

# Point of View

## Corporate Commitment Tested

By Vernon E. Jordan

Back in the late 1960s many large corporations were shocked into recognizing the need for increased corporate social commitment. Their recognition was based on sound self-interest — the understanding that business cannot flourish in a divided society torn by racial strife.

Many companies recognized that traditional corporate departments were not equipped to handle the special needs of the communities in which the company did business, its minority employees, and the recruitment of minority workers.

They established new departments, often called Urban Affairs Department or some similar title.

Whatever the name,

these fledgling operations soon demonstrated their usefulness. For the first time there was an entity within the corporation that helped the company

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relate to the total business environment, including minority communities. They assisted corporations to more effectively manage their human resources.

Such departments proved important to corporate profit and loss statements, since minorities make up a disproportionate percentage of consumers for many products, and play a similar role in the workforce of many companies.

And, of course, com-

panies were also motivated by some of the multi-million dollar settlements awarded victims of past discrimination by judges and regulatory

agencies.

Urban affairs staff in many corporations have built an enviable record of accomplishment despite less than whole-hearted support from their administrative superiors.

One important area of accomplishment is hiring. They've mastered the technicalities of equal employment regulations, helping to guide corporate practices to compliance with the law.

They've worked with minority organizations,

helped curricula development of black colleges, steered corporate business to minority organizations, helped curricular development of black colleges, steered corporate business to minority firms and banks, sensitized corporate executives to racial issues, and recruited black and minority talent for corporate jobs.

That's an enviable record of accomplishment in just a few years.

But most important has been their very existence. An urban affairs department makes corporate executives conscious of need to include minorities in corporate plans. Just sitting at a decision-making session — often the only black face in the room — the urban affairs officer makes his colleague aware of the



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fact that not everyone affected by the corporation is a middle class white male.

When the crunch came in the mid-seventies recession and corporations were trimming budgets, the urban affairs function survived. But

now, with a new recession under way, some companies are letting their ur-

ban affairs programs feel the hatchet's blow. Some have merged their functions with the old-line personnel department, some have trimmed urban affairs budgets to the bone, and others have simply abolished the department.

Why now? I don't think the recession is an adequate excuse. Rather, some companies may be responding to the national indifference to minority needs. Others may reflect the shift to more traditional, older ways of doing business that are more compatible with middle management and administrative preferences.

But chipping away at the effectiveness of the corporate urban affairs or affirmative action offices is self-defeating. The (See Middle, page 22)

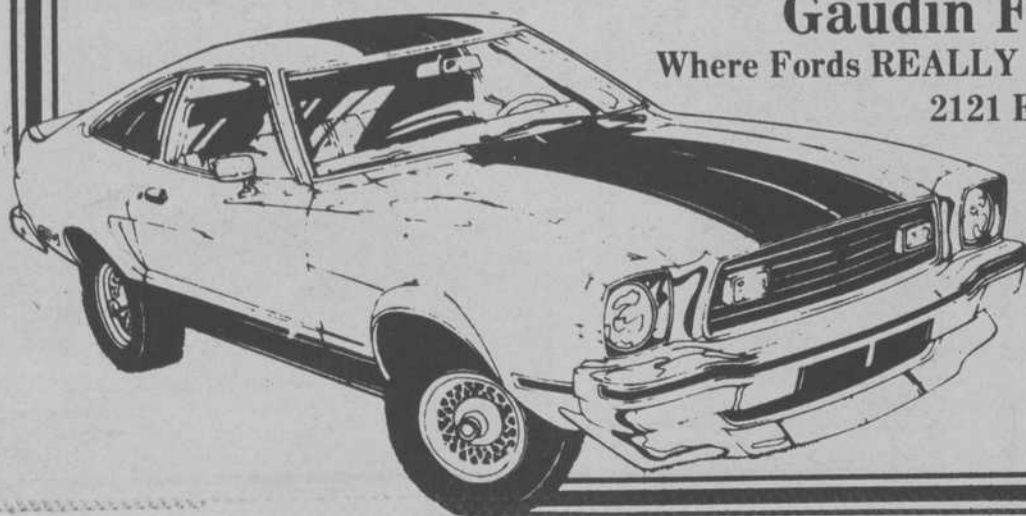
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### A Sentinel Editorial

## A Look At Our Black Businesses

This issue of THE LAS VEGAS SENTINEL is devoted to the black businesses of the community. It deals with the issues of "where we have been, the present situation and tomorrow's outlook."

Blacks count in the American consumer economy and every year, more attention is directed toward this area. The "buck" is green and is important to the total economy regardless of what race or creed handles it.

Success in business is what everyone strives for. However, it is not the whole story. We cannot separate our awareness of how much some of us have achieved, in the face of forbidding odds, from our awareness that most of us are still denied the opportunity of achieving more than grim survival. For every black family whose economic prospects are indisputably improving, three or four

others remain locked in a state of poverty from which they have virtually no hope of ever escaping.

Even where we have made significant economic progress, the base for further progress remains dangerously limited.

The door to opportunity and success is open to blacks, we are told. That it is open only a crack, through which only a few can pass, is conveniently overlooked.

In face of this kind of attitude, what can be the meaning of black success? Simply this: it puts us in a better position to help ourselves.

Greater opportunities for economic progress will not automatically follow from the opportunities we have already made for ourselves. They will follow if, deliberately and persistently, we apply to this goal the strength we have gained as a result of our successes to date.