

WHAT CAN NAFTA DO TO STRENGTHEN THE BLACK COMMUNITY'S SELF RELIANCE?

By Raynard Jackson

"What can the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) do to strengthen the black community's self reliance?" Despite all of the shouting coming from the Congressional Black Caucus in opposing NAFTA, it seems they forgot to ask this one simple question.

Despite all of the money that's been spent of much-ballyhooed social programs aimed at creating "equality," the state of black America today is not a great one.

According to the Index of Leading Cultural Indicators, in 1865 one in four black children were born to single mothers.

Today, it is nearly three in four. Juvenile violent crime arrest rates in 1990 were nearly double those in 1965. Other statistics show that over eighty percent of the victims of black criminals are other blacks.

Clearly, something has gone wrong. Yet, in spite of these trends a small yet steadily grow-

ing number of blacks have escaped the culture of poverty — not because some government agency allowed them to, but because they seized opportunities in business.

Today, black-owned and operated businesses constitute the only true source of self-reliance for the black community. During the 1980's, which many black leaders continue to refer to as the "decade of greed," the number of black-owned businesses increased 37.6 percent, from 308,260 in 1982 to 424,165 in 1987. During the same period, receipts increased an impressive 105 percent, from \$9.6 million to \$19.8 billion.

Why is it, then, that the so-called black leadership, when considering the state of black America, continues to focus on failed government-led efforts ignoring the successes that have been enjoyed by black businessmen and entrepreneurs? Further, why do these leaders continue to support efforts to hamper the growth of these businesses, such as higher taxes, and more and more government regulations?

Unfortunately, black America do not now have the time to show our leaders how wrong they are, for this week we have the chance to support an effort which can help undo the damage of the last thirty years while at the same time strengthen our black-owned businesses and provide new employment opportunities for black workers.

This week, Congress votes on NAFTA, and the vote is critical to every black man and woman in America. Why? Because we're well-positioned to

take advantage of the doors that NAFTA will open. One example is the transportation industry, where blacks own 17 percent of all small passenger transit businesses, plus five percent of trucking and warehousing firms. NAFTA will break down the barriers that keep these businesses from breaking into the Mexican market, one of the fastest growing in the world.

Technology-intensive industries provide another example. With over \$650 million in revenues, black-owned companies dealing in communications, information services, health care and biotechnology stand to benefit greatly from new sales in Mexico, especially with access to the growing Mexican government procurement market.

New sales from these markets will mean that black-owned businesses will need to produce more, distribute more, and transport more. Ultimately, this will mean more jobs for black workers, something which government programs have been miserable at creating.

All of this, of course, flies in the face of the rhetoric that comes from the Washington civil rights establishment, which seems preoccupied with playing special interest politics with the

predominantly white labor and environmental groups that oppose NAFTA. Meanwhile, they ignore the strength of our business leaders.

John Sibley Butler, a black professor at the University of Texas (Austin is absolutely right when he observes that the black community used to look to black entrepreneurs for our civic leadership and to economic activity as our principal route to the American mainstream.

Then, he says, we shifted our focus and the entrepreneurs were supplanted by preachers and politicians, and the entrepreneurial model gave way to a new emphasis of fairness and civil rights.

"A focus on rights forces you to think in terms of victimization," Professor Butler told me. "A focus on business forces you to look for opportunity." NAFTA, of course, is one such opportunity, and if we're smart, the black community will seize it."

Raynard Jackson, an African-American, is a graduate student in international trade at Virginia's George Mason University and is the author of a detailed study of how NAFTA would effect black businesses published by The National Center for Public Policy Research.

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that you can no longer take anyone of African-American descent for granted because generalizations don't necessarily apply. The choice to be a hip-hop b-boy, buppie, or anything else, are viable options today where before few existed.

Let's celebrate the extended range of possibilities that exist for Black people today. Better yet, let's take full advantage of these opportunities to expand both the perceptions and the realities of who we really are.

Despite any differences that are unjustly imposed by society, we will always have at least one common bond among us, color. As Boxing Promoter Don King so aptly asserts when asked to define the dilemma of being Black, "It makes no difference whether you're rich or poor, if you're Black, you're still a n—r!"

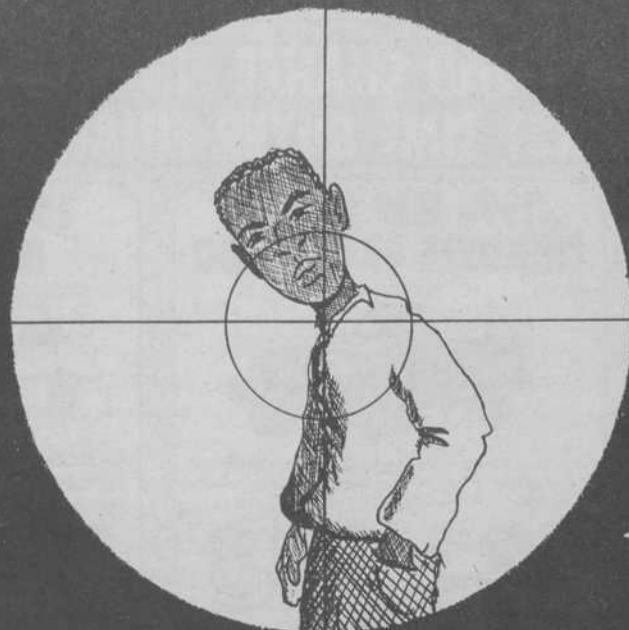
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cocaine used primarily by Latinos and Blacks as opposed to another type of cocaine used by whites. If a drug is illegal then it is illegal regardless of whether it is crack cocaine or powder cocaine. Again the racist nature of the system is apparent and it is not lost on our youth nor anyone else who is thinking in this society. Again, it is not enough to merely speak out against this bill or this package that Clinton is putting together. It must be made very clear to Mr. Clinton and his associates and those who own him that there will be an extremely severe and heavy political price to be paid if he proceeds with this. If indeed there is 22 billion dollars available, that 22 billion dollars has to be put into people type activities, not making the SS any larger or any more potent. La Lucha Continua!

The Struggle Continues!

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