as Blackness remains "problematic" in the U.S., and so long as "We Shall Overcome" remains a dream deferred, rather than a reality, we will continue to be dissatisfied.

*Dr. Manning Marable teaches political sociology at Colgate University, Hamilton, New York. "Along the Color Line" appears in over 140 newspapers internationally.*

## Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

There is an uneasy silence among fair-minded Americans about U.S. aggressive posturing against Libya.

The U.S. carriers Saratoga and Coral Sea have just completed exercises off the coast of Libya in what the Reagan administration calls a "war of nerves" with Col. Muammar Qaddafi. The exercises were said to be non-provocative — a blatant insult to the intelligence of those who have been observing U.S.-Libya relations. Apparently dissatisfied with not having provoked Libyan forces into a fight, the U.S. now plans to send the carriers to the Gulf of Sidra next week, and this time they may enter the area claimed by Libya to be national waters but contested by the United States. Is this not provocation?

The administration justifies these belligerent actions as retaliation for Qaddafi's support for the Rome and Vienna bombings, even though it now seems Syria may be to blame. But terrorism is merely a pretext for the U.S. to bully the vulnerable Libya, as well as Nicaragua and Cuba, have long been identified by the Reagan administration as countries against which our government could "take out one of their pieces" off the geopolitical checkerboard. In the meantime, the CIA has been desperately trying to undermine Qaddafi's government.

Qaddafi is erratic, he exalts terrorists to freedom fighters, and indications are that he facilitates their training on Libyan soil. (The question of who is to be defined as a terrorist still remains.) But none of this should not be an excuse to use military aggression, instead of diplomacy, against Libya. What if another country were to commit its forces against the U.S. as retaliation for Reagan's training and support of the Contras, who murder and maim innocent civilians in Central America?

Terrorism does not spring out of some primordial devilish instinct, it is a product of political conflict. The conflict in this case is the Israeli-Palestinian issue and the U.S. partisan position. Instead of attempting to settle this conflict diplomatically, however, there has been a myopic attempt to use military means, and an arrogant effort to coerce public support by appealing to the fear of terrorism. The public and the media are falling for it; hence the sheepish silence.

This disturbing silence seems to arise from a recent retreat from reason and an appeal to nationalist dogma, a dogma which has rekindled the widespread but contradictory feeling that the U.S. brands of freedom, justice and democracy are so "correct" that the rest of the world — particularly small weak countries — must be whipped into compliance.

The policies of this administration may be popular now, but as the transgressions of individuals committed in a fitful moment of excitement come back to haunt them, so too will the momentarily popular but unjust policies of government. Justice reserved for only those who are ideologically compatible is not justice. And freedom that survives by aggression against the weak is not freedom.

Sincerely,  
Trevor & Dorothy Purcell

To The Editor:

Inside-Outside People got their roots in the Spring of 1984. The organization began with a few meetings on the prison yard in Salem, Oregon; enlightened convicts discussing the many problems akin to their social status, trading theories and ideas, offering solutions.

"I want to try a new way," seemed to be the recurrent theme among these men. "I just want to get out and live a normal life." After years of residency in various Corrections systems, IOP hopefuls were ready to hang up their guns, thoroughly tired of prison life.

Gone were the Bonnie & Clyde ideals, gone were the romantic aspirations to fast fortune, and the problem remaining was how to enact new life practices on the streets; no small dilemma for men long branded criminals.

They wanted a fair chance at a fair start on the outside. Early IOP support-

ers put their heads together, trouble shooting from a realistic standpoint. The sudden impact of social re-entry had to be considered; the shock-pressure of life in a dollars-and-cents world had to be anticipated and provided for during those first crucial weeks after release, a period in which the ex-convict is traditionally known to fail on parole.

Immediately upon release, IOP clients would require the basic necessities — food, clothes, lodging and job referrals — in amounts far greater than anything offered by a low-budget State Subsidy Program. Some members would need the services of drug or alcohol counselors; some would need emotional or marriage counsel; and others would simply need to talk with someone who understood the thorny transition from prison to free society. Assistance, advice and direction had to be available 24 hours a day if clients were expected to succeed in the real world, and it was unanimously agreed that these goals could be accomplished only through community support.

From those first discussions on the yard, Inside-Outside People campaigned with the Oregon State Penitentiary administration, submitted a formal proposal, requested appointments with various prison officials, and at last perseverance paid off. IOP were permitted to hold weekly meetings in the Activities Room.

Attendance was large from the start, prisoners attracted by IOP's novel approach, and new members were sworn in at each meeting. Formal positions were appointed, responsibilities delegated, and when newsletters were sent to judges, lawyers, Corrections officials, Governors, Mayors and anyone else who seemed likely to take interest in the program, IOP began getting results. Many viable links were soon established with the outside.

The organization is the brainchild of Donald McMillan, a sincere, dynamic Black man who hails originally from Southern California's Bay Area where he had spent a large portion of his juvenile and adult life behind bars for offenses ranging from Petty Larceny to Armed Robbery. He understood the uses of penal systems, intimately, and when he landed in the Oregon State Penitentiary at the age of 44 he saw much potential for positive change, both in his own life and in Oregon Corrections.

In June of 1984, IOP Founder, Director and President McMillan was released from prison. He carried the young program to his Portland home and left behind a strong, dedicated staff. According to the tentative plan, McMillan would deliver the message to the public, establishing a sound base of operations, and members still within the walls would re-enforce the Founders' efforts with letters, phone calls, and by whatever means they could muster.

The fledgling organization had all the right ingredients for success: there was an honest cause, a real need for proposed IOP services, and there were enough loyal men to make it work. It was inevitable that the program would soon become a household word.

Crisis struck. Just a few short weeks after his release, McMillan learned that he had terminal cancer of the pancreas and lower lungs. With no other members on the outside who could match his fortitude and expertise, the collapse of Inside-Outside People was foretold by pessimists far and wide. Even to the most ardent members, the future looked bleak for their would-be organization.

No one but the Founder himself, however, accounted for the raw power of human will.

From his bed at Emanuel Hospital, between exploratory surgeries and chemotherapy treatments, McMillan continued to promote the cause. As his condition gradually stabilized he was allowed to return home, an out-patient, and, with his own mortal end looming so near, he worked himself to exhaustion each day delivering the IOP message.

Other members have joined in the drive with McMillan since those dubious times, shouldering the work-load; community support grows steadily, social empathy for a higher ideal; and to date IOP is credited with some major

SUCCESSES:

They have been gifted with a large house in N.E. Portland, courtesy of Tom Boothe and American State Bank. With considerable repair and remodeling, perhaps even a new coat of paint, McMillan and his staff plan to have the IOP house ready to receive clients by early Summer of 1986.

They have twice appeared on N.E. Spectrum (Rogers' Cable Systems, Ch. 23), a TV talk show which covers current events in the Portland-Metro area.

IOP representatives have appeared in court several times to stand behind clients in need of their interjection, offering alternatives to long, needless prison sentences, and while IOP have had only limited success in these endeavors, judges have begun to take notice of their solid principles, their progressive approach to a stagnated situation. As IOP gains credibility with the courts (a slow process with the nation's most conservative institution), members are confident that they will have a real affect on the flow of lives bureaucratically destined for the Corrections warehouse.

IOP have been in touch with many Portland business people who have agreed to consider IOP clients for job placement. With this approach, clients can begin immediately to gain stability as productive, working members of society as opposed to the stereotyped ex-convicts who are on their way back to prison from the moment they're released.

An IOP Youth Program waits in the wings (McMillan's personal project) which will enable youngsters to earn money by collecting garbage in their respective neighborhoods; a productive alternative to the current slug-them-and-run ethics practiced by so many young people today. Logic dictates that the moral condition of today's youth will determine the quality of the future — either positive or negative, law abiding or criminal; an excellent case-study in social preventive medicine.

Dear Editor:

Re the Editorial/Commentary in the Jan. 29 issue by N Kenge Toure: Reproductive freedom is a Black issue. I am distinctly uncomfortable in taking the opposing side or view when it pertains to a seemingly positive good work, but I am duty bound (required by conscience) to express serious alarm at the thought of my people marching to assert the right to abortion — in the name of "reproductive freedom."

There is no such thing — outside rape — as "forced childbirth," just as there is no such phenomena as "reverse discrimination," something of which a still relatively powerless minority is simply incapable. We need to look closely at such loaded and tricky slogans.

Have we really tried to deal with our moral weakness (absorbed as a cultural influence) and the problem of teenage pregnancy? I think we are just now fully recognizing the problem and just now getting in a position to do something about it. The talk of coat hanger abortions seems an attempt at sensationalism. We as a group may be much more perceptive than is thought — and this "sit back" on this issue for a good cause. And there are several Black organizations beginning to successfully deal with adoption of Black children.

N Kenge Toure asserts that 90% of the inmate population of Attica were born to teenage mothers. Questionable, but very shocking indeed if true. But the statement that "most of the women using these clinics (abortion and family planning) are Black women" simply has to be untrue.

I would suggest that we address the issue of "babies making babies" from our own perspective. After all, is it really that difficult to imagine the end results of our interrupting the life process at will, and further encouraging our young people in irresponsibility? Let us continue to search for our own solutions.

Family planning is only intelligent, a must for our people and any civilized society, but "family planning" and "abortion" are not synonymous.

Sincerely,  
Nabeeh Mustafa

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