

Black-owned businesses continue to grow at high rate

WASHINGTON (AP)—The number of businesses owned by Black entrepreneurs grew more than four times the national rate for all businesses from 1997 to 2002, the federal government said Tuesday. Black entrepreneurs owned 1.2 million businesses in 2002, an increase of 45 percent from 1997, according to a report by the Census Bureau.

"It's encouraging to see not just the number but the sales and receipts of Black-owned businesses are growing at such a robust rate, confirming that these firms are among the fastest-growing segments of our economy," Census Bureau Director Louis Kincannon said in a statement.

Revenues from Black-

owned businesses increased by 25 percent during the period, to about \$89 billion.

The report is the third in a series of Census Bureau reports on businesses owned by women, Hispanics and Blacks. Together, the reports show that the three groups are underrepresented in business ownership but are narrowing the gap with White men.

From 1997 to 2002:

- The number of all U.S. businesses grew by 10 percent, to about 23 million.

- The number of female-owned firms grew by 20 percent, to 6.5 million.

- The number of Hispanic-owned businesses grew by 31 percent, to nearly 1.6 million.

Overall, Black entrepre-

neurs owned 5 percent of U.S. businesses in 2002, Hispanics owned about 7 percent, and women of all races and ethnicities owned 28 percent, according to the Census Bureau.

The overwhelming majority of Black-owned businesses were small — 92 percent had no employees other than the owners. By comparison, about three-fourths of all U.S. businesses have no employees.

"I'm proud," said Harry Alford, president and CEO of the National Black Chamber of Commerce. "We're the fastest-growing segment."

Alford said Black entre-

preneurs have been helped by improved education levels and increased incomes among Black consumers and business owners.

Blacks as a group still trail Whites in education and income, but they have made gains in the past half-century. In 1950, only 14 percent of Black adults had high school diplomas, compared with 36 percent of whites, according to the Census Bureau. The gap narrowed by 2000, when 72 percent of Black adults had at least a high school diploma, compared with 84 percent of Whites.

"We've got the first generation of significantly edu-

cated people," Alford said. "There's a Black middle class like never before."

The report is based on administrative records and a survey of 2.4 million businesses. The Census Bureau defines Black-owned businesses as private companies in which Blacks hold at least 51 percent of stock or interest. The report does not classify public companies, with publicly traded stock, because they can be owned by many stockholders of unknown races and ethnicities.

Black-owned businesses are not concentrated in any sector. The largest sector was health care and social assis-

tance, with 246,000 back-owned firms. The second largest was other services, such as personal services, repair and maintenance, with 210,000 firms.

However, in some states, Black-owned firms are concentrated in urban areas. About 80 percent of all Black-owned businesses in Illinois were in Cook County, home to Chicago. Los Angeles County was home to nearly half the Black-owned firms in California.

New York state had the most Black-owned firms, with 129,324. It was followed by California, Florida, Georgia and Texas.

Wilson

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of pain and glory/Cause you're the best thing that ever happened to me."

Addicted to Your Funk

While Wilson was weathering his storm, the youngins were coming up. Hip-hop was taking its seed and producing all kinds of offspring. Artists had begun sampling like never before. Rap artists discovered that infusing the old with the new was not only a surefire method of making sure a song had a reliable, sellable beat, it was also a means of communicating respect and paying homage to the artists that had paved the way for them.

The GAP Band's music has been hybridized into Hip-hop and Rap, thanks to Snoop Dogg, Dr. Dre, and Master P. This fusing of old and new allowed Wilson to attain a respect that has alluded many artists who were subjected to the same fate, and it kept the Gap Band's sound available to artists who would become leaders in the industry.

Looking Sweeter Now

African-American adage states: Trouble don't last always. And, after Wilson waded across the torrential waters of his life, God opened doors for him.

Wilson said, "I had been away for so long, and it was hard. Finally, I hooked up with R. Kelly. He told me not to worry about people not wanting to hook-up with me before, because when they found out that he was with me, they would come out of the woodwork, and he was right. Everybody wanted to work with me then."

It was only fitting that Kelly would extend his star power to the artist after whom he modeled his style. Kelly has long dubbed himself as the modern day Charlie Wilson. Wilson teaming up with Kelly provided him a shoe-in at Jive Records, and allowed the bigwigs at Jive to know that Wilson was back and open for business.

"The president of Jive Records, Barry Weiss, told me that he has been a fan of my work for years, and Wayne Williams signed me," Wilson said.

This second chance proved to be the right move for both Jive and Wilson. While at Jive, Wilson has made a new and profitable name for himself. His latest release, "Charlie, Last Name Wilson," has done extremely well, and the listening public has been showing up in droves to see him perform live.

Wilson heartily thanks all of his fans for the support that they have shown him through the years, and for making his return successful beyond his wildest dreams.

Wilson still performs with his brothers, when time permits. He informed me that his oldest brother, Ronnie Wilson is an evangelist and ministers at revivals and churches throughout the country. On his baby brother, Robert: "I've heard a lot of bass players, and he's still the best."

Ladies and Gentleman, the Gap Band is still in the building.

Solomohn "Piebald" Ennis writes for the Windy City Word.

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